

Disco Apocalypse : Liminal Fictoscapes

and

Hatricks: Where did the White Rabbit Go?

Submitted by Lisa Pizaro

Bachelor of Arts in Media Studies (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology)

Post Graduate Diploma in Professional Writing (Victoria University)

Post Graduate Certificate in Education (Monash University)

Masters of Arts in Creative Writing (University of Melbourne)

A Research Thesis in two volumes submitted in total fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Communication Culture and Language

Faculty of Arts

Victoria University
St Albans, Victoria 3021

January, 2007

VOLUME TWO

EXEGESIS

***HATRICKS:
WHERE DID THE WHITE RABBIT GO?***

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

LIMINAL FICTOSCAPES

Time and space are not really so much conceptual opposites as complementary parameters of experience (Heise, 2003).

What are some of the challenges and opportunities for an Australian feminist fiction writer producing a text about people on the edge? Liminal people, threshold people, people “betwixt and between” and the spaces they inhabit?¹ I will respond to this question by discussing my process in crafting the novel *Disco Apocalypse*.

This thesis comprises a novel, *Disco Apocalypse: Liminal Fictoscapes*, and an accompanying exegesis, *Hatricks: Where did the White Rabbit Go?* that as a whole explore socio-political and aesthetic currents in contemporary culture and literature by means of an authorial journey. The ultimate aim of the thesis is to create a body of work which applies a critical analysis and produces an original and exhilarating cutting edge narrative.

Exegetical activity is a framing device positioned between the world created in the fiction and the world the reader inhabits. It is aimed at creating a link between the creative work, its milieu of production, and the broader field into which it is projected. (Krauth, 2002: 3-8)

¹ Anthropologists Arnold van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1969) discuss and develop these concepts of liminality and “betwixt and between” which are discussed further throughout this exegesis.

I envisage the exegesis as the cellular structure of the DNA strand where each component contains its own cell of information, links into the next component, and is then incorporated into the whole to give a complete picture. The exegetical focus radiates from one information unit into the next, much like stages in a ritual event, with sections differing in style and focus, sometimes exemplifying literary criticism of particular works, other times presenting accounts of personal immersion in ritual practices such as tattooing, occult events, visionquest and goddess worship.

The narrative style of *Disco Apocalypse* is sparse and cutting in execution as distinct from the flamboyant verbosity, repetition or excess of novelists such as Angela Carter, Bret Easton Ellis or Kathy Acker. One of the characteristics of the postmodern world is sharp cuts between images, split images and speedy consecutive images familiar in film and visual art forms. The point-and-click, immediate-gratification world we inhabit is reflected by this prose style in *Disco Apocalypse*. The novel has been written as a series of continuous narrative segments, each bearing a distinct title which offers insight into the particular segment which follows. This technique is infrequently used by novelists, but can be seen in William Burroughs novel, *Cities of the Red Night*, (1981) and in Christos Tsiolkas' and Sasha Soldatow's collaborative autobiography, *Jumpcuts* (1996).

In the last few years, my research and writing practice have focused on creating fiction that connects with my own experience of backpacking around every continent in the world except Antarctica, and then having to return home to my boring life.

This raises questions, political, intellectual, personal and spiritual about the mind space and the physical space I inhabit – where I go when I am out on

the edge on the road, the people I meet, the situations I engage with and the impact I make on those whom I meet albeit briefly – and the I that returns home. What do I return home to? What with? Who am I now that I have returned? I am not the me that I was when I was out there and I am not the me before I left. I am “betwixt and between”. I myself am a liminal person inhabiting the space at the threshold.

In 1997 I was backpacking around South America as a strict vegetarian who made no allowances for travel in a desert with scarce vegetation. In Santa Cruz, a small town in Bolivia I found a vegetarian restaurant called *Restaurant Vegetarianista*. In a country that was economically challenged and faced food shortages for much of the population, some members of the population chose to impose further restrictions upon their already limited diet. Once inside the restaurant I discovered that neither the patrons nor the staff could speak English, and in my tortured Spanish I was presented with Hare Krsnna pamphlets rather than a menu. Only one dish was offered for the day. In a country with a heritage abundant in Inca and Pre-Columbian myths, folklore and rituals, where ninety-five percent of the population professed to be Catholic, and over fifty percent of the people are of pure Amerindian blood, an enclave existed and managed to survive financially practising the beliefs of a contemporary version of the parables of an Indian deity. On many occasions locals told me of the complementary views of Andean and Indian philosophy. “Live in the moment” was a moral I heard frequently from locals, especially as a parting greeting. I wasn’t sure whether their awareness stemmed from the internet, cable TV and the proliferation of literature in English describing the life of gurus like Krishna Murti and Sri Chinmoy, or if my Peruvian, Brazilian and Bolivian peers shared an interest in what the Theosophical Society in Melbourne snidely refer to as, “metaphysical shopping”, or if they were like me, liminal and filling up their own cosmic grab bag. They would

always ask, “When can you send me your book?” Some would add, “Put us in it, then we’ll be famous!”

Communitas is a Latin term referring to a collection of neophytes who are living in the liminal phases of a rite of passage (Turner, 1969). Liminality, a term derived from the Latin word, *limen*, meaning “a threshold”, is a period of transition. The liminal stage is the second stage of a ritual.² Liminal personae, threshold people, slip through the network of classification, which include jobs, families, prestigious positions and market-based audiences that normally locate social positions in a cultural space. In the novel, the characters are outside of or opposed to an agenda-setting hierarchy. The characters analyse and mythologise local situations as fluid and unpredictable, though influenced by global trends. In quintessential postmodern form,³ they have homed in on the micro-situation – to “think globally, act locally”. The characters therefore reflect key aspects of Pomo or postmodern selfhood. Douglas Coupland in his book, *Shampoo Planet* (1992) exemplifies this style:

“It’s early afternoon, the best time to hit the gym because the after-work crowd has yet to invade, and so only the unemployed, the semiemployed, and the marginally employed people are here – people like bouncers, cocktail waitresses, and talkers on the phone-sex lines. Like all gymgoers, their eyes are riveted to the walls of mirrors and their flesh and their Lycra skins of coy, calculated skimpiness. Funny, but mass unemployment hasn’t upped the number of afternoon gymgoers here in Lancaster, and those jobseekers really ought to be here since working out would give them a sense of empowerment that would help their job searches. Any career manual will tell you *that*.”

² Ritual is discussed in Chapter Seven.

³ Quintessential postmodern form is a buzzphrase used to describe elements in contemporary culture which characterise the essence of pomo operating in the world. Hypertext represents this, as does reality TV and experimental pomo writing.

"The jobless are probably all too proud and loafing at home, inhaling lite beer and trash TV," says Harmony.

"Life of shame," says I. (Coupland, 1992: 168)

I wrote the novel from that liminal place of falling through the rabbit hole and found myself to be like Alice, caught "betwixt and between" in the dream world of hatricks, white rabbits and hookhah smoking caterpillars.⁴ Aldous Huxley refers to this liminal area as the antipodes of the self-conscious mind where you can encounter all sorts of creatures at least as odd as kangaroos (Huxley, 1954: 62).

⁴ The image of Lewis Carroll's white rabbit from *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) is one that inspires many researchers across all disciplines as they create the landscape of the thesis or creative work.

CHAPTER TWO

METHODOLOGY

I guess I just want to go on a journey and so I start with a sentence and then the language twists and turns and you don't even remember where you've been, you're always faced with the present. You're always going somewhere, you always end up somewhere. You want to be surprised (Acker in Kleiveland, 1999).

In this chapter I discuss the strategies involved in constructing both the title and the main characters, and the construction of a text where the reader is engaged in the narrative structure through the technique of disclosure (revelation and confession). The commencement of the overriding theme of ritual process is introduced.

The Literature Review has been incorporated into the body of the thesis in each chapter.

CONSTRUCTION OF CHARACTER

I used the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) in the development of the characters of Suzy G and Kit, the two sisters who dominate the story.

The aim of Isabelle Myers-Briggs and her mother, Katharine Briggs in developing the MBTI was to make the theory of psychological types described by C.G. Jung understandable and useful in people's lives.

The essence of the theory is that much seemingly random variation in the behaviour is actually quite orderly and consistent, being due to basic difference in the way individuals prefer to use their perception and judgement.

(Myers and Briggs Foundation, 2006)

My concern in writing two characters who are both dominant was that the two characters would not vary enough from each other so that when their dialogue appeared in the narrative, or when the inner dialogue was used in chapters, it would be difficult for the reader to tell them apart. I used the MBTI device to reassure myself that the two were distinct enough in their view of the world, of humankind and in how they took to the world, how they viewed it, whether from the point of view of an Introvert or an Extrovert. This allowed me to explore which function in terms of Jungian typology was the dominant function in the two main characters.

Jung suggested that there were four major types – initially the person had to figure out whether they were an Introvert or Extrovert – whether they were energised and preferred to focus on the outer world or if they direct energy inwardly and are energised by reflecting upon their inner world – and once that was established, to decide which other functions were preferred. The preference to either focus on the basic information taken in any given situation (Sensing) or the preference to interpret and add meaning (Intuition). In the process of decision making, the preference to first look at logic and consistency (Thinking) or first look at the people and special circumstances (Feeling). How an individual structures their life, whether by preferring to get things decided in a matter of fact manner bringing closure (Judging) or to stay open to new information and options (Perceiving). Although there are strong

demarcations between the way each type views and acts in the world, none is considered better than another (Briggs Myers & Myers, 1995).

The major difference in type between the two was that Suzy was Extrovert, and Kit was Introvert.

My research led me to conclude that Suzy G was an ESFP which was an Extroverted, Sensing, Feeling, Perceiving type. Suzy's MBTI indicated the Portrait of the Performer Artisan (Keirse, 2006). Performer Artisans are described as being concrete in speech and utilitarian in reaching their goals, as well as expressive and sociable, a natural performer for whom the world is a stage. They arouse and stimulate others with contagious laughter and irrepressible joy.

Our first introduction to the adult Suzy G in *Disco Apocalypse* is her arrival in the Vegie Bar to meet Kit wearing black leather and a diamond python straight from a photo shoot.

"I was sitting on the floor in front of a cheval mirror...And I was sitting cross legged, and Snake was wrapped around and around my torso, skin to skin. His head turned to face me. My lips were puckered as if to kiss his head. Tribal." (Pizaro, 2006: 9)

Although at the time Kit is highly conscious of Suzy G's impact on those surrounding her Suzy has the air of an unflappable professional. In the following chapters we see Suzy act in a short feature film,

Suzy G murmurs to the wax creature she has been carving. She straddles the man on the futon. Glides her toe across crisp linen sheets. Scratches a forefinger nail across the man's top lip, lifts and

slides the finger along the profile of her wax creature. Circles the black holes in the creature's head.

SUZY G

Such dark eyes. (Pizaro, 2006: 28)

and her performance amongst the gathering at the screening,

Tonight's MC, the man with the Allen Ginsberg beard shuffles over to survey Suzy G. "Love your work, it really is what I would call VooDoo," he says to Suzy.

"Oh you think so? Kit dragged me here, you see, I am an impostor," Suzy explains. The group chuckles.

"Ah you're a ring-in are you?" says an aging cinematographer, agog in the presence of a non-celluloid woman not his wife.

"Yeth" lisps Suzy G, "and I am an artist myself, and I explore all of the movie's themes in my own work. So what Marlene Dietrich says in the movie about Victorian bric-a-brac and a Pianola in a bordello is just as true today as it was in 1958. 'It's so old – it's new.' Customers go for it!" Suzy G laughs.

The audience all nods around like a monstrous Hydra with many heads.

"When did you last hear such an infectious laugh?" Asks the man who had been sitting directly in front."(Pizaro, 2006:30)

Suzy is a natural performer (Performer Artisan) who never switches off.

Kit on the other hand was an ISTP – an Introverted, Sensing Thinking Perceiving type. Kit exemplifies the Portrait of the Crafter Artisan (Keirse, 2006).

Also concrete in speech, Crafters live a life of artful action. They are attentive to detail are reclusive. They are drawn to tools of all types, including vehicles

and cameras which they operate with precision. Kit views the world through her camera lens and lives with the constant anxiety that she hasn't made it yet, and unless she is recognised as a film maker she will never be real,

I look at the video camera propped in the orange beanbag, 70s yet again, recording dutifully in disbelief. This would make such a nice little urban legend movie. Pity no television producers ever seem to answer my phone calls." (Pizaro, 2006: 15)

The only time in the novel where film footage Kit has shot is played back so that she can watch what she has seen through the camera is the UFO footage the Peruvian room attendant urges her to shoot.

I switch the camera to play back mode. The camera's monitor shows the navy sky above the Spanish hacienda rooftop. The round snout of a dark object moves into view and monopolises the screen. Flashing lights from the object reveal its shiny surface. The camera pulls way back to show a dark wedge of glossy black. Reflective black tinted windows indicate a frenzy of flashing lights within the craft. It glides out of view. White vapour trails behind it.

"This really looks like a movie!"

"It is a movie – yes!" The Peruvian man smiles and nods.

(Pizaro, 2006: 48)

It is mentioned in the text that Nick shows this footage of the UFO to the Hollywood couple in Nazca, using it as a pitch to get him into the industry. What becomes of the other footage Kit shoots randomly yet consistently throughout the text is hidden. She doesn't have a storehouse of footage tucked away somewhere. She doesn't screen her films. Her natural temperament of the Crafter (Keirse, 2006) leads her to use the camera as a tool to record images while out on the road. It is only at the close of the novel

that the suggestion is made that Kit will be gainfully employed in her role as a Crafter – she is offered the chance to produce short features for a network.

Kit's focus on simulated reality via her film camera echoes the following statement by Kathy Acker. Acker states that "everything is very surface, knowable. So there's no reason to constantly take things apart and investigate them. What we really need is some kind of construction. Fiction writing is magic – you're working in the area of transformation" (Acker, 1999: 1). Acker places emphasis on image-mediated reality, however *Disco Apocalypse* also explores the material threat that lurks beneath the surface world depicted in the novel. Postmodernism is contradictory and works within the very systems it attempts to subvert. Therefore, in classic postmodern form, the novel *Disco Apocalypse* incorporates what it aims to contest. Similarly, reality now is very much a matter of an endless stream of images we receive that have effectively killed both context and content, so that meaning disappears. Paradoxically, the image continuum perverts reality, so that according to Baudrillard, "Illusion is no longer possible" (Baudrillard, 1988: 166).

DECONSTRUCT TITLE

The title, *Disco Apocalypse* pays homage to a Jackson Browne song from 1980 – the post-punk period referred to as New Wave. The period which fell loosely between 1978-1984 was encapsulated in the following comment by Simon Reynolds in *Rip it up and Start Again*:

In retrospect, as a distinct pop cultural epoch, 1978-82 rivals those fabled years between 1963 and 1967 commonly known as the 'sixties'...in terms of the sheer amount of great music created, the spirit of adventure and idealism that infused it,

and the way that the music seemed inextricably connected to the political and social turbulence of the times. There was a similar mood-blend of anticipation and anxiety, a mania for all things new and futuristic coupled with fear of what the future had in store. (Reynolds, 2005: xiv)

Various styles of music emerged in this period which led to the New Romantics/Blitz movement, or the Cult with No Name, featuring artists such as: Steve Strange, Spandau Ballet, Ultravox and Duran Duran which blended Punk into Goth (Sisters of Mercy, Bauhaus), and was the forerunner to the Manchester sound from the industrial northern English town also home to numerous university campuses. Manchester was the style which dominated the eighties and caused JJJ DJs to regularly quip that it only took a band to drive through Manchester to become famous. Arguably the most famous band to emerge from this era was The Smiths.

By the time the two main characters in the novel were growing up this epoch was already passing, but it infused their connection to the culture compressing the impact of the sixties and seventies that their parents enjoyed. So all of these mini eras impacted on the characters and on the world they inhabited.

The song *Disco Apocalypse* was itself retro at the time of its release, and something of a parody. By 1980, Disco was stone cold dead and its demise reflected in the title along with the elegiac lament for the end of the world. The song depicts a landscape of poverty, homelessness and desperation – a reminder of the economic recession in the seventies and forecasting the disintegration of the fictitious society of the song lyrics. However in true pomo form the singers are dancing to the end.

A single sound that never ends
They die each night and live again.
Dancing through the fire on the edge of time (Browne, 1980).

In the following scene from the novel amidst a setting of debris and decay the Allen Ginsberg character shares his nostalgia for the happening sixties Pop Art era with an unimpressed Kit.

“Andy as I see him was the ultimate performance artist – he lived each moment like there was none before and none after. No union, no parting – sub-zero sex and death. They talk about the sixties, as a magic life consuming be-in. Andy was the BE ALL. He was the absolute superstar – he transcended the sixties, seventies, the eighties and beyond.”

My senses are deranging. I lean across and speak clearly into his red-eye gaze.

“By the early 1970s Jimi Hendrix was dead, Jim Morrison was dead, Janis Joplin was dead – the whole fuckin’ Summer of Love had died in the arse. Andy Warhol meanwhile was out and about making US 25, 000 dollars a piece. What a hero.” I slam back in my seat. He shakes his head a tad mournfully and sighs.

