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# Dialogue not Diatribe: Methods for a practice of socio-humanitarian playwriting

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**Dialogue not Diatribe:**

**Methods for a practice of socio-humanitarian playwriting**

This thesis is presented for the degree of

**Master of Arts (Performing Arts)**

**Siobhan Dow-Hall**

Edith Cowan University

Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts

2017

## Abstract

This dissertation is the result of a practice-led research exploration of how creative writing practice may be expanded and developed with particular application to the writing of what I refer to as socio-humanitarian drama. I have developed this notion to promote discussion and consideration of specific issues of social justice and human rights within playwriting. While this practice-led research enlisted reflective practice in the task of developing and extending my own writing practice, this dissertation does also outline specific, practical modes of creative process, or exercises, that could be applied more broadly for others who may seek to develop their creative writing practice in the field of issue based theatre. The particular socio-humanitarian concern with which this research is engaged is those behaviours, attitudes and beliefs that perpetuate the acceptance, normalisation and enacting of sexual violence, termed in this research as 'rape culture'. The research identifies modes and methods of the works of a select community of socio-humanitarian theatre-makers, including the work of Caryl Churchill, *version 1.0*, Patricia Cornelius and Timberlake Wertenbaker, and experiments with the application of these modes and methods to the writing and development of dramatic writing that draws attention to issues relating to 'rape culture'. This research also considers what, if any, development of my own creative practice these writing experiments facilitated. The final chapter includes an unproduced play-text that attempts to pull these writing experiments together as a cohesive whole. This research discusses certain works from what I refer to as the community of socio-humanitarian dramatic practice, and identifies methods, constructs and concepts that were employed to develop this form of theatre without resulting in a performance text that was overly didactic. The concern being that issue based dramatic writing that is overly prescriptive with meaning may serve to disaffect and disengage audience reception of an issue, as well as result in a performance work that is artistically limited.

## Declaration

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- i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;*
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Date: 24/07/2017

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## Introduction

Theater can reach people in a different and deeper place than reading a news article or listening to a speech: there is an emotional aspect that for some people can be more long-lasting and motivating. (Corrie & Corrie, 2006 para. 3)

So write Craig and Cindy Corrie of the play *My Name is Rachel Corrie*, a verbatim play developed from the emails, letters and diaries of their daughter Rachel Corrie. Rachel belonged to the pro-Palestinian group International Solidarity Movement (ISM) and, while protesting the destruction of Palestinian homes in Rafah, a southern part of the Gaza Strip, was killed by an Israeli Defense Force armoured bulldozer. Rachel's death, and the conflict in which it occurred, have been the subject of myriad forms of discourse, from news articles to doctoral dissertations. For the Corrie's, however, the hope was that a theatrical consideration of the issues would offer a different perspective on their daughter, and the conflict in which she lost her life. Richard Taylor-Norton believes it is the interpersonal element afforded by having a live person/people before an audience to deliver content, rather than reading written material, that provides theatre with much of its impact:

First...a group of actors on stage...give a sense of context much more effectively than the written word alone. The experience of watching leads to an understanding that goes beyond the mere intake of information; it involves empathy for the victims. Second...witnessing...the exposure of injustice as a group of spectators places a corporate responsibility on the audience to acknowledge that injustice – and, potentially, to act to prevent similar future injustices. (as cited in Brown & Wake, 2010, pp. 20-21)

Katharine Viner, who developed the work from Corrie's writing along with director Alan Rickman, stated that the aim of the piece was to represent Corrie in a more holistic manner than she was being portrayed in media formats. They wanted to explore the very real, in many ways very normal, human woman behind the words, saying "we wanted to uncover the young woman behind the political symbol, beyond her death" (2005 para. 6). George Contini was critical of the work's theatrical merit, feeling that the dramatic action and production choices were underdeveloped (2007, p. 117), however he acknowledged the power that came from hearing Rachel's words aloud, from seeing

Rachel personified by actress Megan Dodds (2007, p. 116). Contini describes the experience of watching *My Name is Rachel Corrie* as “having made Rachel Corrie’s acquaintance through what amounts to a theatrical handshake” (2007, p. 116). This metaphor describes, in part, the immediate, live, human interaction between performer/production and audience. This notion of the handshake goes even further when theatre asks of its audience to consider issue based work. There are myriad elements to the development, performance and reception of a theatrical work, but at its most basic level theatre demands human interaction; it requires some number of people, in some form of space, engaging with one another in some form (whether that be as performer/spectator or otherwise), for some period of time. In one of the many statements they made about *My Name is Rachel Corrie* Rachel’s parents make repeated mention of how “theatre humanises” (Corrie & Corrie, 2005 para. 3), including how aspects of Rachel’s humanity and personality were “illuminated” even for them, by having her reactions imagined and represented by Megan Dodds (Corrie & Corrie, 2005 para. 4). Rachel Corrie’s writings were informative and emotive on their own, but theatrical representation provided another dimension; a human face, a human voice, and a very real reminder of the human life lost.

Using theatre as a vehicle for the promotion of social justice, human rights and political agenda is hardly a contemporary idea, “since Ancient Greece, theatre has acted as a forum in which political and moral issues can be debated and explored” (Derbyshire & Hodson, 2008, p. 198), and for centuries playwrights and companies have sought “to be a force for social change” by placing a theatrical focus on specific issues of social justice and human rights (Paget, 2010, p. 173). Taking this sentiment even further Harry Derbyshire and Loveday Hobson argue that “theatre offers a way of imaginatively exploring the possibilities offered by human rights discourse, making it potentially more successful than law at disrupting dominant discourses in human rights” (2008, p. 195). Throughout this research I use the term *socio-humanitarian* drama to refer to work of this nature and intent. The aim of this research was to develop new writing processes in order to develop my own creative writing practice, and to contribute to theatre scholarship on modes of practice in relation to socio-humanitarian drama. Ryan

Claycomb concurs that this type of theatre at its best can “effectively build a dialogue on stage to provoke further discussion with those in attendance” (2006, p. 703). Of course, attempting to qualify exactly when, why and how a person’s attitudes change or measuring what part, empirically, theatre may play in the evolution of socio-humanitarian discourse is, to my mind at least, impossible, and most certainly not the focus of this research. Instead this research is an attempt to further understand and develop my own creative writing process, as it pertains to the creation of theatre that specifically addresses issues of social justice and human rights.

The principle motivation for this research was that I had concerns about my own creative writing practice, namely that the politics of the work always seemed to overwhelm the artistry. Derbyshire and Hobson qualify that theatre’s role in human rights discourse is reliant on its unique characteristics, “theatrical treatment of human rights allows for the dissemination of information, the arousal of compassion, and the raising of consciousness in a way that is particular to that form” (2008, p. 191). Viner writes of being highly conscious that developing Rachel Corrie’s writings into theatrical form was a very different process to her usual journalistic work, writing “stagecraft is what makes theatre what it is” (Viner, 2005). Theatre offers opportunities for delivery, interpretation and perspective that journalism, and other more literal forms of discourse, do not. These are too numerous to list in full, but an aforementioned style is the effect of personifying content; the opportunity to physically, visually, vocally, and emotionally represent the information concerned. Live theatre even offers the opportunity to represent ‘nothing’, or to fail to represent, to enforce moments of stillness, silence, and darkness. By employing constructs such as allegory, audio-visual displays, and soundscapes, to name a very few, theatre can explore content in differing contexts, providing alternative perspectives. Theatre offers a wealth of opportunity to develop, mould and explore content in forms not open to more literal mediums, such as media representations.

As a writer in the early stages of my creative practice I noticed a very clear pattern in my work; I would be inspired, often through outrage, distress or frustration, to promote

an issue of social justice or humanitarian concern in dramatic writing, and that impassioned inspiration would facilitate the writing going forward. The sole drive for my creative practice was to explore this specific issue, and almost always to promote what I understood to be a very specific moral paradigm. This creative process, however, made for work overwhelmed by political agenda, saturated by the didactic, and left the work lacking psychological complexity in characterization, nuance in plot, and the sense of spectacle that makes live theatre such a compelling activity. Using a statement by David Hare in praise of fellow playwright Caryl Churchill – “She never flattens her art out of a need to advance what she urgently has to say” (as cited in Paget, 2010, p. 181) – this research explores particularities of the theatrical form in an attempt to draw my work away from being what Derek Paget calls “flat” theatre. It is a problem I have found consistently with my own work, that the desire to provide clarity about a certain issue overwhelms the ‘theatricality’ of the piece, resulting in “a two-dimensional presentation that habitually seeks breadth of content rather than depth of character psychology” (Paget, 2010, p. 181). This ‘two-dimensional’ work is questionable not only from an artistic perspective, but also with regards to the potency of its intent. This research seeks to develop my creative practice, a way for the artistry of theatre-making to be as equally fundamental to my practice as the thematic focus or political agenda.

Work that is overly prescriptive in meaning making runs the risk of disaffecting an audience, rather than promoting genuine consideration of a central theme, an issue that Ryan Claycomb and Clive Davis both found with *Guantanamo; honor bound to defend freedom* by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo (2004). *Guantanamo* – first performed in 2004, by London’s *The Tricycle Theatre* – is drawn from interviews and public testimony regarding the case of four British Muslim men who were detained in America’s infamous detention centre in Cuba on suspicion of terrorism. It questions their treatment, (there are accusations of torture), the unrestricted duration of their detention, and the legality of their incarceration in the first place. Claycomb, however, argues that the work failed to inspire discussion, that it instead “closed down the possibility for dialogue, instead of opening it up” (2006, p. 705). Davis agreed, stating that the ‘two dimensional’ theatricality, meant that “ambiguities are brushed aside,

which makes for ideological purity and dull theater” (2004, p. 2). Claycomb also took issue with the oppressively didactic nature of the work, “from the very first moments...*Guantanamo* produces diatribe rather than dialogue” (2006, p. 703). This is just one example of socio-humanitarian drama, and the opinion of just two critics, however it succinctly highlights primary concerns of this research, principally how to specifically address issues of social justice and human rights through a theatrical medium without producing work that limits opportunities for interpretation and meaning making by the audience.

For the purposes of this research I consider work that is “overly didactic” to be that which is so overt, and limited in its representation of a political, social or humanitarian agenda, as to disallow an audience the thematic ‘space’ to develop their own interpretation. The aim of the research and the writing is to allow audiences a space to develop their own meanings. The underlying socio-humanitarian agenda is certainly designed to shape – but not forcefully – the responses of its audience/reader, but through less dogmatic representations so as to allow greater engagement with individual paradigms of reception and meaning-making. The work created during this research is heavily embedded with my own values around socio-humanitarian concerns, and the aim of this research was never to detract from these values, to suggest that didacticism is fundamentally flawed or that politically based theatre needs to be opaque or ‘quiet’, but rather draw attention to these issues with nuance and complexity. I believe strongly that theatre has a valuable place in the promotion and progression of socio-humanitarian discourse in the greater community. With this in mind the research is concerned with developing my writing practice with depth and richness, to further its capacity to illuminate and encourage socio-humanitarian agendas.

I determined in this practice-led research to analyze playwrights and theatre makers who have particularly engaged me artistically or politically, and to emulate techniques and methods they employ as a framework for my own practice, to find a way to develop a relationship between technique and theme from the earliest stages of practice, and to develop a greater understanding of my own creative writing processes. I used the techniques and methods drawn from these chosen established playwrights and theatre

makers to examine the issues, behavior and language that foster my chosen polemic, that of 'Rape Culture'.

'Rape culture' can be described as one in which women are exposed to a "continuum of threatened violence that ranges from sexual remarks to sexual touching to rape itself. A 'rape culture' condones physical and emotional terrorism against women and presents it as the norm" (Harding, 2015, p. 2). It is a culture in which around one in six to one in four women in first world western countries, such as Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States, have been sexually assaulted (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 443; Mouzos & Makkai, 2004), but as little as 6%-20% of sexual assaults are reported (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004; Wolitzky-Taylor et al., 2011, p. 808). Cultural aspects that contribute to a prevalence of threatened or actual sexual violence differ in various countries, and for the purposes of this research I will be focusing on those elements that are prevalent in Australia, and western or euro-centric countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States and Canada.

In 'rape culture' issues include 'victim blaming', 'slut shaming', sexual objectification, oppressive gender and cultural stereotypes, false beliefs regarding sexual consent, and myriad other issues. Throughout this research I used the techniques and methods identified in the works of other playwrights to explore these topical issues. This resulted in a number of scenes that, although connected thematically, were not originally intended to be compiled into a single performance text. This research is deeply self-reflective, and throughout this thesis I consider the process by which I develop creative writing and I unpack the impulses, the habits and the obstacles or blocks, that drive the practice. Having acknowledged how a desire to illuminate a particular socio-humanitarian concern had previously both driven and overwhelmed my creative practice, the aim of this research was to explore how this impulse might be re-directed through various creative methods to develop work that offered a richer, more nuanced exploration of socio-humanitarian discourse.

The following dissertation begins with a discussion of my primary reason for undertaking this research, that is my previous issue based creative writing practice and the belief that it produced work that was overly dogmatic with representations of meaning, creatively 'flat' and lacking in theatrical or thematic dimension. The next chapter discusses primary aims and research questions. Following that is a discussion of the practice-led reflective methodology employed in this research. The final section prior to the creative analysis is discussion of the communities of practice from which I have drawn to inspire and inform this research, as well as the key concepts and issues explored throughout this dissertation.

*Chapter One: 'Discussive' elements in the dramatic play text* considers the work of Henrik Ibsen and David Hare with special regard to how Ibsen and Hare address complex social issues in a way that allows for layers of complex meaning to emerge. *Chapter Two: Collaborative Genesis* considers the impact on my creative practice when the original inspiration for, and development of, dramatic text is drawn from collaboration with performers. The first of these collaborations was inspired by the work of *The Civilians* (Kozinn, 2010, p. 189). I experimented with the particular technique of providing actors with an original, verbatim piece of 'testimony' to read over quickly. The information retained, and impressions drawn from these testimonies were distilled to what engaged the actor the most and from here we developed a series of improvisations. The second collaborative technique was drawn from the work of *Frantic Assembly* (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 69), and involved having a single physical trope represent the socio-humanitarian concept under examination. The idea behind this was to develop a movement vocabulary that captured the ideas and power relations we were grappling with.

*Chapter Three: Enemy Rhetoric* explores the construct of employing the rhetoric of an oppressive ideology, and using these as the basis for the play text, in order to render inherent injustices and paradoxes visible. *Chapter Four: Subversive Representation* examines the subversion of an expected representation of a particular set of issues, in performance, of either characters or narrative, through finding methods that seem

incongruous with their usual or expected representation. In a way chapters three and four explore the use of juxtaposition. *Chapter Five: Allegory* examines an allegorical construct and premise to consider an issue as its primary function, separate from social, political, cultural or personal contexts that might incite biases, prejudices and sympathies from an audience or reader. The application of this method involved firstly considering what the foundational function of a chosen socio-humanitarian concern is, for example the fundamental power imbalance in sexual assault, and then secondly considering how this foundational function might be represented through allegory. Chapter Six: *Voicelless – a play in bits* was initially an unplanned aspect of this dissertation, the original concept being to consider how the various writing processes used as the basis for creative experimentation affected creative writing development on an individual scene by scene basis. Toward the end of this research, however, the decision was made to consider the scenes developed over the course of this research as a cohesive performance text. This chapter examines how the scenes impact and inform one another when brought together. I offer some final conclusions I have made over the course of this research as to the effect this creative analysis and experimentation has had on the development and mastery of my creative practice in the writing of socio-humanitarian drama, and what it may offer to others in this field of theatre scholarship.

## Background

In 2010, with the support of Chris Bendall, former Artistic Director of the now dissolved Deckchair Theatre Company based in Fremantle, Western Australia, I applied for, and received, an emerging artist commission in writing for the stage from the Australia Council. Following a six-month research and writing process, the script went through a two week development and rehearsal process in 2011, with three actors, which culminated in a workshop performance. The work, entitled *Invisible*, explored the experiences of the City of Fremantle's homeless population. This was largely based on an existing relationship with 'The Freo Street Doctor', an organisation that provides free health care to those who find themselves unable to access more traditional health services. 'The Freo Street Doctor' involves a mobile unit operating from a number of

different locations, such as a homeless shelter, a Fremantle park and South Fremantle beach. The 'waiting room' consists of outdoor furniture placed outside the medical van where patients, without having to make an appointment, can wait for medical attention. It was in this 'waiting room' that I spent most of my time, talking to those patients who were willing to share their stories. Several patients even invited me to come into the van with them, to witness their medical consultation and gain insight into how homelessness had affected their health, or, more often than not, how ill health had contributed to their homelessness.

As a playwright my aim was to foster an understanding of the issues faced by Fremantle's homeless population, and give voice to a demographic who so often felt invisible at best, despised at worst. The focus on this issue was the inspiration for writing, but it was also my biggest obstacle. I found myself overwhelmed by a need to communicate my 'message', to make clear value judgments that the audience couldn't fail to understand, and in so doing I created a work that lacked complexity or nuance, and was too prescriptive and restrictive in message and intent. My characters needed psychological depth, or individuality, and instead were simply mouthpieces for moral judgements. For example, the following is a monologue from the central character, Chris, on the history of domestic violence that led him to run away from home.

*Script excerpt 1 Invisible - Scene Three*

*Lights up on Chris in Area Three.*

Chris: It was trickle. I don't mean that as some kind of metaphor. Literally a trickle. Of blood. It wasn't the first. It wasn't the worst. It wasn't the most terrifying, or the least deserved. The beating itself was average. Your everyday, run of the mill, paternal bashing. *I* was different. I didn't give a fuck. I stared at the trickle oozing from my nose, and I didn't give a fuck. I couldn't be bothered wiping it away. I couldn't be bothered getting a bag of frozen peas to stop the bruising. I couldn't be bothered crying, or getting angry, or

asking why. I didn't give a fuck. I just stared at the trickle. I'd thought about it before, packing a bag, walking off down the street, taking a left, a right, a whatever.....ending up.....anywhere but here. But it had seemed overwhelmingly impossible. Like the world outside was a giant black hole, and I would just fade into nothingness. Invisible."

David Mamet says character development is essentially "the way a character does something and, on the other hand, the actual *thing* that he does" (Mamet, 1986, p. 118), but in the character of Chris an audience is denied the opportunity to witness either. He talks of disassociating from his abuse, but this is not actually represented in his characterization. Instead of witnessing actions, or dialogue, driven by individual and complex psychology, subconscious objectives, fears or trauma, Chris explains the issues surrounding domestic violence, becoming little more than a narrator to his own life. The audience essentially have their understanding of Chris's character and journey dictated to them, instead of developing their own nuanced understanding from both the circumstances and Chris' response to them. This sense of limiting space for audience interpretation was not unique to Chris' character. The following is a scene involving all the main characters, however the stage is split into three separate performing spaces, and the characters are alone within these spaces. Clare is a young homeless girl who ran away following sexual abuse, Chris is a young homeless boy who has been squatting with Ella, an older transgendered homeless woman, and Sophie is a medical student who has been doing work experience with The Freo Street Doctor.

*Script excerpt 2 Invisible - Scene Twenty-Seven*

*Three distinct performance spaces are in this scene, the characters in each individual area are unaware of the others.*

*Sophie is talking to the audience in Area One.*

*Clare is in her own space.*

*Chris and Ella are in Ella's squat.*

Sophie: What's the measure of civilisation? Culture, infrastructure, economy, rates of obesity?

*Clare pulls out a razor blade and cuts at her arms as she begins to count.*

Clare: 1,2,3,4,5

Sophie: Your streets can be paved in gold, filled with tourists, spending their greenbacks, and their yen, their rupiah, and their pounds.

*Chris storms into the squat, clearly very distressed. He begins shoveling his meagre belongings into a duffel bag. Ella watches him, her usual calm viciousness has an edge of desperation.*

Ella: Oh no. We have a fight with the Princess of the Paupers?

Sophie: Boutique beers overflow, fresh seafood abounds, green and gold trinkets chime Waltzing Matilda.

Clare (*continuing to cut herself*): 6, 7, 8, 9, 10..

*Clare continues to cut herself as the other two scenes play out. She continues to count, but does so quietly, not detracting from the other action.*

Sophie: Trained barista brew coffee and steam milk, trying not to think of the shoes in the shop next door that cost more than their weekly wage.

Ella (*standing up, bitter and vicious*): Don't make the mistake of thinking she's your friend. She's paid to care.

Sophie: And standing amongst it all are the ones whom nobody sees, and nobody wants, because they don't fit the picture.

Ella (*following Chris around as he throws things in the bag*):  
There's you imagining castles in the fucking clouds, but really you're just the scum she has to scrape off her shoes each night.

Sophie: Well they are in the picture.

Ella (*relenting, placing a soothing hand on Chris' shoulder*):  
There's nothing -

*Chris snaps, grabs Ella and yells in his face*

Chris: Fuck you, fuck you, FUCK YOU.

*With one last frustrated howl, Chris grabs his stuff and runs off.*

Clare: 95, 96, 97, 98, 100...

*Lights go down on all areas.*

The issues in this piece were explicitly declared by the characters, rather than represented and explored within their own psychological, emotional, and physical journeys, or through other theatrical modes of discourse and delivery. There is the feeling of Sophie judging an audience, of her prescribing the 'meaning' of the work, instead of the work offering different perspectives for consideration. The urge to be emphatic in my own judgment on dispossession and homelessness could only ever mean that the work was overly prescriptive with meaning, thus diminishing other theatrical possibilities more specifically, and meaning making more generally, leaving the work, to refer back to Derek Paget's description, "two dimensional", and "flat".

This experience was repeated again in 2011, when another piece of mine, 353, was selected for the 2011 “Maj Monologue” season, downstairs at His Majesty’s Theatre, in Hay Street, Perth. 353 was a monologue inspired by the sinking of the SIEV X on its way to Australia on October 19<sup>th</sup> 2001, when 353 people, mostly women and children, drowned. There were questions regarding the complicity or fault by Australian politicians and/or naval personnel that may have contributed to the extent of casualties (Hutton, 2011 para. 5). The aim of writing the monologue was to encourage consideration and discussion of Australia’s policy toward asylum seekers, specifically those arriving by boat. As with the previous work it became difficult to separate the ‘aim’ of this piece from its execution, and the monologue became overly dogmatic in its representation of the focus issue.