“Saturn’s Child.”

“What?” I cock a brow at him “*Satan’s* child?”

“Saturn – the planet with the luminous red rings. In Rome Saturn was a god – with two faces – one looking forward into the future, and the other face looking backward into the past. That’s you kid, you don’t want to be here, you don’t wanna go there, whatever are you looking for?” (Pizaro, 2006: 72)

Kit has no nostalgia for halcyon days of smashing the status quo as she was born and raised in an era of downturn and recession where people blew on the handcuffs of conformity to warm them up so they were more comfortable to wear.

Jackson Browne had been involved with The Velvet Underground in the seventies. The band formed at Andy Warhol's New York factory featured as its female lead-singer, Nico, who was initially famous as an actress in the Fellini film, *La Dolce Vita*. Nico was a tall blonde charismatic and mesmerizing character who produced experimental and alarming music throughout the seventies and eighties. She had a son, Ari, with Alain Delon who refused to acknowledge him and later Nico abandoned Ari to continue her jet-setting drug-affected no-strings-attached lifestyle. Nico referred to Jim Morrison, the shamanic Dionysian lead singer of The Doors, as her soul brother and together they spiralled into exciting drug related chaos. Nico recorded her version of The Doors elegy, *The End*, matching its bleak and stark execution. Despite his abandonment, Ari remained devoted to his mother and recalls her sitting at his bedside when he was in hospital in a drug related coma taping the sound of the life support machines to use on a song recording (Ofteringer, 1995). She recovered from years of drug abuse and planned to reignite her musical career only to be hit by a car while riding a bike. This part of her story weighs heavily with postmodern parody.

I attempted to infuse this atmosphere of charismatic annihilation in the character of Suzy G. Suzy is infectious and mischievous, oblivious to approval but commanding attention yet predominantly mysterious. Although Kit knows her better than anyone much of her character remains hidden, and our understanding of her journey in the novel is contradictory. Suzy is like an escape artist who disappears from a scene without guilt for the turmoil of those she leaves behind.

Suzy isn't coming back. Suzy has disappeared.

Suzy left. She walked out. She abandoned me.

OK, so I did. I left Kit for dead. And? (Pizaro, 2006:195)

Just like the character of Nico in the life of the singer/songwriter Nico, Suzy G reappears in Kit's life at the close of the novel in an ambiguous manner.

Seemingly someone has left a message for Kit in a way that indicates Suzy G's signature style, in a note asking where Kit is. Suzy's pendant has also been left as a memento or as a signal for Kit. Was it Suzy who left this or was it one of the liminal characters whose lives we have been given a peek into in the course of the narrative? Has Suzy become a Dracula character, the undead with an anonymous Renfield to do her bidding in the daylight world?

Along with Nico, another iconic woman artist I examined as a template for Suzy G was Sylvia Plath, the American poet whose work has continued to inspire decades after her tragic suicide in 1963. Plath was living in a liminal time on the brink of the 1960s women's movement. She encapsulates her choices in life in the symbol of a tree with disconnected branches between career, family life and her poetry. Unlike today, Plath and her college peers believed choosing one of the branches would automatically lop the others (Stevenson, 1989: 32). Plath married the English poet Ted Hughes in 1956. Her poetry, although award winning and brilliant – she was first published in a magazine at eight years of age – was not perceived as a career in the same way her husband's was. Plath deferred her artistic life and became her husband's agent and typist, and taught classes at college to provide the stable family income. It has been claimed that Plath infused and motivated Hughes' career with her Eastern seaboard approach of active promotion and persistence.

Plath suffered depression in her life and was hospitalized on several occasions. The aftermath of electro-convulsive-therapy (ECT) indicated her condition was more probably manic depression (Bi-Polar Disorder).

“Why, after the “amazingly short” three or so shock treatments did I rocket uphill?” (Plath in Steveson, 1989 : 148). ECT can cause depressed patients to become manic which is why they often feel better initially.

“During these manic spells, she would become agitated, her mind racing with ideas she couldn’t begin to form into words” (Kottler, 2006: 17).

Plath attempted suicide three times in her life. In each case the setup surrounding the attempt led to her being found prior to death. It’s questionable whether in the last case her expectation was also, to be found in time. She left a plate of bread and butter out for the children. Nicholas was far too young to eat such food so it looks like Plath is leaving us a token of herself as the good mother. This correlates to Suzy G’s disappearance in *Disco Apocalypse*. I have used similar techniques in the narrative around Suzy G who leaves clues of her whereabouts. The novel ends with similarly tantalizing questions: Where did Suzy G go? Has she returned? Did she ever leave?

There has been enormous output regarding the marriage of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes, the only element in their union that informs my novel writing is their use of the occult and in particular, Plath’s engagement with the Tarot and magic practice, and strong belief in the spirit world. In this preoccupation Suzy G as a fictional character parallels the depiction we receive of Plath through the eyes of her friends, relatives and colleagues as Suzy’s nature is dissected and emblazoned by characters in the novel. Suspicious of Hughes’ infidelity Plath

ripped up several of her husband's manuscripts, mixed them up with a few of his fingernail shavings and dandruff from his desk, and burned them together in a cauldron while uttering witch's incantations. When the fire died down, there was one particular scorched piece of paper that caught her attention. She reached down to retrieve the paper among the ashes, noticing to her horror that there was a single legible word – Assia. (Kottler, 2006: 22)

Plath recognized "Assia" as the name of a woman that she suspected of being her husband's new lover. Another branch could be added to her tree of life possibilities – witch.

The witch, too, lures us into another dimension of thought and feeling operating in all of us, a magical level where we participate in each other's lives, linked by the unconscious principles of similarity, continuity, and pars pro toto. The witch [stays] on the borders of human community. (Ulanov, 1987: 13)⁵

Suzy G also, is depicted as a sorceress in the short feature, *VooDoo*, in *Disco Apocalypse*.

Suzy G licks the pinpoint. It scratches a salty layer from her tongue and urges the blood to ooze onto her fingertip. She stretches to grasp her margarita. Leans back onto the man's stomach. Sips. Tongues the lime and blood. Scrapes some sugar from the rim of the glass with the pin. Puts the heavy Mexican glass down on the

⁵ The archetype of the Witch/sorceress is discussed further in Chapter Five.

floor. Adjusts her weight onto the man's hips. She raises her arm to heaven, the pin winks silver, a sabre between her fingers. She strikes the pin into the wax creature's forehead, between the pleading eyes. The man is spread like a swastika across the futon. He screams, his head beats the pillow, teeth pierce his lip. A headlight passing in the street shoots his face white. (Pizaro, 2006:28)

Her performance indicates similar inclination to occult practise.

Plath's poetry features images of myth and the occult. In particular the poem, *Lady Lazarus* incorporates ritual and rebirth.

Soon, soon the flesh
The grave cave ate will be
At home on me

And I a smiling woman.
I am only thirty.
And like the cat I have nine times to die.

This is Number Three.
What a trash
To annihilate each decade.

Herr God, Herr Lucifer
Beware
Beware.

Out of the ash
I rise with my red hair
And I eat men like air. (Plath, 1965)

Al Alvarez wrote in Plath's obituary that she had been "writing continuously, almost as though possessed", and perceived Plath's poetry as probing into "that narrow violent area between the viable and the impossible, between experience which can be transmuted into poetry and that which is overwhelming". Alvarez describes this process as Plath "going down into the cellars and confronting her demons" (Kottler, 2006: 28).

Explorers such as Plath take this solitary journey down into the cellars not just for themselves, but also for us chickens back here. Their venture into the dark tells us of time outside of time in lands imperceptible to ordinary consciousness. Suzy G is something of a Lady Lazarus herself with her disappearance and reemergence cloaked in a new skin and seemingly reborn.

I gasp and my eyes pop open. A small beam of light is waved side to side above my eyes.

“I.D?” asks a voice close up.

“Suzy, her name is Suzy,” replies a voice further away.

Someone tears away the last of the opaque snake scales that have been covering my eyes. I have my new full skin.

“Suzy, can you hear me? Do you know where you are?”

asks the voice close up. The entire bustle stills for a moment, as if the room has cocked an ear to listen.

“My name is Suzy G. I’m back.” (Pizaro, 2006: 194)

The condition of bi-polar disorder that afflicted Plath also affects Suzy G. Some of the characteristics of hypomania – the upside of bi-polar which are exhibited by Suzy G in the novel include: high energy, risk taking, impulsivity, ability to function at a high level with little sleep, charisma and sense of personal power that is persuasive and influential, paranoia, sexual acting out, and gregarious, engaging, highly talkative (Goldberg, 2006). Plath describes her life as being run “magically by two electric currents – joyous positive and despairing negative” (Kottler, 2006: 17). I deliberately did not label Suzy G as having a mood disorder in the text, primarily because I did not want to write a novel about manic depression, and secondly, I could correlate the characteristics of the mild form of hypomania with those duplicated in the creative process. Plath writes in her journal of the power of her creative drive, “I fear the oppressive and crushing forces, if I do not plot

and manage and manipulate my path, joining: academic, creative, & writing, and emotional & living& loving: writing makes me a small god.” (Kottler, 2006: 23) However, I have no plan to discuss the parallels between madness and creative power as there has been much written on this subject as well, (Alvarez, 1990; Kottler, 2006; Frankl, 1946). My intention was to enliven and layer the character of Suzy G so that she became not simply a charismatic affected artiste, but a walker of a grey path between destructive and creative forces.

“Last time I saw Suzy I told her there was a snake coiled at the base of her spine.” Eva says, staring up to the right at the figures of three flying geese hanging on the wall.

“This snake wanted to uncurl and rise up, to charge Suzy with the energy to take her place in the world. I always thought that she was meant to do something, she’s a special person.”

“What did Suzy say?” I ask.

“She thought that there was a presence, like a snake charmer, calling to the snake, making it dance. Snake charmers wear lots of colourful clothes and shake rattles and jerk about so that the snake gets dizzy. That is how Suzy said she felt, that it was not her, it was the snake, and she couldn’t stop.”(Pizaro, 2006: 159)

TELL IT TO THE CAMERA

The confessional narrative is at the forefront of contemporary culture: *Oprah* (1986+), reality TV such as *Big Brother* (1999+), infotainment shows like *A Current Affair* (197+). Television shows such as *Sex and The City* (1997-2004), *The Secret Life of Us* (2001-2005), *Desperate Housewives* (2004+), *Grey’s Anatomy* (2005+) use a voice over narrator to extrapolate on the life events in the clan it portrays whether in a suburban locale or in a workplace such as a hospital. It’s common to blame *Bridget Jones’s Diary* (2001) for the launch of this

phenomena as was indicated in an episode of *Grumpy Old Women* (2005), but the style of Voice Over narration employed by the producers of that film has its roots in the movie *Taxi Driver* (1976) where a dislocated Vietnam Vet derisively critiques the degenerate city in which he drives his cab, a style reinvigorated in the nineties with gangster film noir such as *Goodfellas* (1991) which was narrated by Joe Pesci playing the real life gangster, Henry Hill. The movie depicts Hill's teen years on the streets of New York and continues to his anonymous exile under witness protection and is narrated through Hill's voice and mind. The life and times of heroin addicts in a nowhere town in Scotland became prominent in a film in similar style bio-pic in the movie, *Trainspotting* (1996).

The commencement of the confessional effect in moving pictures was in Steven Soderberg's film, *Sex, Lies and Videotape* (1989), featuring a narrative strand where a local drop out, Graham, returns to town with a collection of video 8 – this was 1989 when video 8 was groundbreaking – which portrayed video footage of young women talking to his hand held camera. Graham asked them intimate intrusive questions about their sexual history in the manner of a therapist or a television interviewer, and they answered. It was revealed in the film that Graham then viewed the tapes and climaxed while watching them. It was made evident in the narrative of the film that the women Graham was filming had climaxed at some time in the duration of the taping of the interview. The character Graham also informs other characters in the film that he had promised the participants no one else would ever watch. The concept of the confessional narrative, sex, climax and a camera was blended and screened.

At a café Graham confesses to his college friend's wife, Ann,

GRAHAM

I can't get an erection in the presence of another person
so for all practical purposes I'm impotent.

He later informs Ann what the tapes contain. Her sister visits and
asks,

CYNTHIA

Is this how you get off or something – taping women talking
about their sexual experiences?

GRAHAM

Yes.

(*Sex, Lies and Videotape*, 1989)

This style of film-making became the favourite of undergraduate film students in the years that followed – the nineties. Kit's age in the novel puts her in this category of film student. Kit is as we recall according to the MBTI an Artisan Crafter, so her camera is a tool she keeps in her bag. She could keep it in her pocket given current technology but she doesn't as her use of her camera is not secretive but obvious. The individuals she films on her meanderings through the novel are engaged aware and participating. This attitude recalls the character of Louis in the film *Interview with the Vampire* (1995) based on the screenplay written by Anne Rice from her novel of the same title.

LOUIS

So you want me to tell you the story of my life?

JOURNALIST

Well I guess that's what I do. I interview people –
I'm a collector of lives.

LOUIS

You followed me here didn't you?

JOURNALIST

Yeah I suppose I did. You seemed very interesting.
Let's say we get started. So what do you do?

LOUIS

I'm a vampire.

(*Interview with a Vampire*, 1995)

Ken Gelder contends that in Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, we are presented with an unorthodox approach, a Vampire protagonist – Louis – who is interviewed. This approach that Anne Rice has taken raises questions as to how Vampires are perceived by the so called 13th generation (more commonly referred to as generation X by the press) raised in the context of *Rolling Stone* magazine and *MTV* (*Countdown* for Australians) where local stars and superstars join in intimate chats with journalists, disc jockeys and Vee Jays.

The narrative strategy emphasises disclosure (through confession or revelation) and publicity, topics which have become increasingly important in Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. The reader hears the "other" speaking first-hand, the vampire comes out of the closet and makes himself known; he gives us "the real story" (at last) about vampires. Moreover, the boy is the perfect listener, hooked by the narrative to such an extent that, at the end, he wants to be like Louis, a vampire. That is, the novel builds its own ideal reception – where the interviewer is thoroughly pacified, standing as an image for the converted reader, the fan – into its structure. (Gelder, 1994: 109)

In the novel *Disco Apocalypse* elements of the narrative strategy exemplify this process of disclosure through confession or revelation, and link in with the position of the fan, or the cult audience participant. However, in contrast to this idea of Gelder's that the fan is

pacified, I would argue that a cult audience is aware, engaged and participating, and is not only captivated but also activated by the process of narrative disclosure.⁶

The characters in *Disco Apocalypse* did not climax by talking about their sex lives. They discussed their day to day lives. But they did not reveal the mundane diurnal dramas of their life, but the movie of their life – the story that was essential to their core and which differentiated them from others. It could be argued that the characters were all people living both inside and outside of consensual reality, in liminal space.

Alien abductees,

“We are literally the first generation that could communicate with an Extra Terrestrial civilization. We have a dual identity, both with an alien dimension, and a human aspect. Our job is to integrate these two aspects of ourselves, the human and the alien.” Thus spoke what looked like a middle management exec in a grey pinstripe suit. (Pizaro, 2006: 140)

S+M service providers,

“Styx has never been in here. The first time Salli and I met him was at the Bloodsuckers Ball. Salli was at the front door with two guys in dog collars on leads, and the door bitch was refusing her entry. It’s a recreational club only, they reckon, no professionals allowed.” Jeanette indicates disgust. (Pizaro, 2006: 149)

relics clinging to retro sub-cultures

“The Sex Pistols and The Clash jump-started the bloated self-parody rock music had luxuriated into, igniting the extended musical tantrum that became the year of Punk. The first rule of Punk – Punk is whatever you say it is. The Punk fanzine *Sniffin Glue* printed a

⁶ This concept is discussed further in Chapter Seven.

diagram of three guitar chords accompanied by the caption “This is a chord. This is another. This is a third. NOW FORM A BAND.”
(Pizaro, 2006: 100)

and witnesses to history changing events.

“The nightmare – B29s over Hiroshima city, I run and run but cannot escape. Glittering glass reminds me of the A-Bomb, sirens remind me of the A-bomb.”(Pizaro, 2006: 106)

The characters orating to Kit in the novel are performing disclosure, confession and revelation.

In his book entitled, *Non-Fiction*, Chuck Palahniuk differentiates between the journalist and the writer. He suggests the journalist is rushing, hunting, meeting, cooking a story to connect the reader to the larger world. He goes on to describe the process of researching novels as the amount of time the novelist has to spend with people in order to create the “lonely” voice. He attributes the “lonely” voice to the idea that fiction connects the reader to only the voice of one other person. “Maybe because reading is something we do *alone*. It’s a pastime that seems to split us away from others” (Palahniuk, 2004: xvii). In *Non-Fiction*, Palahniuk presents a series of stories and essays he wrote in between writing novels based on interviews with people as diverse as Marilyn Manson and hospice volunteers. In his interview with Marilyn Manson, “Reading Yourself”, Palahniuk visits Manson near midnight in the attic of his house where the walls are red the carpet is black and the altarpiece of a Satanic church – a seven foot skeleton of a man with a ram’s death’s head – crouches, looking on. Manson conducts a tarot reading for himself, and describes what the reading indicates to Palahniuk.