The monologue was from the perspective of a young fictional British tourist Jenny, who was traveling around Australia on her gap year. The piece began with her initial impression of Australia, then as she travels through Canberra she comes across a memorial to the victims of the SIEV X drowning. The piece then follows her investigation of, and reactions to the event.

*Script excerpt 3 353 – excerpt one*

Three hundred and fifty three. Three hundred and fifty three white, wooden poles, between seven and nine feet tall. Dug into the ground, seemingly growing toward the sky like leafless trees. They’re evenly spaced, for the most part weaving along in a continuous line, occasionally looping around one another, creating little pockets. The lake lies beyond the poles, utterly still, there are trees on the water’s edge, and up the grassed slope, but there’s not even a breeze so they’re silent too. It’s just me and the poles. Walking between them they almost feel like standing stones, like Stonehenge. Three hundred and fifty three poles. Two hundred and seven larger ones – for the adults. One hundred and forty six small ones –

for the children...

To my mind Australia was synonymous with Summer Bay, The Sydney Opera House and a consistent thrashing at the cricket. The sheer enormity of this place blew my mind, from Tasmania with its snow-capped mountains, to the tropical humidity of Far North Queensland - where I thought I'd have to drink my oxygen through a straw. In WA I expressed a desire to drive along the coastline for "a day or two", only to be reminded in the gentlest terms that it was roughly the same size as all the countries of Western Europe put together. You could fly for five hours and still be in the same country, and yet walk for five minutes in Melbourne and suddenly swear you'd wandered into the heartlands of Greece - the Baklava! Never mind my inability to walk 5 metres without hearing a British accent, there seemed to be people from every far-flung nook of the world on every street corner. I went to a traditional Estonian restaurant in Sydney. I got drunk with a Bulgarian in Adelaide, who assured me there was little else to do there. I went Scuba Diving on the Great Barrier Reef with Krystal, who'd only just returned from visiting her grandparents in Beijing. She said I should come stay with her in Canberra since her folks were currently in Macedonia visiting her aunt, and her brother had just moved out with his half Maori half Uzbekistani girlfriend...

...As I read through first-hand accounts, I could almost hear their voices in my head. Still dark, when they gathered at the docks, huddling together, trying to attract as little attention as possible. I wondered about the children, I thought back to my own journey to Australia, the screaming babies that refused to be comforted. Would it be the same on those Indonesia docks? Would the babies be howling? Would

tired and fearful mothers try to feed and soothe them, would surrounding passengers shoot harassed and irritated looks? Or would even the smallest of them sense the atmosphere? Would the urgent fear that gripped the others keep them silent?

A small wooden fishing boat, 19.5 metres long by 4 metres wide, rotting, rusting, leaking, listing to one side. The boat floating - barely - before them was the stuff of nightmares. But behind them, barring the way, were Indonesian police, holding their guns steady, forcing them on board. For most of them this was their only option anyway, they'd all paid small fortunes for the desperate privilege of being crammed into the murky, stinking hold of this ship.

A ship that lasted just one day at sea before it sank. Around one hundred and twenty people survived the initial clutches of the sea, but it was over twenty hours before help arrived. Then there were only forty-four waiting to be rescued. Sixty-five men perished. One hundred and forty-two women. One hundred and forty-six children.

Instead of a character engaging with the information through the filter of their own emotions, life experiences, fears and beliefs, the 'voice' of the playwright is too easily detected. My original aim, to question the treatment of asylum seekers in Australia, overwhelmed theatrical considerations of character, plot, differing constructs of delivery, and the piece once again becomes 'flat'. The monologue continues in a similar vein.

*Script excerpt 4 353 - Excerpt two*

This I had not been expecting, human tragedy was one thing, but these people, journalists, even some Senators, seemed to be suggesting that there was some issue with the way the government acted. The ship had gone down in international

waters, but within the Australian aerial border protection surveillance zone - whatever the hell that was. People were saying the Australian Border Protection Agency had been advised that a ship was out there, a ship that was overcrowded, and poorly maintained. The argument raged - that someone, somewhere in Australia, had known these people were out there, and that they'd done nothing.

I found this difficult to believe, I knew that the "boat people" issue was hugely controversial in Australia, it seemed to get far more news time than health, education or political sex scandals. I knew Australians were worried about being inundated with asylum seekers from all over the globe, but surely, surely there was no way in hell anyone, whether they be a politician or naval officer, could disregard the lives of so many people.

Not in the country I'd found to be so welcoming and friendly. Every hostel I'd stayed in, every pub I'd walked into, there was someone interested in where I'd come from, someone offering to let me stay awhile, someone who was fairly sure they could find me a job, or at the very least someone inviting me to a barbeque. These were not a people who willingly let children die as some sort of absurd people smuggling deterrent. It just wasn't possible.

Again, there is the sense in this scene of an attempt to dictate interpretation and prescribe meaning. Rather than offering an experience or theatrical perspective of this issue, the piece becomes dogmatic, demanding outrage, denying the audience the opportunity to derive their own meaning in what is, for many people, a situation of intense ethical complexity.

Having considered the elements of my previous creative practice I wanted to develop, this research began when I then considered how I might develop modes of practice to extend my creative writing. I considered how best to focus the scope and aims of this research into the development of socio-humanitarian dramatic writing practice.

## Dialogue not Diatribe: Creative Experimentation as Methodology

This research methodology has engaged reflective practice to challenge and extend my writing practice in a deliberately self-conscious way. It is the concept of theatrical experience and engagement over a thematic or ethical dogma that was the central aim of this research, taking inspiration from the work of other playwrights/companies that have either openly declared their work to be addressing socio-humanitarian themes and issues or I have read their work to do so. Using these works as a framework I then proceeded to go back and forth, through creative experimentation and writing and rewriting, for the development and mastering of my own creative process.

Underpinning this process were the following core research questions:

- What writing techniques and/or methods of development have other playwrights and/or theatre companies employed to develop socio-humanitarian theatre?
- What impact does my employing or emulating these techniques and methods have on my own creative practice, in particular on my difficulties in developing work that limits an audience's opportunity to contribute to meaning-making?

This research is practice-led whereby “the supposition is that it is through the practice of creative writing that new knowledge about the art of creative writing is developed, and knowledge about the contribution of creative writing to contemporary society” (L. Green, 2006, p. 177). In this “process of research enquiry through artistic reflection we aim to communicate the manner in which the artistic process has served to transform the understanding of a given experience resulting in deepened meaning” (Hawkins, 2017, p. 87). This “requires a reflexive analysis of the processes of the production of the creative component ...that situates it within a body of work” (L. Green, 2006, p. 178).

This raises the notions of reflexive and reflective respectively, the former being the acknowledgement that as a researcher my “social, political and value position and positionality” inform all areas of my research, from original motivations for creative writing, to the interpretation of research and theory (Griffiths, 2012, p. 185). I have been conscious, while conducting this research, that my practice is informed by my social and political beliefs, experience as a performer, and lived experience as a woman, including an awareness that this lived experience is as a caucasian hetero-normative woman, and is not informed by intersectional concepts of race, and non hetero-normative gender and sexual identities. There is also the fact that throughout this research I had been involved in the research, development and performance of a play called *Project Xan*, developed by Western Australian playwright Hellie Turner. The play centres around the experience of Xan Fraser, gang-raped as a child and subjected to victim blaming and slut shaming from both her community and the justice system. The play premiered in Perth in late 2016, and although this production is not part of this research it certainly played into my psyche when conducting it, and it would be remiss of me not to mention its impact. I have not sought, in this practice-led research, to distance myself from my social, political and personal contexts, but to recognise how they affect my creative writing practice, and where, and how, these personal contexts may be tempered with new modes of practice. The reflexive practice component of the analysis is an “exercise of the mental ability...to consider [myself] in relation to [my] social contexts” (Archer, 2012, p. 3). I include in the category of ‘social contexts’ my relation to communities of practice within theatre settings, various political ideologies and my own creative practice predominantly because I understand that “whether we are creating or responding to a creative or artistic work, we cannot dissociate our own emotions, beliefs and cultural values” (Ryan, 2014, p. 6).

Reflective research is dependent on “a reciprocity between what you experience out there and changing yourself in response to it” (Etherington, 2012, p. 30). The primary concern of this research is the development and mastery of my own writing practice and processes, “a concentration on ‘process or processes’ – which is a more common way of describing the events of writing creatively... is one of the most fundamental of

re-orientations for anyone undertaking creative writing research” (Harper, 2008, p. 166). Thus in establishing a practice-led research methodology Graeme Harper notes several methods of collecting “evidence relating to the acts and actions of creative writers”, including “re-examination of the writer’s own previous works and projection of similar or alternative approaches to subjects or themes” (2008, p. 165). Through reflective practice we can develop greater understanding of ourselves as individuals, and as artists, and begin to apply that understanding to the development of new practice (Ryan, 2014, p. 8), in this way a consistent aspect of this research was the reflective consideration of both my previous creative processes, and how my social contexts drove past and current writing practice. As such it is impossible to limit evaluation and analysis to a qualitative or quantitative measuring system, and instead it is the *affect* on myself as researcher in my creative practice as research that will be considered. “The practice-led research methodology is the doing of the work of creativity”, and “the justification for practice-led research is that certain kinds of knowledge can be created only through practice”(L. Green, 2006, p. 176).

While this reflection on my own practice was fundamental to this research, I also needed to establish a methodology to offset “the very real difficulties of trying to understand writing from the inside”(Waters, 2013, p. 137). Playwriting as pedagogy is somewhat elusive, owing largely to its subjective nature. A long accepted practice, however, is the analysis of existing work, “to describe plays through sustained observation of exemplary yet catholic works in action, guided by an appreciation” (Waters, 2013, p. 145). In his outline of potential practice-led research methodologies Harper includes “modelling involving consideration of other creative writers’ works, present or past, and speculative consideration of technique or writerly decision-making” (2008, p. 165). I examined theatre that inspired, excited or confused me and used these texts as motivations for creative experimentation. Out of the canon of what I understood to be socio-humanitarian drama I chose works that, when filtered through the paradigm of my personal social and artistic context, most engaged me. I began to develop conceptual and technical frameworks, that is specific exercises or creative parameters, to direct my own creative practice. Using the techniques, methods, and

concepts identified in the established works I set frameworks other than theme as a genesis point for scene writing. I would consider what aspect of my target issue, 'rape culture', I felt would be best explored by the framework in question, and would aim to develop processes that focused on the interplay between technique and theme. This was, as Harper describes it in his model of practice-led methodology, a process of "drafting and redrafting; revising, editing" (2008, p. 165).

These processes were largely solo-based writing, but also included experimentation with collaborative techniques. This research was conducted part time, and the collaborative experimentation involved two non-consecutive days, August 17<sup>th</sup> 2014, and September 14<sup>th</sup> 2014, of workshop with three actors, during which time we explored various collaborative theatre-making techniques as the genesis of scene making. Owing to the sensitive nature of the issues discussed, I do not include video recording, or direct transcripts of the workshops involving collaborators. I have received their permission to include transcripts of improvisations borne of our collaboration, but will maintain the anonymity of their identities and certain creative processes. These days proved to be starting points for the research.

By focusing on published and produced works that strongly appealed to me I identified a variety of concepts to be used as the genesis for developing new writing processes, and further considered how these influenced my writing practice, and the final outcomes.

In examining and articulating these reflexive deliberations, creators and perceivers of art can identify their motivations and potential for taking different courses of action for improved outcomes in their artistic endeavours or in their lives (Ryan, 2014, p. 9).

The aim is to develop socio-humanitarian dramatic texts that provide differing perspectives on relevant issues, and examine, without overt judgment, or explore, without prescription of meaning. This is in direct opposition to a play-script that is more of a dictatorial event, attempting to direct an audience to a specific viewpoint or opinion. Affecting scripts are not lessons in moral action but living organisms whose

complications and contradictions should be experienced rather than explained. Thus this research involved immersion in the craft of playwriting, workshopping with actors, textual analysis and beyond. Four principle strands to the research design included:

1. Analysis of selected socio-humanitarian playwrights and theatre-makers. This analysis examined varying creative practice processes employed by these artists, acknowledging myriad different writing methods, and literary constructs used.
2. Trialing methods that were collaborative in nature, which included exercises, improvisation and devising techniques with actors.
3. Trialing identified methods that were primarily developed by a single writer.
4. Reflection and analysis of the effect emulating these methods had on the development of my personal creative practice.

The final presentation of this research is this dissertation detailing a theoretical analysis of the varying creative methods, accompanied by a collection of original play scripts of socio-humanitarian focus, and a final full play-text comprising selected scenes developed throughout this research. This final full play-text, as indicated earlier, was not part of the original research design, but I made the decision to include it at the end of this research, as it represents the development of my creative writing practice, and my own understanding of the relationship between myself as a researcher, an individual with specific social and political contexts, and member of this particular community of practice in the making of socio-humanitarian drama.

## Inspiration and Issues

Communities of practice are formed when a group of people collectively learn from each other's knowledge and learning in a "shared domain of human endeavour", and include artists drawing from one another in the development of "new forms of expression" (Wenger, 2009). The particular community of practice with which I engage are the playwrights and theatre-makers who work to employ "theatre's potential to be

educative and empowering, to enable critical and ethical engagement, to awaken a sense of social responsibility, or to raise an audience's sense of its own political agency" (Freshwater, 2009, p. 55). Through this research I explored methods, constructs and practices of playwrights and theatre-makers interested in socio-humanitarian themes to develop my own creative writing practice. Through this practice led research I outlined specific constructs and exercises with which to engage in order to develop and better master my own creative writing practice, and aid others in this particular community of practice who might benefit from these creative experiments.

Throughout this research I have referred to the works in question, both my own and others, as 'socio-humanitarian drama'. I use this term to refer to work that has a clear thematic focus on an issue of social justice and/or human rights. I acknowledge there are myriad playwrights, theatre makers and indeed entire theatrical genres that are part of, even foundational to, the socio-humanitarian dramatic canon, and could have been discussed in this work. There are countless playwrights and theatre makers all over the world, throughout history, who have used theatre as a means of socio-humanitarian discussion, warning and protest, but it is impossible to draw from them all here. The writers and theatre makers analysed in this research are a sampling of those whose work I found particularly inspiring, interesting or, quite often, perplexing, such as Australia's *version 1.0* and the UK playwright Caryl Churchill. This research also draws on the work of theatre theorists and critics such as Caroline Wake, Jacques Ranciere, and Elin Diamond, Feminist and Gender theorists such as Judith Butler, and sociological/criminological research into factors supporting 'rape culture'.

The construction of meaning in a theatrical context is very much a collaborative effort, even for traditional theatre, between writer, director, design team, cast and others. There is another relationship that determines meaning in a performance context, that between the work and the audience "who play the role of active interpreters, are performers in their own story, and whose responses cannot be (and should not be) anticipated by the artwork itself" (Spencer, 2012, p. 21). Jacques Ranciere compares theatre spectators to students, or scientists "He [the spectator] observes, he selects, he

compares, he interprets. He connects what he observes with many other things he has observed on other stages, in other kinds of spaces” (as cited in Wake, 2009, p. 3). A playwright may construct character, narrative and thematic composition, elements that Roman Ingarden calls “places of indeterminacy” that create the aesthetic *potentiality* of the play text, however the *actuality* of the theatrical experience is dependent on further “steps of concretization” (as cited in Mitscherling, 2012, p. 440). Each place of indeterminacy is a moment for meaning-making on the part of those interpreting the play text, firstly in the development of the live performance, secondly the potential differentiation between each individual performance, and thirdly the experiencing of the live performance by the spectator, which is the final actualization of the piece (Mitscherling, 2012, p. 440). Ultimately meaning is derived from “the active (and inevitably idiosyncratic) translation through which each audience member...appropriates that experience and makes it her own” (Ranciere as cited in Spencer, 2012, p. 21).

This notion of ‘active translation’ or ‘active spectator’ is somewhat paradoxical, as Caroline Wake explains “when the spectator is understood as active and spectatorship is understood as an activity, then the notion of “passive spectatorship” reveals itself as a contradiction in terms” (2009, p. 3). Drawing from the idea that all spectatorship is already active, that is to say an active consideration of performance through the individual paradigm of a spectator’s own social, cultural, political, and personal context, the question of what is meant by ‘overly didactic’ arises. Susan Bennett describes spectatorship as the “social contract” between spectators and theatre-makers as one in which the audience tacitly agrees to be “eager and active in their acceptance and decoding of the signs presented to them” (as cited in Fortier, 1997, p. 91). Some theatre, however, is more directive and declarative in its presentation of these signs, and calls for less decoding from the audience. Overly didactic or moralistic theatre breaks this “social contract”, as the playwright attempts to circumvent this “decoding” or individual reception by dictating meaning, assuming, or appearing to assume, an intellectual passivity, or even inferiority on behalf of the audience. This dogmatic approach robs an audience of their part in the discourse of theatre, as it attempts to control their

reception and understanding of meaning. It is understandable that attempts to usurp this right of individual reception and understanding, giving the impression of insulting their intelligence or forcing a response, may result in an audience disengaging from a theatrical piece, and the issue/s it explores. In his theories of intellectual and spectator emancipation Ranciere talks of a “community of narrators and translators” (2009, p. 22) bound by an “equality of intelligence” whereby everyone must be considered capable of “an intelligence that translates signs into other signs and proceeds by comparisons and illustrations...(to) understand what another intelligence is endeavouring to communicate” (2009, p. 10). In this equal community of narrators and translators the role of the playwright, or theatre-maker, is to initiate discourse, and offer perspectives of the issues that are enhanced by, or even specific to, the theatrical medium. Meaning is not finite, but a starting point, an offering to the many translators involved in the actualisation of socio-humanitarian theatre. In essence, overly didactic theatre is that in which all the work of meaning making is done for the audience by the performance, instead of theatre that asks questions and invites active consideration from its audience.

There is a great deal of debate as to what language descriptors should be used when discussing sexual assault, in particular what terms should be used to describe those upon whom sexual assault has been perpetrated. There are arguments in favour of using the word ‘survivor’, as explained by Cassandra Thomas, president of the (American) National Coalition Against Sexual Assault, “When you think in terms of a victim, you think of someone who has had all power stripped of her by the attacker...the term ‘survivor’ says: ‘I do have power’” (as cited in Mills, 1991). There are, however, those who feel that enforcing the ‘survivor construct’ pressures those who have been assaulted to frame their own identity and narrative as such, that it shames the notion of victimhood, suffering and post event trauma (Anonymous, 2016; Ferguson, 2016). There are still others who feel both terms are phallogentric, patriarchal and deprive women of adequate language to define their own narrative of sexual violence (Spry, 1995). All of these arguments are, in essence, centred on a commonality; those who have been sexually assaulted must be allowed to define their own narrative, identity and response in relation to their experience with sexual violence. In this dissertation I

will use varied terms to refer to those who have been sexually assaulted. I do not, in any way, imply that there is a 'correct' manner in which to respond to being sexually assaulted. In this dissertation I discuss, both in the creative and analytical components, reactions and responses experienced by those who have been sexually assaulted, drawn from academic sources and more informal sources such as online blog posts and articles. I do not intend to suggest the experience of sexual assault is limited to, or can be defined by, these reactions. When using the terms 'sexual assault' and 'rape' I refer to any and all sexual contact that is perpetrated on a person without active consent. I use the term victim in support of the experience of trauma, no matter to what extent or how it is individually experienced.

'Rape culture' is used throughout this dissertation to refer to the many beliefs, behaviours, societal and language conventions that support, to whatever degree, sexual violence toward women. Prevalent among these issues is that of 'victim blaming'. 'Rape culture' places the burden of rape prevention on women taking action to avoid being raped, rather than on men to ensure they have full and active consent to sexual activity (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011; Grubb & Turner, 2012; Hayes, Lorenz, & Bell, 2013; Rich, Utley, Janke, & Moldoveanu, 2010). Owing to this expectation, survivors of assault are often blamed for their own victimization, behaviour referred to as 'victim blaming'. Victims are often held accountable for their own assault owing to the presence of alcohol at the time of assault (Hayes et al., 2013, p. 203), prior sexual history and/or the assumption or self-presentation of sexual availability, otherwise known as 'slut shaming' (Armstrong, Hamilton, Armstrong, & Seely, 2014). 'Slut shaming' is applied to the use of explicit language, assumed sexual experience (Bancroft, 2015b), and wearing sexually provocative clothing, and the presence of these factors make it "easy to apply the label 'slut' to a girl...and to blame her for making herself a target while boys evade responsibility" (Pickel & Gentry, 2017, p. 90).

'Slut shaming' and 'victim blaming' also equate to the mitigation of perpetrator responsibility, or harm minimization of a perpetrator's actions (Yamawaki, Darby, & Queiroz, 2007, p. 42). The equation of blame and perceived harm becomes about the

perceived social 'worth' of the survivor in comparison to the perpetrator, and can affect not only perceptions of an assault, and the support a survivor may receive, but also the likelihood of conviction if the assault survivor pursues legal action (Yamawaki et al., 2007, p. 42). Factors such as perceptions of social-class, aesthetic attractiveness and the adherence to hetero-normative gender constructs of both survivor and perpetrator affect perceptions and attributions of blame and harm respectively (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 447; Pickel & Gentry, 2017; Yamawaki et al., 2007, p. 42).

'Rape culture' is also concerned with a social reluctance to acknowledge and redress these harmful beliefs, "the desensitization of and acceptance of violence against women as normal" (Bancroft, 2015a). Traditional constructs of gender, that is the characterization of men as aggressive and sexually dominant, and women as passive and overly emotional, contribute to the prevalence and justification of rape (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2007; Hill & Fischer, 2001). Studies suggest correlations between "masculine gender role socialization with rape-related behaviors and attitudes" (Hill & Fischer, 2001). Women are also likely to engage in rape excusing discourse in order to excuse perpetrators who inspire feelings of maternalism (Chapleau et al., 2007, p. 131) or to cognitively and socially distance themselves from those who have been assaulted as a physical and psychological protective mechanism (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 446).

Traditional constructs of masculinity also serve to perpetuate the notion that men are entitled to sexual gratification.