“The third card is to represent my goals,” he says, the leather-rubbing-leather sound in his voice. “The Fool is about to walk off

of a cliff, and it's a good card. It represents embarking on a journey, or taking a big step forward. That could represent the campaign of the record coming out or going on tour now." He says, "I have a fear of crowded rooms. I don't like being around a lot of people, but I feel very comfortable onstage in front of thousands of people," (Palahniuk, 2004: 150).

The experience of the Marilyn Manson fan engaging in this interview through Palahniuk parallels the engagement of the boy interviewing the Vampire that Gelder describes as the ideal receptor.

In view of the previous examples it could be argued that sex is a ritual, the confession is a ritual, being interviewed is a ritual and playback is a ritual.

But the most important feature of ritualization is that all its strategies are rooted in the body, or rather in the interaction of the social body within a symbolically constituted spatial and temporal environment. (Bell, 1992: 93)

I contend that the process of taping people telling stories is a form of ritual. Or, according to Jone Salomonsen in her chapter "Elements of Magic: Learning to Ritualize" in her book, *Enchanted Feminism*, (2002) discussing the function of ritual; the individuals telling their stories in *Disco Apocalypse* are engaging in a form of ritualizing.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NUMBER EIGHT

This exegesis is constructed with eight chapters as the number eight correlates to the number of women I incorporated into my coven, as is described in Chapter Three. The number eight in the Tarot deck designed by Arthur

Edward Waite and the artist Pamela Colman Smith belongs to the trump of Strength. It depicts a young woman, her head crowned by the symbol of infinity (a figure of eight), with her hands holding the head of a lion. The history of this card is linked to the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a secret occult society founded in 1887, and indicates the idea of initiation. In this respect, the card suggests psychological transformation and ritual. The image of a woman taming the lion is interpreted by Rachel Pollack in her book *Seventy-Eight Degrees of Wisdom*, to be “the energy of the unconscious released and calmed, ‘tamed’ by the direction of conscious understanding” (Pollack, 1983: 121).

The Hebrew letter given to the trump Strength is Teth, which refers Qabalistically to snake, and in Hebrew, to magic (Pollack, 1983: 69). The overriding symbol igniting the novel is of a snake, both through the transformative character of Suzy G born in the year of the snake, and in the production and consumption of Snake blood.⁷

Because the novel incorporates notions of liminality, ritualizing and alternative realities in its construction and the development of its characters, and the exegesis engages with the reader in order to speak twice, to bring the inner world of the novel to the outer world, trump 8, Strength, suggesting initiation, the occult and ritual, encompasses the themes that infuse this thesis.

⁷ A more intense engagement with the symbol of the snake is presented in Chapter Four.

Graphic One



Pamela Coleman Smith's version of trump Eight, "Strength" in the Rider-Waite Tarot.

CHAPTER THREE

WHERE AM I?

GROWING UP IN THE SHADOW OF THE MUSHROOM CLOUD

Every act of creation is first an act of destruction (Picasso, 1955).

I become a relatively sick person when I'm writing, because I smoke a lot and drink black coffee, and wring. There's this wringing of the essential self. There's all that constant questioning, the "Who am I?" of it. (Moorhead, 1993: 222)

In the previous quote, Finola Moorhead delves into her working life as writer of *Remember the Tarantella*. She refers to the process of constant questioning. In undertaking an exegesis, one of the more common methods of production is to construct a central research question and somehow traverse circles around this question throughout candidature. This is referred to as the Research Question Model. Barbara H Milech discusses the notion of "the critical artist" in her methodological examination of art-based research in her chapter in *Art-Based Research: A Proper Thesis?* (Martin & Booth, 2006).

In this model both the exegetical and the creative component of the research hinge on a research question posed, refined and reposed across the several stages of a research program. (Milech in Martin & Booth, 2006: 11)

I envisaged this elusive question to be a steadfast coat hanger to hang the exegesis on. Initially I traced my fingers around the s-bend and shoulders of the coat-hanger imaging a marvellous garment taking shape before my eyes.

After a while when no such garment emerged, I threw the coat-hanger away in a mental closet, took to the road, and dreamt the world of the novel and exegesis by allowing symbols to motivate the process of story writing and exegetical dynamic. Unlike Moorhead I don't smoke or drink a lot of coffee and I don't wring – I like to move around a lot without really knowing where I am headed and see what I can find that way.

The resulting exegesis, *Hatricks: Where did the White Rabbit Go?* has been designed as a self-reflexive, critical journal involving a series of chapters with subheadings that act as signposts pointing to cultural and literary strands of interest. This technique parallels the narrative style of the novel which comprises a set of short, continuous narrative segments with a separate title for each segment. In this way, the exegesis relies on breadth of focus. As such, the exegesis will embody the philosophy of postmodern writer, Kathy Acker, who describes the action of extending across the surface. Acker states that “everything is very surface, knowable. So there's no reason to constantly take things apart and investigate them” (Acker, 1999:1). The exegetical narrative was constructed in a manner resembling a series of reflections or reflective surfaces that highlight the images displayed in each segment. This process hovers in liminality where once again we are caught “betwixt and between” the world of the novel and the world of the exegesis at the point of limnos where the horizon meets sea and sky.

Graphics of tattoos, the drawings of Vali Myers and Roslaeen Norton, stills from film archives and a photo of Shin's tricycle from the Peace Museum in Hiroshima are also included.

According to Nigel Krauth in his article in *TEXT*, the exegesis

is not fictocritical; it involves a narrative voice obviously different from that employed in the creative text. While it comments on the mechanisms of the main text, it is itself an associated site and therefore a mechanism of the main text too. (Krauth, 2002 : 3-8)

In my exegesis I planned to harness the progressive cultural thought that infused the 1960s and 1970s where a marginal group gained in number and influence to generate a contagious elaborate drama of rebellion, exploding the rigid system and reinvigorating a weary post-war world. What they did, and what they went to court for on many occasions became in some ways common coin in the 1980s because it had all been done before. However, a conundrum occurred in the 1980s when everyone was taking a step to the right, where “the personal is political” urgency of the 1960s and 70s once again raised its head triggering subversive marginal groups amidst the overwhelming rhetoric of “greed is good”.

Finola Moorhead initially started her novel, *Remember the Tarantella* with diagrams and nouns only, no sentences or prose of any kind. Moorhead said, “No sentences because sentences bind you to themselves” (Moorhead, 1993: 208). One of the diagrams included a spider web. The tarantella is a radial folk dance and is named after the process of spinning evident in spider webs. Moorhead also said that she “shaped the book according to patterns suggested by the Tarot, astrology, the double helix, and mathematics” (Moorhead, 1993: 208).

I could picture the connection between the word, tarantella, meaning spider in Spanish and Italian, and also the term for a type of folkdance, with the diagram of a spider web, as each one resonated with directness and

simplicity. This process of association is referred to as the associative method in psychoanalysis where all thoughts would be viewed as associations which have been selected and organized on the basis of the “laws of association” (Kavanagh, 1997). The noun indicated the drawing and vice versa. I discovered the symbols I chose to work with couldn’t always be represented with a single noun, and came with a suitcase of their own packed with history and sometimes contradiction. The symbols of the witch and the snake at least had one noun that conjured their image, even if that image had multiple variances, however, nouns such as peace and anarchy didn’t have such a direct line of thought.

I was a child in the 1970s – my first drawing was a version of the peace sign designed by Gerald Holton, a circle containing a stick figure. The peace sign was adopted as a badge by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament in Britain. The symbol stood for the “death of man and the unborn child” and was designed from the naval code of semaphore – the code letters for ‘N’ and ‘D’ (Nuclear Disarmament). An alternative view describes the peace sign as being composed of the Ty rune lengthened upward or turned upside down – todesrune – the rune of death or an inverted life rune. The peace sign was deliberately never copyrighted.

Gerald Holton said in 1958,

I was in despair. Deep despair. I drew myself the representative of an individual in despair, with hands palm outstretched outward and downwards in the manner of Goya’s peasant before the firing squad. I formalized the drawing into a line and put a circle around it. (CND, 2006)

A child in the 1970s, I grew up in the 1980s – the decade where we all returned to the grip of patriarchy. It seemed entrenched power was insurmountable, no alternative communities were credible. The political and theological dogma of the eighties resulted in an immobilized psychosis. This immobilization was represented in *The Lost Boys* (1987), a popular teenage vampire movie. The lost boys of the title are stunted burnt out and aimless with neither energy nor dreams of change.

“Even when they fly, they do so with little elation, throwing themselves off a bridge down into a deadening fog rather than soaring upward as vampires did in the seventies” (Auerbach, 1995: 166). Instead of confronting oppressors and soaring beyond society, with renewed paternal authority they become oppressors themselves. “Its vampirism is ineffective predation that is joyless to the perpetrators: transformation is self-imprisonment rather than exaltation” (Auerbach, 1995:166).

The Lost Boys (1987) exemplifies an important paradigm-shift in vampire movies – the not quite vampire, or mortal vampire – where vampire initiates can be restored of what Anne Rice in *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-2003) calls The Dark Gift – the state of being a vampire – to pristine human teenagers. I draw parallels between these vampire initiates that venture into the half light only to step back into the sun with the suburban nuclear families who pushed prams and pushers containing their infants along Bourke Street in Melbourne’s CBD on Sunday anti-nuclear protest marches throughout the 1980s.

There was a resurgence of CND protests in the 1980s due to the rising tension between the superpowers. Nuclear protest marching was a fun family day out. Some parents decked out the prams with streamers and got the kiddies to

wave flags. There were even puppet shows on the steps of parliament house, where huge paper mache gargoylesque figurines of US President Reagan, British Prime Minister Thatcher, the Australian Prime Minister Bob Hawke and New Zealand Prime Minister David Lange were thrust above the crowd on sticks, re-enacting dramas from the nightly news. Every one felt like they counted, patted themselves on the back, packed up, and went back to work the next day without further ado. Conservative overlords Reagan and Thatcher proclaimed that they had restored the patriarchal power that in the 1960s and 1970s had seemed about to collapse.

In the 1980s, I replaced my peace symbol graphic with the Anarchy symbol of a capital A in a circle. The anarchy symbol was first designed and used by Pierre-Joseph Proudhon a French economist and philosopher who was among the first anarchist thinkers and who both influenced and was influenced by Karl Marx, the Anarchy sign is a monogram of a capital 'A' surrounded by capital 'O'. In Latin and Cyrillic scripts the 'A' stands for anarchy and the 'O' for order, therefore, "Anarchy is Order", the first part of a Proudhon quote, (Anarchist symbolism, 2006). The proliferation of this anarchy symbol was courtesy of the late 1960s generation who had grown up to become Punks. I like to think that my teenage and early adult years emulated the inquisitive provocative branch of rebellion that twigged into the two-fold parallel path of idealism and cynicism handed down from the active milieu of the post-war generation.

At high school in religious studies classes, a hippie leftie dude who was a friend of the teacher, visited in an attempt to inform a class of mostly middle of the road, upstanding citizens of the future about the nuclear threat. I sat in the class along with the well-preened prigs, the teenagers whom adolescence had hit pretty hard and a scant few politically inclined students. He showed

us a magazine he was editing. It featured a cartoon of a nuclear bomb entitled “US” pointing its nose at an identical nuclear bomb called, “USSR”. The cold war was in inarguable full throttle mode with no foreseeable detente in sight. Sting’s elegiac lament “I hope the Russians love their children too” was in the music charts. A couple of years later in 1988 I stood in New York’s Times Square with my former classmate and we watched the Sony sign greet the president of the USSR, “Hi Gorby!” The heat of the Cold War was cooling down. The following year in 1989 the fall of the Berlin Wall heralded the end of the Cold War.

My initial intention was to write a political activist novel about the new nuclear danger as discussed by Helen Caldicott.⁸ In order to try and make the story engage with a readership either too jaded, oversaturated with the terrorist threat, unaware of the potential of nuclear harm, or uninterested in nuclear weapons I planned to harness the device of a reality TV show such as the *Amazing Race* (2001) or *Race Around the World* (1997). I planned to link the petroglyph on the desert plain with a tattoo of Suzy’s. When Suzy disappeared in the text into a liminal space, she was intended to go underground in the mode of the anti-terrorist terrorist group known colloquially as “Weathermen” in the US which began in the late 1960s.

The Weathermen were radical left revolutionaries who took their name from a Bob Dylan song *Subterranean Homesick Blues* which featured the line “You don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows” (Dylan, 1965) and drew attention through the use of explosions, to the sorry state of internal and international affairs in the US (Green, 2002).

⁸ Helen Caldicott’s most recent publication *Nuclear Power is not the Answer* (2006) has confronted the nuclear energy debate.

Suzy G was planned to be a resistance fighter – an anti-terrorist terrorist. What happened? Why didn't I go with this plan? The emergence of television shows such as *24* (2003) featuring terrorist and anti-terrorist factions out-maneuvring each other, the predominance of chain store TV like *CSI* (2000), *CSI Miami*, *CSI New York* etc which detailed the gathering of forensic information, and the reruns of the *X-files* (1993-2003) fatigued me.

This research strand which initially contributed to the novel undertook a twist to a consideration of the philosophy reflected in Eastern Religion and Western Occult practises which suggests that action on the inner plane – magic, meditation, yoga – is as effective in the outer-world as any political resistance. I was undertaking the task of “trying to imagine how one alteration in the state of things might extend its consequences across centuries” (Auerbach, 1995: 169). I looked at the literary culture and wondered where I was in all this. How could I write an original literary work dealing with these issues that didn't sink into blockbuster genre? I met Robert McKee the screenwriting guru made infamous in the movie *Adaptation* (2002) at his lecture in 2001.⁹ He said, “You're a novelist, get inside people's heads.” I still felt like I was missing something. The axe I had been grinding was a blunt stub. The sharp edge was missing. I remembered a much-loved childhood book from Enid Blyton, *The Folk of the Faraway Tree* (1959) which featured the tallest tree in an enchanted wood that was home to elves, pixies and an assortment of oddballs. The Faraway Tree reached so far into the sky that it emerged into the clouds and lands beyond existed at the top. One land featured in the book was called the Land of Missing Things. The characters journeyed there to find out what had become of their lost possessions, in an attempt to retrieve them. So that was where things went when they were missing! I wanted to find this ephemeral land and get my missing edge back. I asked myself the question, If

⁹ My meeting with Robert McKee took place before undertaking my PhD research.

there is a place where missing things go, then, where do people go when they're missing? This question informed the novel, *Disco Apocalypse*, in the narrative strand of Suzy G's flight in an aircraft that under mysterious circumstances was reported as missing, and her status albeit brief as a missing person. It is Suzy G who throughout the novel and in the final lines leaves notes asking, "Where are you?"

I was ricocheted back to the Zen koan that had been bandied about in popular culture – If a tree falls in a forest does it make a sound or does it only make a sound if you hear it?

HOW I LEARNED TO STOP WORRYING AND LIVE WITH THE BOMB
If it's not love then it's the bomb that will bring us together (The Smiths, 1985).

The fetishization of huge scale violence in contemporary culture has been described by Jean Baudrillard as "pornographic wish fulfillment" (Baudrillard, 2002: 3). Despite the signing of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1970, the cult of nuclear weapons continues in both the developed and the developing world as evidenced by the burgeoning framework of "debate" as described by Howard. The nuclear physicist and engineer presiding over the nuclear arsenal have become the priests of the invisible. In a return to medieval hierarchy we have the alchemist and the magician conjuring and strategizing secretly in allegiance to an absolute ruler. There exists a cult-like structure around the creation and care-taking of weapons of mass destruction. Anti-nuclear campaigner Helen Caldicott quotes Ted Taylor, former bomb designer, who says: "We were fascinated by violence on a huge scale, I became addicted to nuclear weapons work... it was a high...it was my bomb" (Caldicott, 2001:13).

Post-September 11 anxiety has triggered public regard to the prevalence of chemical, biological and nuclear warfare. Martin Amis' ironic declaration in *Einstein's Monsters* (1987) that he was "tired of nuclear weapons" (Amis, 1987: i) due to over- saturation in the media has become an eternal fatigue. Jean Baudrillard states throughout the stagnation of the 90s, events were "on strike" (Baudrillard, 2002: 3). The strike is over.

Nuclear terrorism is sublime. Edmund Burke locates the sublime purely in terms of fear. He states:

In essence, whatever is fitted in any sort to excite the ideas of pain, and danger, or is conversant about terrible objects or operates in a manner analogous to terror, is a source of the sublime; it is productive of the strongest emotion which the mind is capable of feeling. (Burke, *Litgothic*, 2003)

Nuclear destruction, as it is sublime, is beyond understanding or even adequate representation. Warfare exists in the western world as a contest usually viewed as a simulation via the screen. It's a kind of sport or a mini-series. Reality now is very much a matter of an endless stream of images we receive that have effectively killed both context and content, so that meaning disappears. Paradoxically, the image continuum perverts reality, so that according to Baudrillard, "Illusion is no longer possible" (Baudrillard, 1988: 166).

The opening scene of *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959) examines the metaphors of love and the nuclear bomb in a single frame where two lovers are embracing as radioactive dust covers their naked bodies. Thoughts are narrated over the images.