In acquaintance rape situations, which make up the vast majority of rapes, it appears that men rape as a result of feelings of entitlement. ... Men tend to assume, for any number of reasons, that we are entitled to have our sexual desires met, that men are entitled to share sexually with people we are attracted to, and that we are entitled to a "payback" for taking someone out. (Funk as cited in Hill & Fischer, 2001, p. 40)

This normalisation of sexual entitlement, characterizing coerced or forced sexual intercourse as a natural function of masculinity, along with harm minimizing and victim blaming beliefs, serve to reduce the perception of acquaintance rape, where the

perpetrator is known to the victim, as a violent crime, and the perpetrator as a criminal. Instead “a stereotype of a ‘real rapist’ emerges as “brutish male aggressor ... a sex-crazed, deviant sociopath ... [who] has no previous acquaintance with the victim” (Orenstein as cited in O'Hara, 2012). This reluctance to acknowledge acquaintance rape as ‘real rape’ results in a failure to adequately address common societal beliefs and behaviours that contribute to it. The perception of a rapist is reduced to the ‘monster’, the ‘sex-crazed, deviant sociopath’ and the attitudes of the broader community go unchallenged.

Tom Meagher addresses this in his essay *The Danger of the Monster Myth*, (Meagher, 2014). Jill Meagher, Meagher’s wife, was raped and murdered in Melbourne, in September 2012, creating a media furor around the world. Tom Meagher’s essay examines the pervasive myth that rapists are unknown monstrous entities, “violent strangers who stalk their victims and strike at the opportune moment” (Meagher, 2014). Despite his wife’s attack being considered opportunistic Meagher was struck by the danger in the monster myth; the inability to accept that rape is not solely the domain of strangers lurking in darkened alleys but is perpetrated by men who may otherwise appear socially, professionally, emotionally and psychologically normal.

The more I felt the incredible support from the community, the more difficult it was to ignore the silent majority whose tormentors are not monsters lurking on busy streets, but their friends, acquaintances, husbands, lovers, brothers and fathers (2014).

In his essay Meagher calls on men to challenge traditional notions of masculinity and violence in each other, “bro-codes of silence...and the belief...in the intrinsic otherness of violent men” (Meagher, 2014). He calls on the community, and especially men, to acknowledge the possibility, indeed the *probability* of the normalness of an abuser, to acknowledge social complicity through “the narrow framework of masculinity”, to challenge the myths that further victimize women and to acknowledge “the fact that all these crimes have exactly the same cause – violent men, and the silence of non-violent men” (Meagher, 2014). As Meagher powerfully details in his essay, ‘rape culture’ is the pervasive and persistent normalisation of sexual violence, and the ideology that

supports it, across *all* sectors of the community.

Throughout this dissertation I draw on the socio-humanitarian drama of select playwrights and theatre-makers, as well as aspects of performance theory, feminist theory and sociological data into 'rape culture'. The aim of this practice-led research is to develop and master my creative writing practice beyond didactic and overt polemic, and towards a practice that engages with the 'potentiality' of theatrical form, and leaves thematic 'space' for audience members to develop meaning through their own political, social and personal paradigm without feeling meaning is finite and forced.

## Chapter One: 'Discussive' elements in the dramatic play text

I have long been drawn to the work of Henrik Ibsen, the Norwegian playwright whose primary focus was the “link between artistic and sociopolitical experiments” (Jian, 2010, p. 97). Despite being written in 1879, Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House*, with its exploration of female autonomy, expression and identity is still relevant today, being one of the most performed plays in the world (Blake, 2014 para. 5). I am also aware that the inclusion of such an established naturalistic work of socio-humanitarian drama speaks to my own history as a performer. As a graduate of a conservatoire actor training programme, that of the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, I am aware that my creative practice as a *performer* was heavily informed by traditional Aristotelian drama and that this has, in turn, influenced my creative practice as a writer. The majority of this research was drawn from works that do not adhere to this traditional form, however in the initial stages of this research I did want to examine what constructs might be drawn from work of this nature that allowed for socio-humanitarian discourse in a Aristotelian dramatic form that did not result in overly prescriptive discourse or meaning making. Of particular interest to this research was Ibsen’s use of thematic discussion, “the one thing you can hang on to is that an Ibsen play deals with ideas and that they are discussed in front of you. Ibsen changed the theater by including this ‘discussive element’ within the play” (Adler, 1999, p. 337). To my own subjective reading, the meaning does not seem overly forced or dogmatic. Having struggled to write socio-humanitarian drama in a traditional realistic narrative form that does not descend into ‘flat’ polemic, I sought to explore whether analysis of Ibsen’s work, and creative processes developed from such, could aid in the development of my own practice. This chapter discusses the ‘discussive’ components in *A Doll’s House* and David Hare’s overtly political play *The Vertical Hour* as a point of analysis and departure point for my own experimentation in what I refer to as having ‘discussive elements’.

The ‘discussive element’ in *A Doll’s House* comes as Nora asks her husband Torvald to sit down, as they “have much to say to one another” (Ibsen, 1879, p. 1212), with regard to Nora’s identity and sense of oppression within their marriage. Throughout the action of

the play Nora has come to recognise the restrictive conditions under which she lives, and discusses them articulately and in depth. This technique allows for an overt and comprehensive examination of the central themes, from the characters' *lived* perspectives. Following the events that have previously transpired, and given the character development of Nora and Torvold respectively, the discussion seems a psychologically and emotionally driven conclusion. Not only does the discussion seem a natural response from a character perspective, but an audience has also 'lived' the restrictions, oppressions and miscommunication through the characters in the performance time and space. Whatever subjective response an audience member may have to the issues, they have nonetheless shared in their realization and exploration through the performance, making the discussion an organic, character driven resolution, rather than polemic from the playwright. The discussion does not seem forced because the issues are so integral to the character's lives, and the 'lived' action of the play, and are discussed with such specificity to their own experiences, that it does not seem as if they are preaching to an audience, but fulfilling the natural resolution of their own journeys

Ibsen expresses both sides of the issue with understanding, encouraging consideration rather than prescribing meaning, "In the discussion, you have to try to distinguish between truths. You listen to all the truths and then make your own choice" (Adler, 1999, p. 348). Ibsen does not 'take sides', instead constructing characters, context and narrative that allows for sympathetic consideration of both arguments. An audience has certainly seen Nora's abilities and devotion dismissed and derided, but also Torvold's desire to protect and provide for her. Ibsen does not promote 'right and wrong' but creates a narrative construct through which issues of individualism and social constraints are examined. Whatever their personal beliefs on the issues a given audience member is not, I believe, positioned to be chastised, belittled or lectured to. Instead both sides of the argument are presented for their examination and questioning. By examining, through the 'lived' action of the play, and in the final discussion, opposing elements of an issue Ibsen does not position himself, or the play, to dictate meaning. Rather he presents an examination of the issues from which an audience can draw their

own meaning, without feeling they are being encouraged, or indeed derided, in their response.

This concept of an equal and 'lived' debate was certainly lacking in my work, and silencing oppositional perspective serves to heighten the oppressive sense of dogma. Allowing both sides of an argument, representing 'all the truths', is not only more ethical, but indicates a level of respect for, and equality with, an audience. Furthermore it may lessen the risk of distancing audience members who disagree with a particular viewpoint, and potentially allows for a greater possibility of their considering both sides of an issue without feeling disparaged. There is less of a sense of manipulation, or outright deceit, and the tone becomes less overbearing. Introducing a strong oppositional thematic element also means that there is a greater sense of conflict, or challenge, for the characters whose journey most represents the issues of the chosen socio-humanitarian issue. Nora is not musing on the hypothetical oppression of women in her time, but having an existential argument about her individual existence with the person who most impacts her existence. Her struggle is not just theoretical, but played out over the course of the narrative action, as is her husband's conditioning and reasoning.

The notion of a balanced discussion is evident in David Hare's *The Vertical Hour* (Hare, 2008), whereby "political issues are raised through discussion" (Innes, 2007, p. 443), in this case the many issues surrounding the 2003 invasion of Iraq by American and British forces. The contrasting views are offered by Nadia, a former war correspondent now professor, who believes the invasion was justified to end the suffering of the Iraqi people, and her future father-in-law, Oliver, a doctor who questions the legality of the invasion, and the lack of support for the Iraqi people post invasion. These discussions take place after Nadia has come with her fiancé Philip to visit his father, now a GP in rural England. For as much as the discussions revolve around foreign policy and the ethical conundrum of warfare, the play is equally about the psychology of the three protagonists, the central premise, according to Michael Billington, being "that you cannot separate public actions from private lives and that flight from reality is

ultimately a sin” (2006). All three main characters have run from difficult situations, arguably an apt metaphor for Iraq; invaded then abandoned.

This concept of mingling personal psychology with public politics is not just a central theme of Hare’s, but a central theatrical construct of the play. *The Vertical Hour* is unquestionably ‘about’ the Iraq War of 2003, the politics are not hidden, but nor are they the sole driving force. *The Vertical Hour* is not a lecture, theatrical craft is not sacrificed to political focus, and this is largely due to the characterization of Nadia, Oliver and Philip. They have been constructed with great depth, with their own vital objectives and obstacles, and their interactions with one another are necessary for their own personal development. Their discussions, whether political, personal or mundane, affect one another, making these interactions an essential catalyst for character development, rather than characters arbitrarily indulging in rhetoric and polemic. Philip himself sums it up in a way, “people aren’t their views, you know. They aren’t their opinions. They aren’t just what they say” (Hare, 2008, p. 1231), so too are characters so much more than their opinions, so much more than what they say.

Albeit a century or so apart in both *The Vertical Hour* and *A Doll’s House*, the discussion of a political or social issue does not seem overly forced or dogmatic because the characters have been developed in such a way as to make those discussions seem natural, logical, and actually quite urgent. Nora’s development, her struggle to protect her husband, her realization of how he views her, have been written so that it would seem incongruous for her not to question their relationship. Oliver, a liberal minded doctor who defines his job as “someone who tells you the truth and stays with you to the end” (Hare, 2008, p. 587), is perfectly situated to have an intelligent discussion about the human cost of the Iraq War, while Nadia’s beliefs are so woven into her identity and life experience that failure to discuss the war would say just as much about its impact on her as her easy willingness to discuss it. Oliver does not have the personal connection with the war that Nadia does, but there is a sense of his being defined by idealism. Nadia comments on his tendency to attribute a philosophical ideal to any and every thing (Hare, 2008, p. 1542), and surely nothing is more open to philosophical

debate than war. In *The Vertical Hour*, the political and social debates flow easily, not seeming forced or prescriptive and there is a real sense that, owing to who they are and what they've been through, the characters feel genuinely compelled to have these discussions. Their development, their respective journeys throughout the action of the play, are as much a part of the play as the political focus. There is a sense that they are real, integral to the play with their own unique personalities, and not simply mouthpieces for the playwright's political agenda.

I was very much aware that characterization in a realistic or naturalistic context was an issue in my own creative process, that, as discussed previously, my characters were quite two dimensional, and their discussion of the relevant issues didactic and lacking in psychological or emotional complexity. The primary concept I took from analyzing *A Doll's House* and *The Vertical Hour* was how essential the issues themselves were to the development of character and plot and how they were seamlessly integral to the action of the play. What made the discussions seem less prescriptive is that the characters were discussing the issues as they pertained to their own experiences, rather than more distanced, almost academic discussion that is clearly aimed at the audience. The issues explored directly affected the character's past, present or future. The discussions appeared organic, and inevitable, they were key to the character's psychology, and development.