Like you, I've fought with all my strength against forgetting. Like you, I've forgotten. Like you, I've wished for a memory beyond solace, a memory of shadows and stone. I've fought daily with all my strength against the horror of no longer understanding the reason for remembering. Like you, I've forgotten. (Duras, 1959)

The script written by Duras (1959) refers to "the horror of forgetting"; the fusion of bodies and the fusion of atoms are juxtaposed. The film directed by Alain Resnais depicts an individual Frenchwoman's experience of watching her German lover die the day before the liberation of France layered against images of the aftermath of the A-bomb in Hiroshima which killed her current lover's family.

In Hiroshima during a research trip I visited the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum which first opened in August 1955 "mandated to convey the facts of the Atomic bombing" (*Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum*, 1999 : 5).

In Hiroshima, the A – dome building is one of eleven structures left partially standing after the nuclear bomb blast on the 6th August, 1945. Around its perimeter is the Peace Park with monuments and a museum dedicated to Hiroshima, international peace and the elimination of nuclear war. In this Park, the Eternal Flame burns as a symbol for peace. The hypocenter marks the place where the 'Little Boy' bomb exploded 580 meters above.

A Japanese myth says that to make 1000 paper cranes is good luck, and Sadako, a Japanese child with radiation sickness made 950 before she died. Every day children and adults hang paper cranes onto the monument of Sadako in the Peace Park for good luck. Visitors can walk across the bridge

which the bomb aimed at, where a stone contains the still visible shadow of a person radiated. Along the riverbank below, memorials, monuments and original buildings still extant from the blast are devoted to the memory of the bomb. Artifacts in the Peace Memorial Museum include: thousands of glasses melted together, remnants of radiated human hair, and a watch which stopped at the exact time of the blast. Upon entry to the museum a series of wax figures with their skin melting off simulate the effects of radiation. It is not possible to view these artifacts anywhere else in the world. Although some still photographs of these artifacts are available for perusal through an official website, many of them have not been filmed, and therefore, cannot be viewed outside of the Museum.

At the Peace Park I conversed with many survivors of the A-bomb. One old gentleman informed me that after losing his mother, father and siblings he became a teacher of literature as he believed that literature was eternal, whereas all families and all houses could vanish. I took this statement and my recollection of this old man to assist in my recreation in the novel when Kit films the A-bomb survivor.

“Do you have dreams of the things you saw at that time?” I ask him.
“Spring, 1946 not enough food, school started again in barracks. The spiritual core of Japan was at the heart of the war cause – brain washed to die for the emperor, as the war ended, we lost backbone; it was a hard time – financially, spiritually, emotionally. I felt like screaming. I did not know what to do. Thought that all living things, all houses, would vanish, disappear.” (Pizaro, 2006:106)

While in Hiroshima I visited the Mazda factory and drooled over a glossy new blue Mazda RX8 in the showroom. During a tour of the factory I learnt of

Mazda's role in the production of armaments during World War Two. As was described in the novel, the survivor I met had worked as a child in the factory.

Information regarding the repercussions of radiation on descendants of survivors on display in the Museum depict a far more grisly version than that of the official joint US/Japanese Radiation Effects Research Foundation who state, "no evidence of genetic effects has been found" (*RERF, homepage, 2003*). When interviewed at the Peace Park, a second generation person, a person whose parents were radiated, was asked when they were conscious of being a second generation person. They answered – every time a nuclear test is performed (*RERF, homepage, 2003*).

The A-dome in the Peace Park in Hiroshima may be a rare example in the postmodern world where reality outweighs simulation. My intention in this section was to depict a postmodern Japanese life still tinted with a touch of the traditional sense of *mono no aware* – which translates as – the pathos of things. In English literature pathos refers to "a quality in a work or a portion thereof that makes the reader experience pity, sorrow, tenderness" (Watson, 87:272).

Banana Yoshimoto is the phenomenally successful Japanese Gen X writer whose work has not been studied in any depth in the West. According to Yoshimoto the two main themes in her writing are "the exhaustion of young people in contemporary Japan" and "the way in which terrible experiences shape a person's life" (*Fruits of her Labor, 2001*). Yoshimoto's prizewinning literary works depict unconventional characters leading atypical Japanese lives, and have led to a phenomenon labeled 'Banana Mania'. Although her previous comments do not contemplate either the historical or the personal experience of the A-bomb, I consider that in this statement she has evoked the

eternal fatigue that Amis refers to when he declares his boredom at the possibility of mass destruction. This section of her novel, *Amrita* (1997), exemplifies her intention to depict the ennui of her generation and the generation of A-bomb survivors; the interface of exhaustion layered with post-trauma. In this novel the main character, Saku-Chan awakes from a loss of consciousness with amnesia and recalls details of her own life and the life of her enigmatic sister, Mayu, killed years before.

Was I really the type who would blissfully fade away in her own memories while eating shell shaped Madeline cakes dipped in tea? Could you consider my life in that house with all those people nothing more than a journey, or, even worse, a “trip” that would end in an instant? I couldn’t answer my questions; even trying would have been dangerous (Yoshimoto, 97:19).

Like Yoshimoto’s character Saku-chan, asking questions while producing the exegesis was a dangerous business as the surface I skated upon seemed to stretch interminably into oblivion. I entered the liminal area Suzy G inhabited time and time again only to return to the ennui of Kit’s life when the answers came as Zen koan – riddles without an answer which ricocheted me into further wonderment.

It has been suggested by the convenors of *British Art in the Sixties* at the Tate Gallery, London, that due to the context of nuclear activity during the Cold War it is surprising that there was not a greater prevalence of nuclear imagery in art work in the 1960s, (Stephens, 2004: 64). In 2006, I attended an exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria, *British Art in the Sixties*. Amidst the pop art and funky retro installations I was struck by the nightmarish image of a painting by Colin Self entitled, *Guard Dog on a Missile Base, no.1*. The painting depicted missile fog with the emerging torso and head of a snarling wolf, ears

flattened, its head turned to the viewer so that the salivating pink mouth almost caused me to take a step back. In the background to this weird were-wolf were a line of missiles, their snouts pointed to the sky. In Self's work, atomic weaponry, the prospect of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and the fear it induced became the frame of reference through which the world was visualized. "Nuclear paranoia pervades his work. It is like a dye that colours everything he does" (Stephens, 2004 :65). In 1959 Colin Self had stayed on a farm near the American base in Norfolk. Thor Nuclear Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles could be seen clearly pointing at the sky. At night the guard dogs howled. In creating the painting Colin Self had not wished to protest nuclear arms, but more to depict a particular moment in history to record a time and a way of thinking (Stephens, 2004: 67). This image Self painted of the half-missile half-wolf linked in with the idea of the transmutation Suzy G takes in Kit's vision into snake form, and later when she is being resuscitated.

"Someone tears away the last of the opaque snake scales that have been covering my eyes. I have my new full skin" (Pizaro, 2006: 196).

Although my original intention to write a reality TV-style novel – *Race Around the World, be the first to find a nuke!* – didn't see the light of day; I at least was able to put for the first time into a work of fiction the memoir of an A-Bomb survivor. Like Colin Self in his painting, *Guard Dog on a Missile Base no.1*, I linked a crucial moment in the A-Bomb survivor's life with a devastating moment in our history.

When the A Bomb survivor in *Disco Apocalypse* describes his journey home in the wake of the atomic explosion he refers to the experience as "time-sleep to another world". This temporal-spatial distortion is reminiscent of the

prevalent mood infusing the journey Suzy G takes in the process of her disappearance. Although the A-bomb explosion was monumental, actual, historical, viewable and scientifically observable, Suzy's eruption was symbolic in contrast, and yet, repercussions rippled through her personal world and consequently, the created world of the novel. This narrative strand develops the notion of "Usable Past" (Zamora, 1997) to bridge time and space and to connect the events and emotions of one place and space with audiences in a different space and time.¹⁰

¹⁰ The "Usable Past" is discussed in Chapter 7

Graphic Two



SHIN'S TRICYCLE

Exposed at: Higashi-hakushima-cho
1,500 meters from the hypocenter

Donated by Nobuo Tetsutani



Children's Peace Monument, (dedicated to Sadako), Peace Memorial Park,
Hiroshima, Japan.

CHAPTER FOUR

BETWEEN THE WORLDS

We are part of the Circle of the Wise. There is no mystery that has not already been revealed to us. There is no power we do not already have (Carter, 2000).

Dream sequences, alternate realities, liminal time and space all link into the area of the unconscious. Symbols and archetypes are the language of the unconscious. My plan in this chapter is to offer an interpretation of the symbol of the snake in the novel using a Jungian technique of symbolic analysis. In Chapter Five I will also consider the archetype of the witch, and discuss the lives of some women who have either been called witches, or who are self-proclaimed witches.

In contrast to Sigmund Freud, who posited that the unconscious consisted of the repression of once conscious material, which may again become conscious, Jung considered there to be two levels of the unconscious. Firstly, the “personal unconscious”, and secondly, the “collective unconscious.”

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of collective, universal and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. (Crowley, 1989: 151)

According to Jung and his adherents, we can access this collective psyche through dreams, and its contents are also represented in myths. Archetypes are the lifeblood of the collective unconscious.

Similar to Schopenhauer's idea of prototypes, archetypes have been considered "the original forms of all things" (Samuels, 1985: 24).

Jung resisted this notion of archetypes as categories, which he considered reduced them, and stated that it "disguise[d] them under the cloak of rational motivations and transform[ed] the archetypes into rational concepts" (Samuels, 1985: 24).

A less mystical account of the Jungian model explains the collective unconscious as arising in each individual from shared instinct, common experience, and shared culture.

Archetypes, roots of human mythmaking, are defined in psychology as universal, symbolic images that appear in myths, art, dreams and other expressions of the collective unconscious. (Conn, 2003: 106)

It is this latter definition of Conn's describing archetypes as symbolic images that appear in myths, art and dreams that underpinned the concept of archetypes I used in writing *Disco Apocalypse*.

I found working with archetypes to be a useful technique in the production of a novel which depicted a symbolic universe in which the existence of multiple realities can be true. Particularly as Kit's dream sequences in the novel had implication for the motivation of the drama, and the alternate world Suzy inhabits after her disappearance allows her greater power to observe the life she has left. Given that Suzy was consuming heavy amounts of a

hallucinogen, Snakeblood, I envisaged her twilight world to give her wide access to symbolic images, as well as a detachment from memories of her life. William Burroughs describes his experience as a junkie of heroin and morphine in the satirical and hallucinatory *Naked Lunch* where he lies transfixed by his big toe, and develops a talking asshole (Burroughs, 1962). In contrast I wanted to use the device of the alternate world entered partially by hallucinogenic use and partially by destiny to depict an enriching space where the characters could meet with archetypes.

DAKOU – TO GO LIKE A SNAKE

In undertaking this narrative strand my intention was to depict not only what the symbol of the snake means in historical representation through art work or artefact, but also personally; how the symbol spoke through the unconscious to me individually.

We know from the text that Suzy G was born in the Chinese Year of the Snake. Suzy has had a design of a snake tattooed to her back.

SUZY G wears a low-backed white slip dress exposing tattooed colours across her shoulder blades. A silvery white hooded cobra outlined in charcoal, its red tongue darting, curls up her left shoulder. In the third eye at the centre of the snake's forehead is a shiny green emerald. (Pizaro, 2006: 27)

In the course of the novel Suzy transforms into a snake or a snake-like being. It is not an actual transubstantiation, but a symbolic transformation with the ambience and consciousness of dream, vision or meditation. It is a transformation that belongs in liminal time and space.

The symbol of the snake ignited and designed the novel writing process. Initially I envisaged the structure of the novel as a snake sitting on its tail with its head raised. The loops of the snake's body indicated the twists of the narrative as they curved and swung back on each other. I wanted to have the sense of gliding through the ficto-scape of the novel, but not the bird's-eye view. I wanted to curl and curve through the feet of the characters as they walked across the surfaces of sand and stone and road, dodging cigarette butts and glares cast down from above. I wanted a visceral sense of the heat and dust as Suzy and Kit trucked along the Trans-pantaneira Highway into the grassland of the Pantanal. When snakes shed their skin the scales fall across their eyes and blind them. This sensation of encumbered blindness was something I felt as I was working through the process of drafting *Disco Apocalypse* – I didn't follow a structured plot. My journey could be summed up in a Chinese word – Dakou – (to go like a snake) to meander, to zigzag. I had a hazy dream of where we were going but I was letting the characters take to the road and see where it led them. Snakes will rub their head against a rock to slough off the dead scales covering their eyes. I felt as I followed Kit and Suzy on the road that I had stopped to bang my head against a rock for the scales to fall off and only then could I see which way to go. In a way my experience paralleled Suzy's when she first entered the alternate world after her disappearance.

“Welcome, welcome to where the old world meets the new.” I hear a voice beside me.

“Can you tell me your name? I can't see you.” I look to my left and right, to above and behind.

“I am the unseen. I am invisible. Only I can see the way to go.”

I walk on. The space beside me fills with the guide.

“Where am I?” I ask.

"I told you, we are where the old world meets the new."

"Why are we here?"

"What we do not bring to consciousness comes to us as fate."

"I don't know where I am going," I tell the guide.

"Most people who are here don't know either. It's a common misfortune of this place." (Pizaro, 2006: 154)

Researching snake symbology I encountered my next snake ally – Lotan – a seven headed sea-serpent or dragon occurring in Ugaritic mythology. How does a seven headed serpent get itself around? I expected by rearing its neck high so that its seven heads could see the seven seas and employ its thick snake body as a rudder. As it was a sea-serpent, it was immersed in the water which represented the unconscious. I saw each head as a character, Suzy G, Kit, Ted, Ross (Kit's father), Lucas Styx, Suzy and Kit's mother, and me as the writer. We shared the same snake body and same motion – zigging and zagging, through the terrain of the novel.

Eventually my seven-headed Lotan became too cumbersome an image. I wanted a sleek serpentine glide, not a ride hobbled by too many heads. I came to see the characters as interconnected diamonds on a snakeskin. Each one of the characters with their thoughts and memories were carried along with the sashay of the snake. I imagined my snake to be like the diamond python Suzy carries with her into the Vegie Bar where she meets Kit in the early scenes in the novel – brilliant black curves with luminous white dots that squeezed the life from its prey.

Snakes shed their skins and this metaphor is used graphically in the novel.

I crouch low and shoulder through a short door into a passageway. Above the doorway the motto, "Know Thyself", is written in the bold silver and red letters of the Coke logo. I trip up on a knee high pile of clear six sided scales. I regain my footing and I look up at Suzy in the chamber. She is coiled on the floor. Her hunched back is turned away from me. She has a pale yellowy sheen to her.

"Suzy?"

"We go this colour after we shed."

I reach out my hand.

"It's time to come with me now, Suzy."

"I haven't grown my new skin yet."

"You must come now, Suzy."

Suzy slithers across the floor and raises herself on her tail to meet me eye to eye.

Her black tongue forks out. Her black eyes are unblinking.

(Pizaro, 2006: 192)

In the series of television interviews, *Joseph Campbell and The Power of Myth* (1988) with Bill Moyers, Joseph Campbell tells of a folktale motif called "the one forbidden thing" and demonstrates the recurring motif in two examples.

Genesis 1 "And God said, "Have you eaten from the tree which I commanded you should not eat?" Then the Man said, "The Woman whom you gave to be with me – she gave me of the tree and I ate." And the Lord God said to the Woman, "What is this you've done?" And the Woman said, "The Serpent deceived me and I ate." (Campbell, 1988)

In a legend of the Basari people of West Africa;

One day Snake said, "We too should eat these fruits, why should we go hungry?" Antelope said, "But we don't know

anything about this fruit." Then Man and his wife took some of the fruit and ate it. Oonombate came down from the sky and asked, "Who ate the fruit?" They answered, "We did." Oonombate asked, "Who told you you could eat that fruit?" They replied, "Snake did." (Campbell, 1988)

Both of these depictions cast the snake as a duplicitous deceptive entity and are justification for the dislike, fear and character assassination of snakes. However, we can recast Snake in both of these stories as the symbol of life throwing off the past and continuing to live, because the snake sheds its skin just as the moon sheds its shadow (Campbell, 1988).

Naga Rajah, the snake king is the next thing to the Buddha. The serpent represents the power of life in the field of time to throw off death, and the Buddha represents the power of life in the field of eternity to be eternally alive. (Campbell, 1988)

In the novel Suzy represented by the snake throws off death by entering the realm of the disappeared. As a missing person she has thrown off the past and continued to live. She is beyond the reach of death and is forever possibly alive as long as she is missing.

Snakeblood is the forbidden fruit that Suzy G consumes in the novel. "By eating the forbidden fruit Man [sic] becomes the initiator of his own life" (Campbell, 1988). Suzy's consumption of Snakeblood facilitates her access to a liminal world or altered state and in lingering in this state, this place in the unconscious, and then moving back into consciousness, she has shed her old life. Suzy has initiated an evolution in her life by following the snake. Kit,

although given the opportunity to leave with Suzy, chooses not to, and remains traversing the periphery.

KUNDALINI

Along with political consciousness the nineteen sixties connectedness with the alternative fixated on particularly Indian forms of mysticism and philosophy including meditation and yoga.

Kundalini literally means “coiling,” like a snake. In the classical literature of Hatha Yoga, Kundalini is described as a coiled serpent at the base of the spine. The coiled and dormant “feminine” energy refers to the vast potential of psychic energy contained within us all. It is normally symbolized by a serpent coiled into three and a half circles, with its tail in its mouth, and spiralling around the central axis (sacrum or sacred bone) at the base of the spine. The awakening of this serpent and the manifestation of its powers is a primary aim of the practice of Kundalini Yoga (*Kundalini Yoga*, 1999).

In the novel Suzy G is described as having a highly activated Kundalini.

“Kundalini arousal. It feels like an electric current running up through the spine and into the brain. Then an explosion of energy – kind of like a brain orgasm.” Salli and Jeanette nod together.

“Any form of spiritual practice: meditation, yoga, occult training, all of these can lead to an awakening of kundalini energy.”

“But that’s not all,” Jeanette says, “Other experiences can release kundalini energy. Birth, physical trauma, drug use...”

“Or it can occur suddenly and spontaneously – sometimes in the middle of the night when we awake from a dream,” Michael pipes up.

“It is a state of high voltage,” Salli says.

“I know from personal experience that if you force Kundalini you can overload your central nervous system to the point that you

feel like you are walking a tightrope between sanity and insanity for days, weeks even," Michael confides." (Pizaro, 2006: 152)

Suzy's consumption of the Snakeblood could both motivate and exaggerate paranormal experiences. Suzy's journey of disappearance and settling in liminal space has overtones of the Kundalini experience.

The snake is, "An animal endowed with magnetic force. Because it sheds its skin, it symbolizes resurrection. Because of its sinuous movement it signifies strength. Because of its viciousness it represents the evil side of nature" (Cirlot, 1962: 274).

The snake is symbolic of energy itself, it invokes both ambivalence and multivalencies. I became infused with the powerful energy and sinuous movement of the snake while producing the novel, and created a character possessed by the magnetic force of this symbol. Suzy G was so ignited by the archetypal energy of the snake that she withdrew from the consensual reality of the text to shed her skin in seclusion.

SNAKEBLOOD

Charm – a physical object into which specific energies or vibrations were put by the use of appropriate herbs or symbols (Carter, 2000)

Snakeblood is a magical ingredient or charm that is consumed by Suzy G and cohorts throughout the novel. Snakeblood exists in the novel as both a recreational drug that Suzy G is addicted to, but given that Suzy's identification with Snake spirituality or snake essence is intrinsic to her core character, the drug Snakeblood almost becomes Suzy's own blood or life force energy. Her ingestion of Snakeblood is therefore ritualistic. It is like she is

sipping essence of herself when she ingests it. Suzy is initially energized and enthused by her ingestion of Snakeblood, however like addicts of any kind her complete immersion in the search to reclaim the initial high leaves her wilted, with a consuming paranoia and twisted vision which drives her to an exhausted desperation.

“It’s like there’s ants crawling through my veins, Kit!”

Suzy’s skin is buzzing, her countenance pallid, her pulse slow. Her forehead seems damp, but she is cool to the touch.

“Sip some water, Suzy,” I pass her the bottle of mineral water – she refuses to drink anything without bubbles.

“It has gone flat,” she says when I try to make her drink tap water. The straw has slipped down the neck of the bottle. I squeeze my finger in and inch it back up. Suzy will only drink from a straw. She refuses to put her lips to a bottle, cup or glass.

Suzy sits on the roof of the house all night watching for extra terrestrial craft. When the bar is not too busy Ted leaves me to serve the remaining customers and goes up with binoculars and waits with her. When I tell them that they need a telescope; that binoculars are only good for horse racing and wildlife safaris they tell me ETs have a special vibe and you sort of just feel it. (Pizaro, 2006: 130)

Reference is made in the novel to Yage, the South American hallucinogenic plant harnessed for its visual hallucination inducing properties and its link to shamanic trances. Yage is sometimes referred to as “Jaguar blood” or “Jaguar sperm” as folklore surrounding the substance invokes the mythology of the Aztec jaguar god, Tezcatlipoca. A particular strand of the folkloric narrative divulges that this substance aids spirit flights or visions whereby the adherent on the visionquest perceives his or her self to be flying, entering another world, or transforming into the jaguar.

Aldous Huxley famously undertook a drug induced hallucination recording the experience which later was published as *The Doors of Perception, and Heaven and Hell* (1954), a favourite read of nineteen-sixties musicians involved in the LSD experience. The images Huxley depicts are similar to the accounts of Yage users.

The typical experience begins with perceptions of coloured, moving, living geometrical forms. In time, pure geometry becomes concrete, and the visionary perceives, not patterns, but patterned things, such as carpets, carvings, mosaics. These give place to vast and complicated buildings, in the midst of landscapes, which change continuously passing from richness to more intensely coloured richness, from grandeur to deepening grandeur. (Huxley, 1954: 70)

Huxley describes the hallucinatory drug trip as taking the mind into a liminal realm, a world between the worlds.

If you go to NSW, you will see marsupials hopping about the countryside. And if you go to the antipodes of the self-conscious mind, you will encounter all sorts of creatures at least as odd as kangaroos. You do not need to invent these creatures any more than you invent marsupials. They live their lives in complete independence. A man cannot control them. All he can do is to go to the mental equivalent of Australia and look around him. Some people never consciously discover their antipodes. Others make an occasional landing. Yet others (but they are few) find it easy to come and go as they please. (Huxley, 1954: 62)

We might recall that Huxley wrote this in the 1950s when the transit out of Australia by travellers to the United Kingdom was far outweighed by the influx of immigrants from all over Europe to the antipodes. This exemplifies a moment of historical ironic yet authentic experience. When the starting point of the individual before he or she commences the journey to the other side is in fact the antipodes, how does this influence the outcome and expectation of the person? The notion of the Northern hemisphere as the fixed and focal point of reference is tweaked by Australian and New Zealand pagans and witches when they integrate the traditional pagan calendar into the planetary and weather patterns of the Southern Hemisphere. Some choose to set them in reverse, or withershins, others layer one on top of the other, so that the Northern Hemisphere calendar is superimposed. In the novel I decided to comply with the Northern Hemisphere dates, and sometimes added local festivals.

Bearing in mind the Aztec history surrounding the Yage experience, and the geographical location of South America where they initially consumed it, I chose to name the concoction that Suzy and Lucas Styx have conjured; Snakeblood as both these characters, Suzy and Lucas have an affiliation with snakes. Suzy it could be argued is possessed by the snake.

Suzy G takes a spirit flight to her other world. Like Kit in the Pantanal, she flies or ascends to the new world. She initially physically takes an aircraft which removes her from the everyday world of Ted's house and her regimented rituals regarding daily concerns like food, drink, and array of obsessions such as watching the night sky with binoculars awaiting the Starmen. The aircraft apparently disappears from radar, but does not go

down. Suzy G then reports that she doesn't need a plane to fly. She has ascended, and in a way has also transcended worldly concerns and conundrums of the kind that preoccupy Kit.

“The bar needs us both to work,” I snipe, and trawl through the lunchtime crowd of office cocks and office-girls-with-attitude who munch foccacia and swill beer.

After lunch I walk out the front door to pick up the mail and the black Mazda RX8 isn't parked at the curb. (Pizaro, 2006: 133)

Suzy G's spirit flight involves an ascent to the liminal world. The story Ted tells the two sisters at the beginning of the novel about Persephone's visit to the underworld to be with Pluto has the dual purpose of firstly, explaining the fracture in the family unit to the sisters in that they will have to spend half the time with their mother and half with the fathers, and secondly, foreshadowing Suzy's disappearance. That myth is perverted or subverted in the novel through the exposition of Kit's journey in the sub-cultural underworld – clairvoyants, bondage mistresses, alien abductees – and also in Suzy's journey to an alternate world which does not require a descent. Suzy flies.

The witch's space is liminal, on the edge. Suzy G enters this remote terrain belonging to the witch when she disappears. She leaves the known world and hovers on the rim of existence that borders the abyss. It is here that she meets the creatures of the peripheral collective unconscious and where Kit finds her, half-Suzy half-snake.

“Suzy slithers across the floor and raises herself on her tail to meet me eye to eye. Her black tongue forks out. Her black eyes are unblinking” (Pizaro, 2006: 193).

In *The Witch and the Clown*, Ulanov discusses the archetype of the witch flaring up from the unconscious, seizing the individual and dropping the self into the dark areas. It is the Witch archetype in operation which allows these individuals to as Huxley refers to it, discover their antipodes.¹¹

¹¹ The archetype of the Witch is discussed in the next chapter, Chapter Five.

Graphic Three



Japanese Kanji for "snake"



Tattoo of a Cobra

CHAPTER FIVE

BEWITCHED

The First rule of Magic: words carry energy. Energy is the power to do work. Save energy, think before you speak, and remember that what you say, even in everyday life, has the power to create change (Carter, 2000).

The next archetype at work in the creation of *Disco Apocalypse* was that of the witch. My image of the witch is that of the sorceress – an inventive visionary woman who works alone evoking energies to exert change.

What can we learn of this witch figure? She stands forth as an archetypal female of tremendous power. She personifies the extremes of feminine receptivity, pulling inward, whirling downward, and absorbing into primordial unconscious depths all that is conscious and human. She lures us from our known, familiar world into her far country at a great distance from our ordinary concerns. (Ulanov, 1987:31)

As a child I was brought up on Walt Disney's animated witch from *Sleeping Beauty* (1959), Maleficent with her medieval purple and black cloak who poisoned apples to feed to rosy-cheeked stepdaughters, and of black-clad cannibalistic witches who lived in remote areas of the forest emerging from their cottages only to shove lost children into ovens. This is one prevalent image of the witch in operation, and has existed in Western tradition for centuries. Due to its negative connotation equating old, reclusive or undesirable women as malevolent hags, and because it has reduced the powerful archetype of the wise old woman to a cartoon ghoul or Halloween spectacle, it has become a stereotypical example of the witch. Popular songs

reiterated this stereotypical image. Musicians as diverse as the God-faring Cliff Richard,

She's just a devil-woman with evil on her mind

Beware the devil-woman she's going to get you from behind (Richard, 1976),

to the California lads with a penchant for the supernatural, The Eagles,

Witchy woman, see how high she flies?

Witchy woman, she got the moon in her eyes (Henley, Leadon, 1973).

Contemporary witches attempt to construct new cultural vision and new religious agency and identity by means of nature-oriented goddess worship and magical ritual performance. They are reclaiming the archetype of witch.

The movement of contemporary Wicca or Witchcraft was crafted in Great Britain in the 1940s and 1950s as part of "a rejection of modernity, socialism and Christianity" (Hutton, 2000: 360). Gerald Gardner became the nominated forerunner of this movement which led to Gardnerian witchcraft in the United Kingdom. Contemporary scholars in folklore, anthropology and mythology had been researching and writing about the goddess and goddess oriented religions for decades prior: Margaret Murray, (1921); Jane Ellen Harrison, (1955); Robert Graves, (1948); James Frazer, (1922).

The movement travelled from the United Kingdom to the United States and was particularly embraced by the second wave of Feminism in 1967 onward. In 1971, six Los Angeles women formed the first Feminist Witchcraft coven led by Zuzanna Budapest (Salomonsen, 2002: 6).

The word 'witch', according to the Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary (1995), is derived from the Old English *wicca*, being related to *wigle* meaning "divination". A further definition expounding the stereotype of devil-worshipping supernatural spellcasters follows on in Webster's. Such definitions are overruled by contemporary witches who consider that the root meaning of *witch* and *wicca* is the Indo-European *wic*, *weik* or Norse *vikja*, meaning "to shape, bend or twist" (Salomonsen, 2002: 7). A witch is, therefore, somebody who is skilled in the craft of "shaping, bending and changing reality" and not supernatural (Adler, 1986: 11). Reclaiming women took the name witch, loaded with negative connotations, as an act of solidarity.

The first children's book I read in primary school that bucked the stereotype and engaged with the archetypal image of witch as a solitary female figure on the outskirts of the community whose aim rather than evil-doing was to be in tune with the world of nature was Nina Bawden's, *The Witch's Daughter*.

The witch's daughter sat on a rock in the bay. It was a huge rock, with steep sides of black basalt, turreted like a castle and crowned with purple heather. On one side the sea thundered, throwing up spray like white lace. Inland, the wet sand of low tide stretched back to the dunes and the brown slopes of Ben Luin beyond. The bay was empty except for a few bullocks at the water's edge and the gulls that swooped and cried like kittens over the shore and the hills of this Scottish island of Skua. The witch's daughter closed her eyes and flew with the gulls in the air: she turned and dived and felt the wind cold on her face. She flew in her mind; her body sat still on the rock. Her name was Perdita, which means lost. (Bawden, 1966: 7)

In this excerpt the witch's daughter takes her own spirit flight without the aid of hallucinogenic substances. To her the shadowy astral world can be visited at will. She is a true witch.

My initial act as sorceress or witch in the creation of *Disco Apocalypse* was the conjuring of a name. "The earliest and oldest magic was the naming of things. It was believed that to know a person's (or god's) true-name gave the knower power over the known" (Carter, 2000:6).

Earlier in this exegesis I made reference to the link between the name *Disco Apocalypse* and the title of a Jackson Browne song. I planned to pay homage to this song and the epoch of music from which it came, in this way reigniting a historical moment in time, 1980, when the song was released, and in so doing I engaged with looking back while still looking forward as the title suggests a post modern apocalypse which is yet to be, may never occur, or we are actually already in depending how you look at it. William Gibson entitled his futuristic novel, *All Tomorrow's Parties* (1999), in homage to a song by the Velvet Underground and Nico. Douglas Coupland entitled his novel, *Girlfriend in a Coma* (1997), taken from a song title from Manchester band The Smiths parodic 1984 tune. I like the idea of dancing along the edge, not oblivious or into oblivion but with intent as if it is the last dance.

HOW I CHOSE A COVEN

I love the dark side. It's beautiful. It's like swimming under the sea. You don't know quite where you're going but it's beautiful. And it can be tough sometimes. You have to come up for air (Myers, 2003).

Looking back at the formation of *Disco Apocalypse*, I wonder at what time in its production did the images of women: Nico, Sylvia Plath, Vali Myers, Patti Smith, Rosaleen Norton and Kathy Acker – all living breathing women – bind with the fictional characters of Suzy G and Kit? The living women infused the fictional characters with such vivid archetypal energy that in the liminal world of the novel's creation they formed a coven. As the writer I felt drawn into that coven, but not at its centre. I felt we formed an unlinked circular pattern curving through time, space and mortality. We sinuously curved through some sort of dimension, sliding along some grey path both in and out of the world of the fiction. At one point of the novel writing I envisaged Kathy Acker in motor cycle leathers, spiky bleached hair on end, spin her rear motorbike wheel to a halt and call out, "You are so going in the wrong direction," grin at me, the diamond glinting in her front tooth, then speed off, the front wheel of the motorbike rearing up. I was reminded that Kathy Acker believes that in creating fiction writing we are making reality.

A coven traditionally (in terms of fairy tale and folklore) is a circle of witches. Starhawk, a peace activist and ecofeminist, in her work with the Reclaiming movement of San Francisco further reinvented the word 'coven' in the 1970s so that it referred to a small congregation of women that practiced witchcraft. "In a strong coven, the bond is, by tradition, "closer than family": a sharing of spirits, emotions, imaginations" (Starhawk, 1989:49).

THE WITCH OF POSITANO

Patti Smith was one of the original pioneers of the New York punk rock scene. Patti was both a poet and singer characterized by her androgyny and sometimes boisterous yet elegiac song lyrics. She was rock's version of Sylvia Plath and said upon the release of her first album, *Horses* in 1973, that "three chord rock merged with the power of the word". Patti met Vali Myers at the Chelsea Hotel where Patti was living with the photographer Robert Mapplethorpe.

In 1973, Patti told Penny Green for *Interview* magazine,

Vali's an Italian beatnik-witch and she was a big hero of mine when I was 14. She lived on the left bank, the supreme beatnik chick—thick red hair and big black eyes, black boat-neck sweaters, and trench coats. Before Edie Sedgwick, she was my heroine. I had pictures of her all over my walls. I never considered her as a real person. Then I was confronted with the real girl, and I thought, "oh man, what am I gonna do," cause I had dealt with the image so long. When she tattooed me, it was painful. It looks like a little lightning bolt. My photos had become real, and I had to deal with that as a reality. It was a great turning point in my life, it had come full circle. (Smith, Oceanstar.com, 1999)

Born in Sydney, 1930, Vali became the leading dancer of the Melbourne Modern Ballet Company, and moved to Paris in 1949. During nearly 10 years in Paris, living mainly on the streets, Myers came in contact with writers such as Jean Cocteau and his friend Jean Genet. According to a piece in the *Paris*

Review in 1958 Vali had planned to commit suicide at age 23, but instead met an Austrian, married him, and they moved to Italy, where she became known as "The Witch of Positano," leading a communal lifestyle in the mountains. She was the subject of a film documenting her life there. She made several trips to New York over the years, carousing with Salvador Dali and Janis Joplin at the Chelsea Hotel, selling her paintings to private collectors to raise funds (Norman, 2003).