My first attempt to engage with this 'politics as the foundation of a characterisation' concept was to develop characters that could then be drawn into issue based discussions, but I found this to be a rather two dimensional process. My first thoughts as to character development would be quite functional, so characters would first be defined by vocations that might bring them in contact with sexual assault survivors or perpetrators, such as doctors, or prison officers. I had lengthy character descriptions, but had to admit I had no real concept of their individual psychology, and that the discussions would read very much as a stereotypical doctor talking to a stereotypical prison officer. I then decided to reverse the process, to write 'discussive' scenes, and use

them to develop a notion of who the involved characters were, what their relationships were like, and the narrative that might be extrapolated from the discussion.

One issue I wanted to explore in the discussion scenes was the attribution, or indeed misattribution as I saw it, of blame and victimhood in the relationship between sexual assault perpetrator and survivor. A prevalent theme in 'rape culture' is the shifting of blame from those who commit rape, to those who have been assaulted. As Jody Raphael describes in *Rape is Rape*, so called 'acquaintance rape', where the perpetrator is known socially to the assault survivor, is presented as being the price paid for female sexual empowerment; the result of social independence and female promiscuity (2013, p. 53). The argument is that if women wish to drink heavily, wear revealing clothing, and engage in sexual activities outside the bounds of committed relationships then they must accept that these 'signals' will be misconstrued as sexual invitation, and hence they are to blame for being assaulted (Raphael, 2013, p. 61). This belief not only serves to blame women for being assaulted, but also to diminish the responsibility and culpability of their attackers, with various studies indicating social response is "quick to attribute blame to a victim of sexual assault and to correspondingly reduce the blameworthiness of the alleged perpetrator, especially in those cases that deviate from the "real rape" stereotype of a violent attack of a stranger on an unsuspecting victim" (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011, p. 1786).

There are many factors that lead to victim blaming, and the mitigation of perpetrator responsibility, including the presence of alcohol or drugs in the commission of the assault, the survivor's adherence to socially accepted gender norms (including perceptions of promiscuity), the socio-economic status of both survivor and assailant (Yamawaki et al., 2007, p. 42) and the form and longevity of any relationship between survivor and assailant prior to the assault (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011, p. 1786). A now infamous example of victim blaming and perpetrator responsibility mitigation was a 2013 case in Steubenville, in the United States. Two sixteen year old boys were convicted of the rape of a teenage girl while she was unconscious at a series of parties, and in their on air coverage two reporters from the CNN network focused exclusively on

the devastating effect the incident, and conviction, would have on the boys (CNN, 2013). The reporters described them as having “such promising futures, star football players, very good students”, and talked about the “huge part” that their “alcohol fuelled” state had had on the incident (CNN, 2013), mitigating perpetrator responsibility and, in effect, rendering the perpetrators the victims. There was also a large victim blaming backlash on social media (Wade, 2013), and even sports personalities felt entitled to weigh in on the culpability of the assaulted girl (Dries, 2013). I wanted to explore the idea that while society has normalized the notion that women must take steps to protect themselves against assault (Rich et al., 2010, p. 269), there is far less emphasis on rape prevention programs that focus on male behavior (Rich et al., 2010, p. 271). To my mind they are two sides of the same issue; the belief that rape prevention is the responsibility of the victim, and thus rape survivors are to blame for being assaulted by failing to employ expected self-protective measures, i.e. she was drunk, she was promiscuous, she was dressed in a sexually alluring manner etc.

It was these issues I wanted to explore in a ‘discussive’ scene structure. Having identified that content seemed less forced when related directly to a character’s narrative and psychological development, as in Ibsen’s *A Doll’s House* and Hare’s *Vertical Hour*, I considered contexts that would make a discussion of victim blaming and perpetrator responsibility mitigation relevant, and imperative to characterization and narrative. The following scene involves a couple, unnamed, engaged in a discussion about whether or not their young son should be involved in a school program regarding appropriate socio-sexual conduct. I approached the scene with the aim of focusing on naturalistic, or colloquial expression in the delivery of content. The characters and setting were unnamed, but the intent was to develop a scene that was driven by the interpersonal dynamic of the two characters. In my previous creative practice I have found that I often fail to write distinctive linguistic patterns, or ‘voices’, for my characters. They all express themselves in a similar, often very verbose and self-aware manner. In this scene I aimed for distinct ‘voices’ for the two characters.

Script excerpt 5 How was your day?

M: So how was your day?

W: Yeah, it was good. *Pause.* My afternoon took a rather bizarre detour.

M: Oh?

W: Yeah, I was just going through the news headlines online and I started reading about that case in Ohio. You know, the one where those two high school footballers assaulted an unconscious girl at a party, or a few parties. They took photos, posted them on facebook, all that.

M: Right, yeah, the one where the CNN reporters were crying a river 'cause the poor little rapists had such a bright future and now it's all down the toilet, oh won't someone think of the rapists!

W: Yes, that pretty much covers it.

M: But they were charged right, there hasn't been an appeal or something stupid?

W: Oh yeah, no that's all done and dusted. No, it's just, I started following this trail of links to articles about similar cases, and feminist blogs talking about Rape Culture.

M: Talking about...what now?

W: They were sort of saying that it's when a society blames the victim, and objectifies women, makes men feel like they have the right to rape, that kind of thing.

M: Jesus. You do know how to have a fun time on the internet. Next time just do yourself a favour and google "grumpy cat". Or porn. Porn works too.

W: I think they're saying porn is part of the problem.

M: I think you'll find that porn is actually a *solver* of many problems. A multi-faceted fix-it. Much like penicillin.

W: I'll bear that in mind. There was actually some really interesting stuff in there. About how we shouldn't be telling our girls not to do this or that because they'll get raped, how we should be teaching our boys not to rape. It made me think about Chris.

M: Woah, what? What about Chris?

W: That maybe we should be talking to him about this stuff. Maybe not now, but when he's a little older.

M: Talk to him about what exactly? Son, don't put your penis where it's not wanted. I think we covered that in potty training.

W: I'm serious!

M: About what? What do you want to talk to him about? No-one ever sat me down and told me not to rape women, and look at me - 32 years rape-free and counting.

W: I just think we should think about ways to explain to him what goes on, what could happen, the laws and everything.

M: Again, the law is pretty simple. Don't rape. We can get it on one of those charts you put on the back of the toilet door if you want. Normally it's French verbs or the multiplication tables but we can stay on message if you're worried about Your Son the Rapist.

W: I just think these writers have a point. If we keep telling girls not to get drunk, or go out in short skirts, because if they do they might get raped, then we're kind of sending the message to boys that any girl who does this knows the risks and is up for it.

M: Wow. Up for it? You get *that* from one of your feminist bloggers?

W: I'm just saying that we keep telling kids that nice girls do this, and bad girls do that, and bad girls don't deserve respect.

M: Yeah, well, *nice boys* don't rape. And Chris is a nice boy. If we have a daughter we'll teach her she can wear whatever she wants as long as it strategically hides a can of mace.

W: I just think that if someone had sat those boys down and educated them better about what was and wasn't okay, then maybe no-one would have gone through this nightmare - especially that young girl.

M: Yeah, I think their education was limited in a lot of ways, sexual etiquette including.

W: What's that supposed to mean?

M: Nothing, I'm just not sure they came from the most scholastically focused family.

W: Nice. I like how you used the big words to soften the blatantly classist blow.

M: I just mean that they came from a shitty background, I read that, and I just. (pause) I..

W: So...they're poor. And we all know rapists are always poor people. As long as we send Christopher to a private school and demand to see household income statements of all potential playmates then we should be home free.

M: I just meant...

W: Do you know it's illegal to have sex with a person who's drunk?

M: What?

W: It's illegal to have sex with someone who's intoxicated. By law they're not considered to be of sound mind to consent.

M: Yeah, again, common sense dictates that getting naked with someone who's lost the motor control to remove their own underwear is a bad idea.

W: No, not passed out drunk, I mean plain old had a few drinks, got that giddy feeling, over the legal limit drunk. If you can't drive you can't fuck.

M: That's ridiculous, that makes every first time a sex crime. Nobody's sober the first time they have sex, that would be horribly awkward.

W: Yeah, well...

M: That pretty much makes the first year of our relationship the worst sexual crime spree in history.

W: What?

M: First year Uni. I didn't get out of bed for a blood level of less than .08.

W: You also had to repeat a semester.

M: Good times.

W: What if Chris gets drunk one night, goes home with a girl who's also drunk, and gets accused of something? I'm not suggesting he's going to go out and deliberately hurt someone, but there's different levels of...

M: Of...rape? Different levels of rape? You sound like a republican senator. If you're going to start talking about "legitimate rape" I'm going to need some more wine.

W: So you're saying that there's no way it could happen. That a guy has never gone home with a girl, only to realise the next day that she probably wasn't in any condition to do anything.

M: Of course it happens. People make mistakes, don't forget, you also have girls go home with guys, regret it the next day and just cry rape to make themselves feel better.

W: I cannot believe you just said that. Is that what you boys tell yourselves so you can sleep at night? All the hysterical women are making it up?

M: "You boys"? Yeah, that's what I tell myself about the many legion of women I've taken advantage of. Oh how do I rape thee, let me count the ways.

W: I didn't mean it like that. But this is exactly my point. There is so much bullshit out there about stuff like this. I don't want my son in a situation that I could have prevented just by telling him what's right and what's wrong.

M: And I don't want my son going through life with a phobia about sex. It's confusing enough as it is when you're young without your mother demanding you pull out a notarized consent form every time you buy a girl a drink. Let's just aim for getting him to wear a condom shall we?

W: If *you'd* done that nine years ago we wouldn't be having this conversation at all.

While I did feel I had managed to create a degree of linguistic individualism between the two characters, I did not feel that this scene succeeded in avoiding the didactic. The female character was distinct in being somewhat apologetic about raising this particular issue, and being vague in her language. She raises the issue through the context of other people's opinions, ascribing the ideas to "feminist blogs about Rape Culture", and minimizing her thoughts with vague and non-assertive language such as "They were

sort of saying it's when society blames a woman...that sort of thing" and "I just think that, I don't know, if someone had maybe sat those boys down and educated them better", although as the discussion progresses, and the subject is considered more in relation to their child, she becomes more assertive. Perhaps this indicates that the emotive connection to family is a way in which abstract concepts about possible violence are made more apparent and infinitely empathic when directed to a loved one. For all of her vague and minimizing language, the woman was able to speak quite eloquently, and even academically, on the subject, and with a self-awareness that belied her apparent hesitancy to consider, or unfamiliarity with, the issue. This made the argument quite didactic, as did the characterization of the male character. The argument was not an equal examination of the issue, as the man was, to my mind, unsympathetic and his argument lacking in logic – rather than offering a reasonable explanation of why he opposed his son attending the program, he instead aggressively belittled and undermined his partner's arguments. I had to acknowledge my social agenda at this point, and acknowledge that, owing to my personal politics, I had undermined one side of this argument through the characterization of the character representing it. This is also served to make the scene overly didactic, as representing one side of an argument as eloquent, educated and caring, while the other is aggressive and illogical is hardly representing an equal perspective of the issue. As noted above, one of the strengths of the works I was drawing from, *A Doll's House* and *The Vertical Hour*, was the equal treatment of the focus issue, presented for audience consideration, not overtly positioning them into a specific viewpoint.