This determination of the Witch figure to leave the diurnal world and escape to or down into the forest is reflected in Bawden's witch's daughter as well, just as the character of Perdita remains above ground but wills herself to become invisible.

"Hugging the walls of the buildings, she kept her eyes on the ground as if she did not want to see, or be seen" (Bawden, 1966: 8).

Ulanov reiterates this view by referring to the "psychological force of gravity [that] pulls us down into the dark" (Ulanov, 1987:33).

I encountered Vali when I was working in an eclectic second-hand bookshop called the Bookcave in St Kilda in 1993. Vali's drawings were being exhibited in the Emerald Hill Gallery in South Melbourne and she dropped by the bookshop to browse and discovered an art book printed by Open House Publishers in London, *Vali Meyers Drawings 1949-79*, about her work. She asked the owner if he'd like her to sign it. She wrote, "Eddie, I love your shop, Vali." As she stood at the counter looking through the pages of her own book, I continued moving the Kerouacs and Bukowskis from the aisles close to the doorway where they were planted by book thieves into the 'Beat' section in

the far corner. Eddie's five-year-old son approached Vali and asked, "Are you the Wizard's wife?" The boy was referring to a 70-year-old local who wore robes and carried a sceptre; his fingers bejewelled with agate and turquoise, his long grey beard twisted into beads Ganges river-style. When she didn't reply he asked, "Are you magic?"

"They call me the Witch, little boy," was Vali's response her eyes raised from between the pages of her book. She herself links her creative power both with sorcery and the activated kundalini that electrify witches.

I just draw - ever since I was a little girl. People always try to label it, but you can't label this work, it's original. It's like asking why do you dance? You do it because you have the spirit inside you. . . If I didn't draw I'd go mad. Artists are like shamans - they have that compulsion and nothing can stop them. (Norman, 2003)

Vali drew in pen, ink, watercolour and gold-leaf. I remember looking at the pages of sumptuous colour delineated with precise black ink. She drew herself as a nature sprite inhabiting a forest of vivid animals, both natural and mythic. Her mythic symbolism is often connected to transformation as Conn (2003) notes.

"Myths that show humans coming from trees or plants, or being transmuted from other animals, seem to emphasise humanity's intimate link to nature. (Conn, 2003: 2).

Vali had drawn portraits of herself with her pet fox, Foxy, a red fox who visited her house in Italy. To Vali, Foxy was a witch's familiar or consecrated animal that belonged in two worlds; the wild world of the forest, and the domestic world of her house. Foxy kept paws in both worlds. At the time of

Foxy's death, Vali was taken to hospital with a seizure and decided it was time to leave her house in Positano.

I looked from the young woman in the drawings displayed like a fertility goddess with kohl-lined eyes, black lines drawn around her lips and curling up to her nose so that her visage recalled a carnivale mask, to the older woman standing looking down at the portrait of herself she drew decades before. I saw that the black lines dotted around her eyes and mouth were not make-up or made up, but tattooed. Vali had painted herself, on the page, and she had also drawn on herself. In ceremonies witches draw pentacles astrological symbols and personal motifs on their skin in removable body paint.

THE WITCH OF THE CROSS

"The Witch of the Cross", Rosaleen Norton was a self proclaimed witch and artist who lived in the bohemian Kings Cross after World War Two and rose to infamy in the 1950s.

Around the time that Vali made her appearance in the Bookcave, Kenneth Anger arrived in Australia, best known for an exposé of scandal and sorrow in Hollywood aristocracy, *Hollywood Babylon* (1959). He declared he was going to make a film starring Judy Davis on the life of Rosaleen Norton, whom he claimed was the inspiration for the Rolling Stones' song, *Sympathy for the Devil*. This song also appears in Kit's dream of her dead father and Dream Assassin in *Disco Apocalypse*.

Please allow me to introduce myself
I'm a man of wealth and taste
Been around for long long year

Stole many a man's soul and faith.

Pleased to meet you, won't you guess my name? (Pizaro, 2006:19)

This aroused much attention amongst the St Kilda locals, who all declared they knew Rosaleen Norton, knew about her, or communicated with her in the spirit world.

Roslaeen Norton worked odd jobs after she finished art school, sometimes as a model for artists, one of whom was Norman Lindsay, whose work her own was often compared to. He called her "a grubby little girl with great skill who will not discipline herself" (Takver, 1999).

Under the yoke of parochial 1950s conformity, and rebelling against the stout Protestantism of her parents, Rosaleen had been experimenting with self hypnosis and automatic drawing. Armed with books written by Madame Blavatsky the famous Theosophist and Dion Fortune of the Golden Dawn, Rosaleen devised rituals much like an antipodean Aleister Crowley. Using hashish to establish a spirit flight in a similar way to the adherents of LSD and Yage, Rosaleen explored alternate dimensions and would depict the mythic creatures and demonic entities in her paintings. Just like Crowley, Rosaleen had a particular fondness for the god Pan, with whom she caroused on these hashish induced journeys to a nether world, and in her rituals with other occultists. I have heard it said (by those who knew her, knew of her or communicated with her in the spirit world) that Rosaleen fell in love with Pan.

Rosaleen's flamboyant compositions loaded with swirling patterns, phallic imagery, and grotesque figures often copulating, were reminiscent of the depictions in Crowley's tarot designed by Frieda Harris, Rosaleen's paintings were vivid and powerful and in tune with the melody of Crowley's dark

psyche. Her murals disgraced the walls of Kings Cross cafes, Appolyon and Kashmir, and visitors to the Cross made a beeline to these cafés to get a glimpse of the bohemian Rosaleen and her occult art.

It's not surprising then, that in 1949 at her first major exhibition at Melbourne University's Rowden-White Gallery, four of Rosaleen's artworks were found obscene and seized by the police. Rosaleen was sent to trial where the charges were eventually dropped. Rosaleen made the comment, "This figs leaf morality expresses a very unhealthy attitude" (Takver, 1999).

These women: Patti Smith, Vali Myers, Rosaleen Norton, Sylvia Plath, Nico, Kathy Acker, and in their fictional context, the characters of Suzy G and Kit – my coven – exist in a liminal time, a time outside of time.

Rosaleen Norton chose to stay in Sydney in the 1950s and 60s when everyone else was flocking to get out of the colony and live in the United Kingdom. She became a larger than life fixture in a small bohemian pond in King's Cross. People sought her out eventually as an eclectic example of a pagan. Even the British-born conductor of the Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Sir Eugene Goosens, befriended Rosaleen and participated in her occult rituals. A fictionalized account of the union between him and Rosaleen was depicted in Inez Baranay's novel *Pagan* (1990).

In his robe he approaches the altar, where she is lighting many thick sticks of incense; the air in that closed room is soon laden with overpoweringly sweet, oriental scents: musk and ambergris and aphrodisiac. An old gramophone has been wound up and its needle placed on a record of Tibetan chanting. On the altar, alongside the athame and the white handled knife, the pentacle, the salt and the candles in their holders, some marijuana cigarettes have been placed beside a large goblet of wine:

substances to facilitate the initiate's entry into the illusion, substances to enhance the movement to the realms of the Other. (Baranay, 1990: 120)

In March 1957 Sir Goosens was caught at Mascot Airport trying to smuggle banned books, ritual masks and "1,166 pornographic photographs" into the country. Sir Eugene was given a hefty fine and returned to England in ignominy (Takver, 1999). Infamy and a cult-like admiration still surround Rosaleen. She was an urban pagan who invited foreign visitors in her space and led rituals in her house.

Vali alternately did depart at first opportunity and gained fame and adherents overseas. She chose to live in the country and surround herself with nature. She returned to Australia in later life and eventually died in Melbourne.

Both Patti Smith and Sylvia Plath withdrew from public life and lived in seclusion to raise children, writing around the demands of the family.

Nico encapsulated the citizen of the world demeanour that Anne Rice's vampires typify – sophisticated, cosmopolitan and free to travel. She wasn't encumbered by motherhood and carted her son, Ari around or left him for long periods in the custody of his grandparents.¹²

Kathy Acker was originally associated with the New York punk scene, producing controversial work and taking it on the road. Initially a performance artist, Acker later produced literature published by American underground publishers such as Grove which confounded expectations of what fiction should be. Far from being reclusive or remaining in one place,

¹² Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* are discussed in Chapter Six.

Acker said that travelling is just like having an endless orgasm – you go and go and go.

By contrast, the two characters in the novel who complete the coven, Kit and Suzy G both took to the road. Kit ultimately stayed behind while Suzy departed.

If there is a tie that binds the women in this coven it would need to stretch across countries, beyond death and into liminal worlds.

Graphic Four



Vali Myer's self-portrait, "Dido", 1973-4.

CHAPTER SIX

THE WORLD IS A VAMPIRE: WRITING IN THE FACE OF THE ABYSS.

The World is a Vampire, sent to drain

Secret destroyers hold you up to the flames (The Smashing Pumpkins, 1995).

In my novel, *Disco Apocalypse*, I take the reader on a descent into the hardware of a desolate underworld. A freakish geometry rules this place. It has been said that dark fiction such as *Disco Apocalypse* ushers in what could be called an “aesthetic of the unwelcome” (Cavallaro, 2002:1).

The unreal happens as part of reality, it fractures the fragility of the usual systems of making sense of the world. The language in the novel – “wicked”, “gross”, “bizarre”, “scary” – all derive from the discourse of horror.

While lurking in the world of the novel I get to encounter the malevolent beings that people this abyss. We chat a little, and before long, they unfurl the software of the dark psyche – neurotic, psychotic and paranoid. You get your choice – the scum at the top or the dregs at the bottom. Overall, “the crucial tone is of desensitized acquiescence in the horror of obsession and prevalent insanity” (Savoy, 1999: 3).

But is this really a dark fantasy or dream journey? Or is it a plot in dark fiction? Or is this simply my daily existence, to wake up and face the dark. After all, it is always dark. Light only hides the darkness.

When I was a teenager, I wanted to get the hell out, go off the beaten track, and become the Australian version of Jack Kerouac, the 1950’s beat writer

who depicted his exploits in jazz clubs and bars across the US in his novel, *On the Road* (1957). Trouble was, I took a look around literature and saw that most women who venture off by themselves on the road into the dark unknown don't become a hero, they become a statistic. The world is a vampire.

30 000 Australians are reported missing every year. In a world so well traversed, sign-posted and travel-agented as contemporary Earth, where does a person get lost? Do they go underground? Do they change their identity, or do they leave home one day and never come back?

The most famous missing person's case in Australian history is one that has suspended disbelief so alluringly that it is still argued today that it was based on fact – *The Picnic at Hanging Rock* – written in 1967 by Australian Joan Lindsay.

Directed by Peter Weir in 1975, *Picnic at Hanging Rock* has been voted number one in the top ten best Australian films of all time. The film opens with the following words spoken by the central character, Miranda, "What we see and what we seem is but a dream – a dream within a dream", a line from the poem by Edgar Allen Poe entitled *A Dream Within a Dream*. *Picnic at Hanging Rock* triggered an international renaissance for Australian cinema. The minimalist plot involves a party of teenage schoolgirls from a Victorian boarding school in Woodend. They celebrate St Valentine's Day in 1900 by having a picnic at the nearby Hanging Rock, a dormant volcanic outcrop, a symbol of unadulterated life force. In the drowsy afternoon under a hypnotic thrall, three girls including Miranda and their teacher make a somnambulistic ascent and disappear into the colossal silence of the rock.

One of them is found a few days later but can remember almost nothing. The others never return. The rock has disrupted the social cohesion of the school's prim Victorian order with its seduction and defilement of the missing girls. The movie encapsulates the chasm between the European settlers and the mysteries of their ancient new home. The rock teems with life – insects, birds, colour, so much so that it seems to operate on a different timescale – it absorbs all other life. The vampire at Hanging Rock.

"We worked very hard," the director Peter Weir told an interviewer for *Sight & Sound*, "at creating an hallucinatory, mesmeric rhythm, so that you lost awareness of facts, you stopped adding things up, and got into this enclosed atmosphere. I did everything in my power to hypnotize the audience away from the possibility of solutions" (Ebert, 1998).

Enigmatic, the film confounds, setting up a puzzle it refuses to solve. At the close of the film it is announced that to this day there has been no trace of the missing schoolgirls.

The total absence in both the novel and film *Picnic at Hanging Rock* of what has come to be termed, "closure" in therapeutically inclined contemporary culture further expands the enigma and eccentricity of this story. Both the novel and the film belong to a time outside of time, as they mark particular monumental eras in Australian history. The novel was written in a time of social flux in the summer of love in 1967, and Lindsay deliberately evoked a romanticism and foreboding of the past and of nature. I question whether this story of insoluble mystery could be produced today where solutions to almost everything are a click away. Raymond Chandler described the ideal mystery as "one you would read even if the end was missing" (*Bookmice*, 2006).

I wondered what would happen if I tried to produce a similar mystery story where things are left hanging. I found that some readers concocted their own solution to the novel *Disco Apocalypse* much like viewers do to the movie *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975). One reader thought Suzy G was in fact a component of the character of Kit, and only existed in Kit's fictional narrative, operating like a story within a story. Another thought Suzy G was Kit's double, much like a doppelganger. Yet another concluded that Suzy G had disappeared simply because all things vanish, a sentiment that echoed the thoughts of the A-Bomb survivor in Hiroshima. The puzzle as to where Suzy G had gone was incomplete, like our knowledge of any experience is incomplete, and we create a dream to complete the mystery.

Where do people go when they're missing?

If I were to go missing, where would I find myself? Would I?

Early in the film as they exchange St Valentine's Day cards, Miranda says to her closest friend an orphan, "You will have to find someone else to love apart from me Sarah. I won't be here much longer."

In this quest to disappear the character of Miranda disrupts the social cohesion keeping everyone safe at home. She somehow has fled under the exertion of a hypnotic thrall. But those who journey to the dark side rarely return whole. They are eventually found, ravaged and drained of blood, the defiled victim of a malevolent world. Relocated in allegiance with the vampire and the demon, symbols of the life force energy locked up in the dark hidden areas of the self.

The life force that those of us who stick to the well lit path draw down to transcend however fleetingly the mundane world.

When a person goes missing, never to be found, their life stops. They walk a grey path, their life may be over, but they never die. They have been driven towards what Freud would call, a state of inorganicism, or a “death wish”.

The “death wish” is not a simple drive to cease to be but the most radical form of the pleasure principle, a longing for Nirvana, where all tensions are reduced (Jackson, 1981:73).

Missing persons are the undead. In a way, they are immortal. The essence of them has been preserved, frozen in time. Although no longer in sight, no longer accessible, they are not destroyed. They have been absorbed into a dark nether world, to join the enigmatic liminal population of the witch, the alien and the vampire.

We recognize vampires as supernatural beings who suck the blood of the living in order to prolong their existence indefinitely. The vampire image is a complex metaphor of seduction and submission to a higher mystery and power. They are monsters, making the sacred profane, confusing gender roles and procreating by penetrating their own children, yet they are a bridge to another realm because they once were human and still look human. They represent the threat of the continuum: their kinship to us allows them to invade our defined worlds and intoxicate us with the possibility of becoming like them. We are attracted as much as repulsed. Vampires evoke a response between disbelief and a suspension of disbelief. Vampires magnify human nature. Vampirism in the movie *The Lost Boys* (1987) is no alternative to human society, but an illusion as fragile as a drug trip. “Stripped of its hunger, its aerial perspective, its immortal longing, vampirism becomes more perishable than humanity” (Auerbach, 1995: 166).

The character Louis in *The Vampire Chronicles* written by Anne Rice says, “Maybe I was not the exotic outcast I imagined, but merely the dim magnification of every human soul” (Rice, 1988: 451). The character Lestat says, “To be human, that’s what most of us long for” (Rice, 1985: 494).

Vampires are neither holy nor demonic they are merely vampires, killing over and over again to sustain their existence. Anne Rice depicts the vampire as an outsider who possesses human emotions and the need for answers and acceptance. The questions raised in *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-2003) about immortality are disguised questions about mortal life. “Even when we die we probably don’t find out the answer as to why we were ever alive. We’ll never know and all this meaninglessness will just go on and on” (Rice, 1985: 55). Humans strive to transcend limitations through choice. Life is suffering pain and horror but you know you’re alive. The vampire is trapped in its situation and is closer to an animated corpse.

I’ve often chosen to entertain the bad idea of becoming a missing person – to take my own picnic up at Hanging Rock. I’ve thought that if I were to go missing I would venture into an unfamiliar world more exciting than the one I was confined to, one without the continual drain of obligation and necessity, one that was somehow more mine. I would become the global exotic – a kind of internationalized cosmopolitan tourist, mobile (and leisured) character like one of Anne Rice’s vampires (Gelder, 1994: 123). I would take the role of the hero on my own quest in search of eternal life. To be swallowed up by the universe who then keeps its silence.

Women writers of dark narratives not only depict psyches in the grip of obsession and delusion, they also dramatize the effects of disruptive

occurrences whereby people are forced to face their own darkness or shadow (Cavallaro, 2002 :54).

In psychoanalytical terms, darkness is related to the realm of the shadow: the receptacle of all things dreaded and disowned by consciousness. The Shadow is the force of illusion and oppression. We all have a Shadow, and we all try to deny it. However, the more intensely the Shadow is repressed, the more powerful it becomes, expressing itself in monstrous forms that terrify us, like vampires. According to psychoanalyst Carl Jung, one must get in touch with the Shadow in order to get in touch with the self. Our vampires are ourselves. He referred to this initial stage where we face our own shadow as “the First Act of Courage” (Pettifor, 1995).

Separateness is only an affect of the temporal forms of sensibility of time and space. True reality is to be in unity with all life. The real hero, or slayer, is one who has made the journey to the breakthrough of a metaphysical realization – You and the shadow are one. Step right up and shake its hand. In *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) right before they disappear forever, Miranda says to her school friends, “Everything starts and ends at exactly the right time and place.”

It’s time to turn off the lights and disappear into the dark.

Graphic Five



1931 Bela Lugosi. Still from *Dracula*.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MAGIC, RITUAL AND BODY STYLE: CONTEMPORARY FICTION FOR THE BACK PACK

Fiction writing is magic. You're working in the area of transformation. You're not representing reality, you're making reality. It works the same way as magic does (Acker, 1999).

Magic is defined as the knowledge that comes from the ability to shift consciousness at will into an extraordinary, visionary state of awareness. Aleister Crowley, the infamous magician who was a member of Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an occult society that started in 1888 in London, referred to Magick as "the Science and Art of causing change to occur in conformity with Will" (Roundtree, 2004: 173). This shift of consciousness or altered state is best achieved through ritual.

Ritual can be described as "a patterned movement of energy to accomplish a purpose" (Salomonsen, 2002 :157). In this chapter I propose that storytelling is a ritual, and that the production of both the fiction and the exegesis are forms of ritualization.

The exegesis acts as a framing device (Krauth, 2002: 3-8) which links the world created in the fiction and the world of the reader. The novel and exegesis, *Disco Apocalypse*, demand the active engagement of the reader, much like cult phenomena where the cult audience is aware, engaged, participating. The exegetical activity becomes the re-enactment of a dynamic, organic ritual addressing the world of the imagination and channeling it, giving it form and

place. The exegesis is also a site where the world of the fiction – the inner world – and the world of academic discourse can be linked.

Academic study of “ritual” is an expanding interdisciplinary field far beyond the potential and confines of this exegesis. A brief précis of the notions of ritual that I plan to harness in this chapter are as follows.

Salomonsen in her chapter, “Elements of Magic: Learning to Ritualize” in her book, *Enchanted Feminism*, (2002) discusses the arguments of Catherine Bell and Ronald Grimes in their attempts to differentiate between ritual “what” and ritualization “how”. Ritual refers to a series of special practices, ritualizing is the art of cultivating these particular practices, and ritualization means a social strategy or activity “that is not culturally framed as ritual but which someone often an observer, interprets as if it were potential ritual” (Grimes, 1990: 9-10).

Storytelling is a ritual – it is a practice. Fiction writing is ritualizing, as it could be considered the art of cultivating the ritual of storytelling. The production of this exegesis in my case is also ritualization, as I have attempted to expose the practice of fiction writing and create a link between the inner world of the fiction and the world of the reader, a strategy not culturally framed as ritual, but which can be interpreted as ritual.

I would then expand upon this to say that the act of getting a tattoo or piercing is to the recipient, a ritual, undergoing a visionquest is also a ritual, a tarot reading is a ritual, and having the body art or marking on the skin is of itself a story, and leads to further occasions of storytelling. Therefore the overall process is ritualization, interpreted as ritual.

The actions of the devout Japanese at the temple depicted in the novel, *Disco Apocalypse*, exemplify the “what” of ritual; ritual as a thing.

I walk out at the side of the temple into the gaze of Binzuru who, according to the sign beneath his statue, was an occult master and Buddhist who angered the Buddha by flying in the sky to the delight of his audience. Custom has it that if one touches Binzuru’s body part and then their corresponding body part it will be healed. Elderly Japanese approach Binzuru with reverence, circling the statue, touching his various body parts and then their own. I put my left fingertips on Binzuru’s chest and then my right over my own heart. As I stand before Binzuru my rapid heart beat slows, my breathing calms. (Pizaro, 2006:98)

As indicated by the reverential attitude of the elderly Japanese to Binzuru, rituals serve to perform the function of “playback”, where the centrally held beliefs and values of a culture are systematically replayed, over time, to each member of the culture, providing a structure of meaning and tools for ongoing meaning making (Ezzy, 2003: 77).

In Kit’s quest to invoke Suzy G, she performs a ritual in the crop circle after she meets with Lucas Styx using the structure of ritual and the hallucinatory substance of Snakeblood as an aid to a hypnotic liminal trance state. This type of ritual depicted in the context of fiction writing represents the idea of ritual as “how”; ritual as a quality.

In the north of the circle I place a milky white quartz crystal Ted used with his Native American tribe during the early seventies. In the east I press an amber ring Suzy gave me into the grass to represent the gold of the eagle. In the south the direction that represents midsummer I put a red g-string of Suzy’s. Finally in the west the direction of obstacles I place the black feather of an Australian raven.

I stand in the midpoint of the circle and turn clockwise and say aloud,

“Spirits of the West, East, South and North,
Goanna below, Eagle above,
Croc in the water and Owl in the dark,
Dig out Suzy G and bring her forth
from where she hides before Night departs.”

I feel around in the bag and take out a flat aluminium camping dish and a knife to hack off a tuft of grass. I set the grass in the dish alight and pick up the Hessian sack Lucas gave me. I take out the tubular jar and a hip flask. I swig the snake venom Lucas brewed and swallow sharply. (Pizaro, 2006: 189)

In Kit’s ritual she introduces the elements of Air, Earth, Water and Fire as substance, as real nature, and as metaphors. “Air” is breath, breathing and oxygen, and “Air” symbolises the direction of the east, and in magickal practice the east is a metaphor for beginnings. Kit places a ring Suzy gave her which is the colour of gold, the colour representing both the east and a new beginning for Suzy. In the scene that follows Kit enters a trance state where she makes contact with Suzy and tries to bring Suzy back with her.

Finola Moorhead describes her use of symbols in the production of her novel, *Remember the Tarantella*, “I informed myself through the Tarot and also through colour and through number, all those arcane kinds of disciplines” (Moorhead, 1993: 215). This method of informing by Moorhead could be perceived as a ritual practice, or ritualization, harnessed in the development of her novel. Moorhead’s discussion of symbols parallels my work with symbols in the creation of my novel. Examples of symbols in the text are the crop circle with concentric lines, or the Celtic Cross tarot spread Eva deals for Kit.

This fluid and selective method envelops the concept of ritualization.

Therefore, “Any action can be ritualized, though not every action is a rite” (Grimes, 1990: 9-13).

The fiction presented in this chapter is designed to explore extraordinary individual methods of transcending an impenetrable world order.

Contemporary subcultures such as Punk, Goth, Techno-pagan and Wicca question the legitimacy of forms of authoritarian coercion. Through either first- person experience or through technology such as the internet they examine magick and occult practices, and perform rituals such as trance, tarot and tattooing to search for precursors and connect to or invent usable tradition and history.

Ritual provides the means by which collective and individual identity is both constructed and viewable. One of the research strands I have undertaken throughout the research and writing process of the PhD explores the concept of “Usable Past” which recalls fragments of history and re-contextualizes these historical moments in contemporary culture. In Western cultures Usable Past has a tendency toward appropriation not only of Western pasts, but of the pasts of other cultures.

Flying in the face of postmodern culture’s historic amnesia there co-exists an impulse to create precursors rather than cancel them. This involves an historical awareness of cultural icons and traditions. Punk, techno pagan and other contemporary subcultures perform rituals such as tattooing, blood letting and body art or what Lois Zamora would call “usable traditions” (Zamora,1997:1), to express the inevitable collision between a low tech past and a high tech future.

According to Zamora, “a search for origins may be ironic and at the same time authentic” (Zamora, 1989:6). The stuff of history becomes a source for contemporary ransacking. “Usable” implies the active engagement of users,

similar to cult phenomena where the cult audience is aware, engaged, participating. What is deemed usable is valuable; what is valuable is dependent upon specific personal needs and desires. In contemporary culture and media, reality is forever cannibalized, rendering the real in simulated forms that are better realized.

A COSMIC GRAB-BAG FOR A GENERATION ON THE RUN

The present contains nothing more than the past, and what is found in the effect was already in the cause (Bergson, 1907).

Between 1760-1770 a Jesuit, Sanchez Labrodor lived with the Caduveo tribe of the Amazon. Among other things, Labrodor was shocked by the amount of time the Indians spent each day painting intricate designs on their faces. He believed hunting, gathering and growing crops to be a better use of time than painting bodies which was interfering with god's handiwork. The Indians retort?

"Don't be stupid, if we didn't decorate ourselves then we would just be like the beasts of the jungle" (Polhemus, 1988: 29).

For the Caduveo, the action of decorating and adorning the body is seen as separating humans from animals. The ritual of scarring, tattooing, and decorating the body defines humanity. The reasoning behind this practice is explained in the following quote.

The first and essential fact of body decoration is that it distinguishes man [sic] as a social being, distinct from animals of the forest and other humans outside his own group – for he regards both as equally alien. Through decorating his body in

some permanent form the individual expressly conveys his allegiance to his own group, making a precise distinction between those in society and those beyond its confines: it is the crucial factor in his relations with the rest of the world, the distinction between the beauty and the beast (Ebin, 1979: 23)

Human beings are self adorned animals. Because the Caduveo use body adornment to distinguish the members of one group from members of another, distinctions must be visible and immediately recognizable. This resulted in a dual motive – the individual gained a sense of camaraderie and solidarity through his or her adornment and society gained greater cohesiveness through enforced conformity of appearance. If adornment activities use valuable time and resources and involve pain and discomfort, it is simply because there is no easier alternative method of accomplishing the same thing.

The majority of individuals with body art may cover their tattoos and piercings in their day to day lives. However, they retain the knowledge of the marking on their skin under their clothes and this gives them the distinction of being adorned. Their tattoo or piercing is their mark or story. It is in the act of tattooing or piercing that a ritual occurs and in the telling of the story of the marking or tattoo that is the process of ritualization. The following are personal comments made by body artists which reflect this dual process.¹³

“I got my first tattoo, a yin and yang symbol after I attended my first gay mardi gras in Sydney.” (Barnes, Bryan 2004)

¹³ This impromptu story telling about their body art by these body artists took place in an informal setting and was not an interview.

“I had my first tattoo drawn for my daughter’s name, Jessie Rose, her initial “J” wrapped around a rose, when she was born.” (Thorogood, Deb 2005)

“I pierced my nose when a friend said she was going to make a film with urban warriors similar to *The Crow*. I wanted to be in that film.” (Tyler, Kaz 2004)

In *Disco Apocalypse* Suzy tattoos a woman with the emblem of her football team. The ritual of being marked as a member of the Collingwood fan club precipitates the ritualization of story telling, when the fan recounts the process of being tattooed and the reasoning that motivated it.

Lorraine says with a broad Australian accent, “the black outline hurt so much I’m going to just leave it that way. I never felt anything like it – and I have had three children.” Lorraine lifts her neatly ironed pastel shirt to reveal a tattoo of a magpie outlined in black.

“Collingwood football club – I have been following them all my life” (Pizaro, 2006:74)

Experiences occurring within ritual spill over into daily lives and relationships with others including family, friends and acquaintances.

In contemporary culture, the process or product of body art can be a simulation, and occur on the page, be viewed on the screen, or even heard through music or talk radio. The ritual of storytelling occurs in tandem with the feature of body art. Paying homage to the Caduveo tribe’s philosophy of bodies made not born.

Contemporary literature indicates an engagement with the occurrence of ritual and process of ritualization in the actions and intentions of the characters.

In *Fight Club* (1996) written by Chuck Palahniuk a select men's club with secret codes and gestures amass secretly for the sole purpose of beating each other up. In the course of the novel the adherents commence the manufacture of toiletries and infiltrate the service industries to form their own micro-economy.

What happens at fight club doesn't happen in words. Last week, I tapped a guy and he and I got on the list for a fight. This guy must've had a bad week, got both my arms behind my head in a full nelson and rammed my face into the concrete floor until my teeth bit open the inside of my cheek and my eye was swollen shut and was bleeding, and after I said, stop, I could look down and there was a print of half my face in blood on the floor.

You aren't alive anywhere like you're alive at fight club.

There's grunting and noise at fight club like at the gym, but fight club isn't about looking good. There's hysterical shouting in tongues like at church, and when you wake up Sunday afternoon you feel saved. (Palahniuk, 1996: 50)

In the novel, *Pattern Recognition* (2003) by William Gibson, an underground sub-culture follows the propagation of film footage posted on an internet site. Both the film footage and its adherents have an occult significance in that the meaning of the film footage is unknown – it is random and not annotated – and there is secrecy among the cohort that follows its development.

Footage heads seem to propagate primarily by word of mouth, or, as with Cayce, by virtue of random exposure, either to a fragment of video or to a single still frame.

“What is that?” she’d asked. A sideways look from a girl with hooded eyes, a sharp and avian nose, round steel labret stud gleaming from beneath her lower lip. “Footage,” this one had said, and for Cayce it had started there. She’d left with the URL for a site that offered all of the footage accumulated to that point. (Gibson, 2003: 53)

In the following excerpt the idea of Usable Past is depicted. An Aztec ritual practice that existed hundreds of years ago is reignited in the contemporary world of the fiction.

I feel the nausea catch my throat as the Yage infusion swashes my insides. My temples throb, heart speeds up. I crawl forward on my hands and knees, locked in the pose of an animal. I hear voices – drummers chanting a deep mantra, their drumming a constant throb in the stone walls of the cave. They sit; legs wrapped around Bataan drums, wearing orange flags around their necks and hips. As I sit, thin and mud covered, my hands clap with the tempo of their drums. I join their chant, invoking the spirits of this underground cavern. (Pizaro, 2000: 91)

The previous examples which portray ritualizing and body style as a means of selection; as an elite, desirable practice present a contrast to the attitude taken towards a tattooed man as an outsider to the civilized heroine in Angela Carter’s fantasy novel, *Heroes and Villains* (1965).

He wore the figure of a man on the right side, a woman on the left and, tattooed the length of his spine, a tree with a snake curled round and round the trunk. This elaborate design was executed in blue, red, black and green. The woman offered the man a red apple and more red apples grew among green leaves at the top of the tree, spreading across his shoulders, and the roots the tree twisted and ended at the top of his buttocks. The figures were both stiff and lifelike; Eve wore a perfidious smile. The lines of colour were etched with obsessive precision on the

shining, close-pored skin which rose and fell with Jewel's breathing, so it seemed the snake's forked tongue darted in and out and the leaves on the tree moved in a small wind, an effect the designer must have foreseen and allowed for. (Carter, 1969:85)

The harnessing of tribal practices such as visionquest by Westerners has been controversial and criticism of these practitioners by interdisciplinary scholars is common, perceiving it to be inauthentic, narcissistic and superficial, and has been described as an insincere way of making life in the social margins seem more attractive by appropriating non-Western cultural rites.

"Appropriation is the mechanism by which one culture or community takes from another without permission," (Hawthorne, 2002 : 381). This is recognized by both the sub-cultural groups – body artists/pagans/punks – and theorists who state that the practitioners themselves "are often unconcerned with authenticity, and instead see themselves as capable of modifying traditional practices to fit their own needs, and operates as a political statement, as an expression of cultural dissent" (Pitts, 2003: 128). Their behaviour and intention is the art of filling the cosmic grab-bag.

It is this quest to challenge boundaries of identity rather than any critical thinking about issues of ecology, spirituality or nostalgia that motivates Suzy G. Suzy G appropriates not only the actual vine from the protected environment, but also the indigenous practice venerating it. She then commodifies the item as a product, Caapi, and promotes it – Don't worry b Caapi – throughout a subculture to assure financial reimbursement and cult status. Kit is skeptical of the entire process from the initial undertaking of the Yage trip, (which has been popularized by Brazilians for the tourist dollar),

and the plucking of the vine from the Pantanal right through to its production as a party drug.

"I don't know about this," I say to Suzy as I watch the Japanese punk boy, Howie, wrap the banisteriosis Caapi vine in calico. "I mean, is this considered smuggling?"

"We bought it from a local, how can that be smuggling, Kit?" Suzy shakes her head and rolls her eyes in tandem. "I paid for it fair and square. It's a souvenir."

"Kind of like a diamond from South Africa. Or an emerald from Columbia. Isn't stuff in the rainforest protected?"

Suzy sighs slightly, tightens the pull on her backpack and begins slowly.

"Kit, a local who has access to such substances, due to provisions of freedom of religious beliefs and practices, has offered us this sacramental vine for our own healing purposes."

"Why do you people always quote Crime Scene Investigation speeches care of CBS network productions? Suzy, you're an actor – sort of – you're not a psychologist, you have no religion, and you're not South American."