Developing a context that would seem to allow the discussion as a narrative or emotional imperative, in this case a necessary conversation regarding the imminent possibility of their son being engaged in a school program about rape culture, did not demonstrably reduce a sense of the didactic. Perhaps because the discussion in the above scene was owing to factors as yet 'unlived' in the action, potential educational programs as yet unrealised, rather than factors actually experienced by or affecting the characters personally, as in *The Doll's House* and *The Vertical Hour*.

I acknowledge there are limitations when writing scenes that supposedly involve an established relationship dynamic, without having previously established this dynamic in other, less content driven scenes. Owing to the parameters of this research, namely my intention to write several scenes in a variety of development styles, I was coming to the realization that I could not commit to writing a full-length naturalistic play. I did, however, develop a narrative I felt made these issues fundamental to individual character development and that this would drive an emotional and 'real-life' connection to these issues for the character, beyond the potential relevance to their son's education. For the next task I developed a back story, or a set of given circumstances contextualizing this writing experiment, where the male character, when a teenager, had failed to intervene when a male friend had taken advantage of an inebriated female friend. The man, Peter, would have spent years questioning whether he had failed to prevent a rape, or whether he witnessed 'normal' party behavior. This question would become more pressing after the female friend in question committed suicide. His wife, Catherine, would face a crisis of her victim-blaming beliefs when, owing to dementia, her mother revealed that her much-adored father had actually raped her (the mother). These personal, visceral experiences of the issue would conflate over ideas of how best to raise their pubescent son. The aim was that this narrative would drive discussion that felt natural, and 'necessary', rather than forced and didactic. While I did not write a full-length play text, I did write a few scenes within which I placed a second draft of the discussion between the two parents as to whether their son should be educated on socio-sexual conduct, by which I mean issues of sexual consent, coercion, ramifications of drugs and alcohol on sexual engagement etc. This provided some, albeit slight, narrative and character context for a possible discussion scene.

*Script excerpt 6 Good For You ('discussive' narrative)*

Scene One

*Peter sitting alone at a desk, typing. He finishes whatever he is working on, closes up his laptop and puts in a briefcase.*

*He picks up the briefcase and stands up, preparing to leave, but instead stands there for some time, seemingly lost in thought. He puts the bag back down, sits down at the desk, pulls out a piece of paper and a newspaper clipping and reads.*

### Scene Two

*The sounds of a party - loud music, people talking raucously etc.*

*A teenaged boy, Robert, stumbles on stage, supporting a teenaged girl who is highly inebriated, seemingly slipping in and out of consciousness. Robert gropes and kisses the girl who is too dazed and drunk to indicate reluctance or acceptance.*

*Another boy, played by the same actor as plays Chris, walks out.*

Chris: Hey, Rob, you guys okay?

Robert: Yeah, Rachel's just a bit out of it.

Chris: Oh. You coming back in? Maybe get her some water or something.

Robert: Nah, I'm going to take her back to my place.

Chris: You don't think maybe you should get her home?

Robert: It's all good, we came here together, my job to take care of her. *Winks at Chris and laughs.*

Chris: She seems pretty far gone.

Robert: Yeah, god knows what was in that punch.

Chris: Rob...you sure you should be taking her back to your place?

Robert: Yeah, it'll be fine. Go back inside. I'll see you tomorrow.

*Robert walks off, supporting almost unconscious Rachel. Chris stares after them.*

### Scene Three

*Peter and Catherine are sitting at a table, eating dinner, not speaking.*

PETER: I spoke to Dad today?

CATHERINE: Oh yes?

PETER: He and Trish are thinking of going to Thailand for a holiday?

CATHERINE: Really? I wouldn't have thought it was their kind of place.

PETER: No.

CATHERINE: Too hot.

PETER: Yeah, and too many people.

CATHERINE: Nothing to do but swim.

PETER: Yeah.

*Silence.*

CATHERINE: I have to pick the next book for book club.

PETER: Oh yes? Any thoughts.

CATHERINE: I thought I might pick a classic. Austen or Dickens or something.

PETER: Great idea.

CATHERINE: You think?

PETER: Absoloutely, people can just watch the movies.

*Silence.*

CATHERINE: How'd Chris do in his Math test?

PETER: I don't know.

*Silence.*

PETER: I'm thinking of putting together a petition, to get one of those signs put in near the pick up area at Chris' school, the ones that say "Drive Slowly, think of our children".

CATHERINE: You think it'll change anything?

PETER: You don't?

CATHERINE: I think if the presence of kids doesn't stop people driving fast then a sign won't.

*Silence.*

#### Scene Four

*An elderly lady sits in a chair staring off into space.*

*CATHERINE enters, carrying bags, and greets her.*

CATHERINE: Hi Mum. Mum? Mum, it's me, it's Cath. How are you? The nurse said you haven't been outside today? And you didn't want to go outside yesterday? You shouldn't spend all your time cooped up in here mum. It's not good for you. You need to go outside. I brought that DVD you wanted to watch, but I think we should get outside for a bit first. I know you get cold, but we'll take a blanket. I've brought your dinner too, so you can eat that outside. Chris is at football tonight, Coach is moving him to the forward line, which is really exciting, he'll get a few more chances at goal, so we'll have to take you to the games, but only if you really try to do more stuff here Mum. You really have to let the nurses take you outside. It's good for you. Wait - Mum is this your lunch? You've barely touched it. Well you can have the fruit now, and the soup. Big dinner, but it's good for you.

#### Scene Five

*The dining table is on stage, as are cupboards downstage, as if from a pantry. Peter enters, carrying shopping bags.*

*Catherine enters behind him.*

CATHERINE: There's a letter on the table. From the school.

PETER: Should I be concerned?

CATHERINE: Maybe.

PETER: It's about Chris?

CATHERINE: Not about him as an individual.

*Reads the note. Starts putting away groceries, not looking at Catherine.*

CATHERINE: Well?

PETER: Okay, so? They're a little worried about certain behaviours and attitudes, they're trying to fix them.

CATHERINE: You don't think he's a little young to be getting a...I don't know...a...a *rape talk*.

PETER: Well, yes, but just because we think he's too young for something, doesn't mean he's not already exposed to it. Studies show -

CATHERINE- don't start on studies. We're not talking about studies, we're talking about our son, and I don't think it's appropriate that he hears about this filth.

PETER: Well that was my point, he's already hearing about "this filth". Except he's hearing about it from his friends, and from TV, video games, the back of toilet doors. Wherever. Maybe it's good that he hears it from people who are saying the right thing.

CATHERINE: Well that's just it, we don't know what they're saying.

PETER: It says they're talking about acceptable social conduct, which I'm guessing means how not to be a dickhead, the actual laws, consent, that kind of thing.

CATHERINE: None of which is an issue for Chris! He's not the kind of boy they're talking about!

PETER: I'm sure Charles Manson's mother said the same thing.

CATHERINE: Really? You think this is funny? I don't want them pouring nonsense into his head.

PETER: Pouring what nonsense? Information? Knowledge? Isn't that why we send them to schools in the first place?

CATHERINE: Not about this! This isn't relevant to him. I don't want him to feel accused, he's not the kind of boy to...I don't want him to feel he's being blamed for things he hasn't done, and wouldn't ever do. And I don't think they should be talking about sex at this age. He doesn't need to hear about it, it'll just confuse him.

PETER: Well I disagree. I don't know if you bother to read the newspaper anymore, but every week there seems to be yet another group of teenage boys who've done something stupid to a drunk teenage girl at a party and ended up in a quagmire of shit because of it. And they seem to be getting younger and younger. I don't want that to happen to Chris.

CATHERINE: It won't!

PETER: Why?! Why won't it? Where do you think these boys come from? They didn't all climb out of a sewer. Some of them had perfectly nice parents who slept comfortably at night thinking they raised perfectly nice boys -

CATHERINE: We did -

PETER: (*losing his temper and finally turning around to Catherine*) It doesn't matter! We're not the only people who influence him. We don't know what crap his friends tell him, we don't know what kind of peer pressure bullshit goes on, we actually don't know what nonsense he believes about how you treat girls in short skirts, so we tell him! We tell him what's okay! We tell him so he doesn't end up in trouble! We tell him, very clearly what's right and wrong, and what the hell he's supposed to do when other people fuck it up! We tell him so he doesn't...

CATHERINE: So he doesn't what?

PETER: Doesn't end up hating himself.

*Pause.*

PETER: (*calmer, going back to the groceries*) He's a great kid. We did well, but we owe it to him to explain the kinds of things he might be faced with, and how he should handle them. Or, in this case, sign a piece of paper so trained strangers can explain it to him.

CATHERINE: Fine. If it will make you feel better, okay.

*Pause.*

CATHERINE: But someone better be talking to the girls too, and explaining what happens if they act like sluts.

Scene Six

*Peter is sitting in an armchair, reading the newspaper clipping from the first scene. Chris enters.*

Chris: Hey Dad.

Peter: Hey, Chris. How was last night.

Chris: Yeah, okay.

Peter: Any fascinating gossip to share.

Chris: Ah...some people hooked up, some people broke up. Some of those people were the same people. You know. What are you reading?

Peter: An...obituary.

Chris: Woah...anyone I know?

Peter: No, a friend of mine from Uni. She died years ago.

Chris: How'd she die?

Peter: She killed herself.

Chris: Oh. I'm sorry.

Peter: Thank you, I appreciate that Chris.

Chris: Do you know why?

Peter: She left a note. Some things happened to her, at a party. Or, I guess, after the party.

Chris: Shit.

Peter: Chris.

Chris: Sorry, I mean...that's awful.

Peter: Yes. It should never have happened. It could have been...prevented. It *should* have been prevented.

Chris: You mean if other people had stepped in.

Peter: Yes.

*Chris is thoughtful and quiet.*

Peter: You okay?

Chris: Yeah, just thinking. What was her name?

Peter: Rachel. Her name was Rachel. She used to date Uncle Robert.

In trying to develop characterization beyond direct consideration of the focus issue, I developed a narrative of emotional distance and lack of communication between the adult characters, Peter and Catherine. This is partly because, in the previous scene between them, they were sarcastic, dismissive, and somewhat aggressive toward one another. Extrapolating on that I wrote 'Scene One', in which Peter is reluctant to go home, and 'Scene Three' in which Peter and Catherine repeatedly fail at maintaining

conversation owing to them being dismissive of each other's interests and enquiries. This provided narrative and character context for the final discussion scene, 'Scene Five'.

One major concern arose from 'Scene Four', the scene between Catherine and her mother. The scene is almost a monologue, as Catherine's mother sits silently while Catherine dictates to her what, where and how much she will eat, as well as where and how she should spend her time, all in the name of being "good for [her]". I had intended for Catherine to display a patronizing and dismissive attitude toward her mother that she learnt from her father, however I began to see unintended juxtapositions between a failure to recognize the bodily autonomy of the elderly, ill and/or disabled and the same refusal of bodily autonomy underpinning sexual assault. Catherine feels she is entitled to make decisions regarding her mother's physical care, while attitudes of entitlement strongly underscore date-rape supportive attitudes and beliefs (Hill & Fischer, 2001). This was not a juxtaposition I intended, or feel in any way qualified to make.