"Why do you have to be from where you were born, Kit? Who made up that rule? Why shouldn't I be Brazilian?"

(Pizaro,2006:90)

Suzy G assumes the historical awareness of a "usable tradition" (Zamora, 1997: 1) in her branding of Caapi. Suzy is not as maleficent in her random selection of tribal and occult practices as the characters, Mona and Helen, in *Lullaby* (2003), who along with the other main characters discover that a child's poem is in reality an ancient culling spell, lethal to any to whom it is recited. The four characters form a dysfunctional blended family and journey across the country to destroy any copies of the book that contain the deadly verse. Along the way Mona and Helen vie to translate an ancient grimoire containing spells that will give them the chance to gain ultimate power over the universe.

"I've got a flying spell here," she says. "And one of these might be a love spell." She flips back and forth, each page smelling like cabbage farts or ammonia piss. "The culling spell," she says, "it's this one here. Ancient Zulu." (Palahniuk, 2002: 213)

Suzy is a sophisticated consumer and promoter of body art and tribal practices as much as she is aware of brand allegiance.

"the little girl voice bubbles cutely into the room followed by Diesel jean and Guess T-shirt clad Suzy G" (Pizaro, 2006: 94).

Suzy's search for a "usable tradition" (Zamora, 1997:1) has not only been authentic while at the same time ironic, it is commercial in that she is profiting from Caapi's distribution, and also intrinsic, as her own immersion in a mind-enhancing substance, Snakeblood is essential to her day to day existence and has formed her character.

THE RITUAL OF STORYTELLING

Whoever can give his people better stories than the ones they live in is like the priest in whose hands common bread and wine become capable of feeding the very soul (Kenner, 1951).

In my presentation at the 2004 Queensland University Work-In-Progress Post graduate conference, *Bad Ideas*, I took the unusual step of reading from my PhD novel, *Disco Apocalypse*, as a performance, similar to the multiple voices in a theatrical play or a breakfast radio show. This decision could have been a very bad idea. Each member of my panel became a character and performed from a script based on the novel.

My initial motivation for attempting this approach was to find alternative methods of reading creative writing in a public space, so that everyone felt as if they were driving along in their car listening to the radio, or sitting in a cafe eavesdropping on the loudmouth group at the next table, and in taking that attitude, they could all drop the formality of polite, restrained listening and just become immersed in the story. My secondary intention was to confront the audience, and demand their active engagement, so that they were aware, engaged and participating in the fiction. As a result, the paper I presented, or more accurately, that was performed, involved each of my characters in the novel possessing their own human body and voice for the day. Many of the fictional characters who appeared were male, however, all of the performers, were female. This contradiction didn't seem to disturb the audience, as they related gender identity to the character not the performer. The voice of the character won out over the identity of the performer. Watching the characters in the novel come alive and possess the performers so that audience members made comments later to the female performers such as, "I loved hearing about the aliens collecting your semen!" motivated me to question where my voice was in either this performance or in the novel as a whole.

Was my voice as an author ever present in the novel? Was my voice an amalgam? Although the first person narrator, or "I" voice in the novel is accepted as my voice by readers, it is the narrator who readers refer to as "you" when they discuss the novel with me. "When you talked to the Atomic Bomb survivor in Hiroshima," or "When you watched the Sex pistols concert" are remarks often made to me as an author when in fact the narrator is the real person who did these things, not me. In contrast, the multiple voices of the other third person characters are presumed to be invented for the purposes of the drama, and bear no resemblance to me at all.

The script performed on the day of the symposium was based on a chapter in the novel where a light aircraft disappears without trace over Bass Strait. This recalled the incident involving Fred Valentich in 1973 whose plane, travelling from Melbourne to King Island, lost transmission with air traffic control, disappeared over Bass Strait and was never found. The characters present on the day of the symposium bringing a form of this event to life included a WW2 veteran, a chap abducted by an alien, a hypnotherapist, and a private eye, along with the narrator seeking her missing sister.

“It was the summer of 1945; I don’t remember the exact date, between May 23rd and May 27th, during a spate of bombings over Japanese mainland. It was one of several sightings in the Pacific theatre. We were flying through high cirrus clouds when I first saw a globe-shaped object, one metre across, of a colour resembling the sun, a light orange, occasionally changing to bluish, the outer edge appeared fuzzy.” (Pizaro, 2006: 139)

“It usually begins like this...a low, slow humming seeping into the bedroom, everywhere you look is saturated in light...there are no shadows. My body went limp but I floated as if in a swimming pool, lying on my back and being lifted on waves, and my skin was prickling. Lots of long corridors, then I land on an operating table, unable to move.” (Pizaro, 2006: 141)

In my mind, the voice of the narrator is no more mine than the voices of any of these third person characters in the novel. I am lost in the text and have become simply the storyteller. The ritual of storytelling has surpassed the individual voice. The famous definition of ritual is “a formal behaviour prescribed for occasions not given over to technological routine that have reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers,” (Deflem, 1991). The power that overcame us on the day of the symposium, and which is conjured any time we engage in a performance or open a book is the power of story.

Stories reveal a forgotten past. Stories can uncover hidden injustices and record the contradictory impulses that drive us. And stories link us to the wisdom of our collective pasts.
(Zable, 2002: 5)

Ritual, especially in the practice of storytelling, re-states through reminiscence the ongoing interconnectedness of the human condition, the recognizable states of fear, hate, pity and love so that humanity is not something that seems in the past or exists only in moments of crisis. In telling stories we become human, or it can be argued, storytelling is what makes us human.

In traditional cultures, the connectedness between spirit and earth, between self and divinity are clearly defined and interwoven into a cosmological understanding of all living things. When god is out playing golf, grass is something you smoke and trees get cut down to make room for more bricks, Ritual provides the means by which collective and individual identity is both constructed and viewable.

Ritual, especially in storytelling, re-states through reminiscence the sacredness of this ongoing interconnectedness in the face of a rapidly deteriorating rational world with no hope of divine intervention.

My intention in this chapter was to propose that the PhD novel and exegesis, *Disco Apocalypse* form a coordinated ritual event; a magical practice of ritual that ignites a journey into the psyche and carries it beyond the realm of fantasy to the world of the group. As previously stated, in contemporary culture, the ritual of storytelling can occur on the page, be viewed on the screen, or even heard through music or talk radio. In the process of

ritualization the world of fiction, of magic, is linked through the exegesis to the world of consensual reality.

Our inner world must collide with the actual world.

Graphic Six



Rosaleen Norton's painting, "Blackmagic".

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSION

HATRICKS: WHERE DID THE WHITE RABBIT GO?

Oh my ears and whiskers how late it's getting (Carroll, 1865)

Like Alice down the rabbit hole searching for the waist-coated white rabbit with pink eyes anxiously checking his fob watch lest he be late again for the Duchess, in the process of writing *Disco Apocalypse* I constructed characters who drank unusual potions from vials named Snakeblood, encountered a carnivalesque band of misfits loitering on the periphery of consensual reality and took trips into alternate worlds.

Now that the trip is over I question whether the rabbit has hopped from the hat into the hole in my cosmic backpack that all my stuff gets lost in and will never be seen again, or if he will magically reappear before my very eyes.

When I started to write the novel, I commenced on that metaphor so prominent in contemporary culture, a journey. Like with any destination, and according to the psychobabble, getting there was half the fun. Questions; political, intellectual, personal and spiritual have been raised all along about the mind space and the physical space I inhabit when I am out on the road of novel writing. At the end as at the beginning, I am a person inhabiting the space "betwixt and between", (Turner, 1969) the second stage in a ritual where the status of the self prior to the journey has been stripped away and is yet to be reconstructed before moving into the next phase.

As the writer of this exegesis I have reflected about the process of my novel writing in relation to ritual, body art, liminality, disappearance, archetypes and symbols. As I work back through the chapters in this exegesis, the final image in my mind is of the mystical ouroboros; a snake swallowing its own tail and forming a circle, a traditional symbol representing self-reflexivity and the act of something constantly reinventing itself.

Chapter Seven Magic, Ritual and Body Style – Contemporary Fiction for the Backpack

In this chapter I propose that storytelling is a ritual, and that the production of both the fiction and the exegesis are forms of ritualization. This chapter introduces the concept of “Usable Past” which recalls fragments of history and recontextualizes them .

This chapter also conceives of the activities of body artists (piercing, tattooing, occult practices) as a form of ritual. It contends that it is in the act of tattooing or piercing that a ritual occurs and in the telling of the story of the marking or tattoo that is the process of ritualization. Finally, Chapter Seven discusses the motivation behind my own attempt to test the notion that story telling is a ritual in its depiction of the performance of a section of *Disco Apocalypse* in a public forum. My attempt had the dual purpose of bringing creative writing to a public space, and to confront the audience and demand their active participation in the scenes that followed. A third result was my understanding that I myself as a reader of the text and as the writer of the text were called into question. Who was I and where was I in the novel?

Chapter Six – The World is Vampire puts forward the idea that while reading dark fiction one ushers in an “aesthetic of the unwelcome”

(Cavallaro, 2003: 1). The reader descends into the hardware of a desolate underworld, one that is scary, wicked and bizarre.

The world is a vampire – people can be swallowed up by the universe which then keeps its silence – and this forbidding image looms when women plan to take to the road by themselves. Women writers of dark narratives dramatize the effects of disruptive occurrences whereby people are forced to face their own darkness or shadow in novels such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1967) and *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976-2003). Our desire as an audience to seek an answer to the unanswerable causes us to dream up a solution when one is not already presented to us.

Chapter Five Bewitched also discussed archetypes, this time the archetype of the witch as a sorceress – an inventive visionary woman who works alone evoking energies to exert change. An archetypal female of tremendous power who is skilled in the craft of “shaping, bending and changing reality” (Adler, 1986: 11) and introduces the eight women selected as members of a self-constructed coven. The number eight as was mentioned in Chapter Two refers to magic, psychological transformation and ritual.

Chapter Four – Between the Worlds, considered archetypes as symbolic images that appear in myth, art and dreams. The major archetype at work in the novel was that of the snake, depicted not only as a historical representation through artwork, artefact and myth but Snake as a symbol that operated in my worldview as a writer writing *Disco Apocalypse*.

The serpentine structure of the novel that looped, leaned out and coiled back as a snake sitting on its tail paralleled my process in writing the novel. This process was encapsulated in the Chinese word – Dakou – to go like a snake as

I meandered and zigzagged through the fictoscape of the novel. The character of Suzy G was infused with the symbol of snake as energy represented by Kundalini – energy raised by consciousness and also by resurrection as the snake sheds its skin.

I said in **Chapter Three, Where Am I – Growing up in the Shadow of the Mushroom Cloud**, that in the artwork of Colin Self, atomic weaponry, the prospect of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) and the fear it induced became the frame of reference through which he visualized the world. I called into question my frame of reference while undertaking the PhD and found I was up-in-the-air, in limbo, with no leg to stand on. In the words of the Sex Pistols you could always find me Out to Lunch. There is a name for this stage in any journey, ritual or rite of passage – the liminal phase.

In **Chapter Two – Methodology**, while constructing the title *Disco Apocalypse*, I cited Simon Reynolds reflecting upon the cultural epoch between 1978 and 1982 which he contends rivalled the 1960s for social idealism and turmoil. He reminisces about the blend of anticipation and anxiety, a mania for the new and fear of uncertainty. I consider this dual blend brings both extremes – dread and glee – puts them together and juxtaposes them. The double blade of this perspective belongs to the realm of the liminal where all things are seen as in twilight.

Which brings me to back to **Chapter One – Introduction**, where I questioned what challenges and opportunities arose for an Australian fiction writer producing a text about people “betwixt and between” and the spaces they inhabit?

I was and still am, situated in that liminal area that Aldous Huxley refers to as the antipodes of the self-conscious mind where you can encounter all sorts of creatures at least as odd as kangaroos. The consciousness is carried to a far off region populated with strange psychological creatures leading an autonomous existence according to the law of their own being (Huxley, 1954: 62).

I am still falling through the hole like Alice and the white rabbit is nowhere in sight.

Graphic Seven



View from an airplane of the "Owl Man" in Nazca, Peru.

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FILM AND VIDEO

A Current Affair 1971+, Nine Network, Australia.

Adaptation 2002, Director Spike Jonze, Columbia Pictures, USA.

Amazing Race 2001+, Syndicated, CBS, USA.

A Touch of Evil 1958, Producer Albert Zugsmith, Universal, USA.

Big Brother 1999+, Creator John de Mol, Endemol, Netherlands.

Brigitte Jones' Diary 2001, Producer Time Bevan, Jonathon Cavendish, Eric
Fellner, Miramax, UK.

Cat People 1942, Producers Jacque Tourneur, Val Lewton, RKO Pictures Inc,
USA.

Citizen Kane 1941, Producer Orson Welles, RKO Radio
Pictures Inc. USA.

CSI 2000+, Created by Anthony E Zuiker, CBS, USA.

Desperate Housewives 2004+, Created by Marc Cherry, ABC, USA.

Dracula 1992, Producer Francis Ford Copolla, Columbia USA.

Goodfellas, 1990, Producer Martin Scorsese, Irwin Winkler, Warner Brothers,
USA.

Grey's Anatomy 2005+, Created by Shonda Rhimes ABC, USA.

Grumpy Old Women 2004+, Created by Judith Holder, BBC 2, UK.

Hiroshima, Mon Amour, 1959, Producer Sam Halfo, Anatole Dauman, Director
Alain Resnais, Pathe Films , France.

Interview with the Vampire 1994, Producer Neil Jordan, Warner Bros, USA.

Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth, 1988, Mystic Fire Video in Association
with Parabola Magazine, NY, USA.

La Dolce Vita 1960, Producer Giuseppe Amato, Director Federico Fellini,
Koch-Lorber Films Italy/France.

Love at First Bite, 1979, Producer Stan Dragoti, MGM, USA.

Nico Icon 2001, Producers Thomas Nerter, Annette Pisacane,
Director, Ofterring, ciak-filmproducktion for ZDF, Netherlands.

Oprah 1986+, Director Joseph C Terry, HBO Films, Syndication, USA.

Picnic at Hanging Rock 1975, Producers Patricia Lovell, Australian Film
Corporation, The South Australian Film Corporation, Greater Union
Film Producers, Australia.

Plan 9 from Outer Space 2000, Producer, Edward D Wood,Jr, Force Video,
Australia.

Queer as Folk 2000-2003, Producer, Cowlip, Tony Jones, Temple St, Showtime
Entertainment, Canada.

Race Around the World 1997+1998, Producer ABC, ABC, Australia.

Secret Life of Us 2001-05, Created by John Edwards and Amanda Higgs,
Channel 10 Network, Australia.

Sex and the City 1997-2004, Producer Darren Star, HBO, USA.

Sex, Lies and Videotape 1989, Producer John Hardy, Robert Newmyer,
Miramax, USA.

Shadow of a Doubt 1943, Producer Jack H Skirball, Universal Pictures, USA.

Sleeping Beauty, 1959, Produced by Walt Disney, Buena Vista Distribution,
USA.

Taxi Driver 1976, Producer Julia and Michael Phillips, Columbia, USA.

Trainspotting 1996, Producer Andrew Macdonald, Polygram, UK.

The Brady Bunch 1969-74, Producer Sherwood Schwartz, ABC, USA.

The Hunger 1983, Producer Richard Shepherd, MGM, USA.

The Lost Boys 1987, Producer Harvey Bernhard, Richard Doneer, Warner Bros,
USA.

The Matrix 1999, Producer Joel Silver, Warner Bros, USA.

The Partridge Family 1970-74, Producer Bernard Slade, Screen Gems

Production, ABC TV Network, USA.

The Third Man 1949, Producer Alexander Korda, David O Selznick, British Lion Films, UK.

The Weather Underground 2002, Producer/Director Sam Green, Bill Siegel, The Free History Project, USA.

The X-files 1993-2002, Producer Chris Carter, Fox, USA.

24 2001+, Created by Joel Surnow and Robert Cochrane, Fox, USA.

SONGS

Browne, Jackson 1980, 'Disco Apocalypse'.

Dylan, Bob 1965, 'Subterranean Homesick Blues'.

The Eagles 1973, (Henley, Leadon) 'Witchy Woman'.

McFerrin, Bobby 1988, 'Don't Worry, be Happy'.

Richard, Cliff 1976, 'Devil Woman'.

Smith, Patti 1973, *Horses*.

The Smiths 1984, 'Girlfriend in a Coma'.

The Smashing Pumpkins 1995, 'Bullet with Butterfly Wings'.

The Velvet Underground and Nico 1967, 'All Tomorrow's Parties'.

GRAPHICS

One – Trump number eight from the Rider-Waite tarot deck, personal collection, Pizaro.

Two – Picture of Shin’s tricycle and monument to Sadako, personal collection, Pizaro.

Three – Tattoos of snakes, personal collection, Pizaro.

Four – Vali Myers self-portrait, [online, internet] Available

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Five – Bela Lugosi, [online, internet] Available

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Six – Rosaleen Norton’s painting, [online,internet] Available

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Seven – The “Owl Man” on the Nazca plain, personal collection, Pizaro.