One concept I wanted to examine is the prevailing social and cultural myth of sexual assault being "deviant acts committed by a few bad men" (Messner, 2016, p. 57). This adherence to the 'Bad Man', or 'Monster Myth', then serves to promote the idea that rapists are "distanced from normal men" (O'Hara, 2012, p. 248), rather than rape occurring as "a normal manifestation of patriarchal masculinity" (Messner, 2016, p. 58) which should be addressed as part of "a larger effort at revolutionising gender relations" (Messner, 2016, p. 59). 'Scene Two' involves the prelude to what we can assume is an 'acquaintance rape', in which one young man, Robert, takes a highly inebriated young woman, Rachel, from a party with the intent of assaulting her. Owing to a sense of sexual entitlement drawn from traditional constructs of masculinity (Hill & Fischer, 2001) Robert himself does not recognise this as a criminal act of sexual violence, and his friend, Chris, is also confused as to whether the action merits intervention. The final image of 'Scene Two' is Chris staring after his friend, uncertain as to what he should do.

The events of 'Scene Two' are not as literal as they first seem, within the narrative. In fact, as is revealed in 'Scene Six', it is actually Peter, not Chris, who failed to prevent the sexual assault of the young Rachel. What is not made clear is whether 'Scene Two' represents a similar occurrence in Chris' life, a perpetuation of silence condoning sexual violence, whether it is a representation of Peter's fears for his son, or whether the actor playing Chris simply plays a young Peter for the sake of age-appropriate casting. In any case the events of 'Scene Two', and the fact that Rachel later kills herself, apparently in response to being sexually assaulted, inform the characterisation of Peter and the discussion in 'Scene Five'.

In 'Scene Five', I aimed to reduce the didactic nature of the scene by limiting the scope of the discussion. In the previous draft the characters had a fairly all-encompassing discussion of issues relating to rape culture, from victim blaming and perpetrator exoneration (Bieneck & Krahe, 2011), toxic masculinity and entitlement (Hill & Fischer, 2001), alcohol related date-rape acceptance (Grubb & Turner, 2012), and the dangers of believing that 'good boys/men' are not in need of gender equality and sexual conduct education (Messner, 2016). In this version, 'Scene Five', Peter and Catherine are less articulate and knowledgeable about the specific aspects of rape culture, and the discussion focuses more on their emotional responses to the prospect of their son receiving education about 'rape culture', and the insinuation that he is in need of such training. Owing to the events in 'Scene Two' the debate in 'Scene Five' is also informed by the presumption that Chris is, in fact, faced with issues of sexual violence already, that a lack of understanding has already left him unsure as to whether or not to act. While his parents debate whether or not information on gender relations, sexual violence and socio-sexual conduct is relevant, a potential audience is aware that these issues are already influencing Chris' life and relationships. It is not, however, Chris who failed to protect Rachel. It was Peter, and the guilt he carries, that is evident in his emotional response to the discussion, as is the anger he feels for not doing the right thing, for not knowing what the right thing to do was, and in his desire for his son to be educated so he never faces the same situation. Emotion and experience drive Peter's responses in the scene, not socio-humanitarian polemic.

Another element of 'Scene Five' that differed to the previous draft is making Catherine the parent in opposition to Chris' being involved in a 'rape culture' education program, and demonstrating overt victim blaming beliefs "But someone better be talking to the girls too, and explaining what to expect if they act like sluts." There is, understandably, a strong focus on male beliefs, behaviours and rape myth acceptance, which is the extent to which they agree and normalize with rape myths such as victim blaming, perpetrator exoneration, male entitlement to female bodies and beyond. Studies, however, indicate that rape myth acceptance is also prevalent amongst women, particularly women who demonstrate benevolent sexism in the form of high maternalism toward men (Chapleau et al., 2007, p. 131). Catherine represents the belief in the 'Monster Myth', that only truly evil men commit rape, that her son is inherently good, and that any suggestion he might be capable of sexual assault is immediately projected as blame onto potential victims. My aim in capturing this character trait was to suggest that Catherine reinforces gender expectations of maternal compassion to such an extent that the reader/audience is made to feel uncomfortable enough to understand that this decision is ironic, and that perhaps they will go on to question their own perception of rape-supportive belief systems.

One aspect of my creative practice that I did note throughout this section of the research is that I was consistently developing character and narrative in such a way as to inform or support the socio-humanitarian agenda. I found it difficult to separate character and plot from their potential influence on the reading of the issues explored. For example, while writing 'Scene Three' which highlighted the emotional distance between Peter and Catherine I found myself concerned that this narrative and character context altered potential understandings of the focus issue in 'Scene Five'; namely that the discussion could be dismissed as a manifestation of marital discord rather than thoughtfully considered as an issue-driven debate. Helen Freshwater says of audience reception theory it "is important to remember that each audience is made up of individuals who bring their own cultural reference points, political beliefs, sexual preferences, personal histories and immediate preoccupations to their interpretation of a production" (2009, p. 6), and it is my view that characterization must be considered in

the same multi-dimensional sense when in a naturalistic genre. If an audience “play[s] the role of active interpreters” whose “responses cannot be (and should not be) anticipated by the artwork itself” (Spencer, 2012, p. 21), then as much as is possible characters should be written with similar psychological and emotional autonomy. As much as reception and response to any given socio-humanitarian issue will be filtered through the individual social, political and personal paradigm of writer, performer, director, designer and audience member the fictional characters must also respond to the issues, particularly as they are ‘lived’ in the action, through their own individual paradigm. If characterization (in the naturalism and realism genre) is written simply to serve a socio-humanitarian agenda then it will be ‘flat’, lacking in emotional and psychological complexity, and the meaning will ultimately seem forced as all theatrical constructs, characterization, plot, and dialogue, are in service to polemic.

I did find this particular section of the research, the development of realistic or naturalistic socio-humanitarian drama through a focus on the ‘lived’ experience of the issues for the characters, to be an enormous challenge and hence also beneficial to my creative practice. This was also true of a focus on discussions being driven by emotional and psychological response to these ‘lived’ issues, and equal debate on the issues. Certainly I perceive an improvement, an added complexity, to my writing of naturalistic socio-humanitarian drama, and for any other theatre-makers drawn to this form I believe the concepts outlined to be foundational in the development of naturalistic practice. I perceive, however, weaknesses in my own practice of this form still. Difficulties in separating socio-humanitarian agenda from characterization and plot, which must be developed as much for themselves as the thematic concerns, result in writing that that is still, although to a lesser extent, limited artistically and overly didactic.

## Chapter Two: Collaborative Genesis

The next section of research involved experimentation with exercises that engaged several collaborators as an initial development point, as opposed to single-writer practice that engages others in workshop with work that is at least partially developed already. Over the course of two days, August 17<sup>th</sup> 2014, and September 14<sup>th</sup> 2014, I engaged three performers to experiment with different methods of what I refer to as “collaborative genesis” theatre-making. What I mean by “collaborative genesis” is that a number of performers are involved with the creation and development of a scene, or thematic construct, at initial conception. This was the reasoning for having a short intensive – so that I could spend substantial time reflecting and writing from this departure point, rather than a longer series of workshops where we perhaps devised the work together in a lengthy co-authoring forum. Theatre-making is often collaborative at some stage, a script will be reviewed by a dramaturg, or readings will be conducted prior to final drafts and/or the rehearsal of a single author piece. The act of rehearsal itself, the inclusion of other creative voices, actors, sound, light and costume designers all shape a work that started ‘on the page’. ‘Collaborative genesis’, in this context, denotes a process in which a collective of performers are involved in shaping the thematic, creative and theatrical elements of a piece from its earliest stage. For the purposes of this research the aim was to investigate how these ‘collaborative genesis’ processes helped develop creative writing practice and research processes.

Before I delve deeper into an examination of the creative aspects of these workshops I will first discuss their facilitation. I was adopting methods and concepts utilized by companies such as *version 1.0*, *The Civilians* and *Frantic Assembly*. All three companies initially start with research by a number of people, and then within different roles and through varying techniques come together to collaborate on the creation of theatre works, a process which can take years, at the very least months (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 5; Kozinn, 2010, p. 189; Rossmanith, 2013, p. 181). In a version of their manifesto *version 1.0* described their process as “time expensive” (Rossmanith, 2013, p. 184). Owing to the difference in time-frame, and the specifics of varying source

materials, collaborators and performance styles, for the most part I have adapted the exercises used by these companies. They are employed here in the spirit of inspiration rather than strict emulation. In addition to having limited time and resources to support a lengthy development period this was ostensibly a research project in dramatic writing and thus I wanted to investigate the collaborative inception point and then move on from here to solo writing tasks.

On August 17<sup>th</sup> 2014, I gathered together with three performers, all of whom had varying degrees of acting and writing experience. I will refer to them as Christine, Jeffrey and Robert, not their real names, as they have requested anonymity. It is interesting to note that this request for anonymity came only at the end of workshops, following the discussion of personal stories and beliefs, which gives some indication of the emotive, sometimes polarizing nature, and all too common occurrence, of this issue. To begin with we sat together and discussed, at length, the issues surrounding and supporting rape culture. In order for this process to be a true 'collaborative genesis' the performers needed a reasonably in-depth understanding of the kinds of themes and issues that perpetuate and veil this culture. During the development of *Deeply Offensive and Utterly Untrue* (Williams, 2012), focusing on the 'wheat for weapons' scandal, each ensemble member of *version 1.0* had "read, processed and memorized huge sections of the 8,500 page Inquiry and the events surrounding it" (Rossmannith, 2013, p. 182). *A Certain Maritime Incident* (Williams, 2012), was initially developed by 10 performers who meticulously combed the 140 hours of Parliamentary Inquiry for the subtleties in culture and politics that would inspire a gripping and nuanced play-script (Williams, 2008). In the pioneer verbatim or documentary theatre work by Tectonic Theatre *The Laramie Project* collaborators visited Laramie six times over the course of sixteen months, conducted over 200 interviews and devoted months to the editing and theatrical construction of the play (Wake, 2010a, p. 25). Artistic Director of *The Civilians*, Steve Crossan, develops the foundation of his work from the extensive research and interviews conducted by fellow ensemble members (Kozinn, 2010). We focused on the common pillars of culture that still allow for so much sexual violence toward women, many of which were understood, either consciously, or through previously unexamined

lived experience, by all collaborators involved. For example, all of us present had heard, or even told, a seemingly 'harmless' joke in which women were demeaned or objectified. Everyone had seen marketing campaigns based on the objectification of women's bodies, in their entirety or, more disturbing, magnified to separate body parts. We discussed cultural norms such as these in detail. What are we really saying about the female body when we so casually use it to sell everything from cars to alcohol? Jokes such as "9 of out 10 people enjoy gang-rape" are laughed off as "harmless", yet would we blithely mock other victims of a violence pandemic or if we knew someone who was the victim of gang rape? The various aspects and concerns of 'rape culture' are myriad, some more entrenched and veiled, hidden behind frequent behaviors, or unexamined beliefs, others more obvious and widely acknowledged. While many of these behaviours and attitudes were immediately recognized by all of us as aspects of rape culture, there were elements that some of us, including myself, had never before encountered or heard of. For example one participant spoke of feeling repeatedly pressured by several different sexual partners into forgoing use of a condom during sexual encounters, a 'trend' referred to a "stealthling" (Maullin, 2017; Williams, 2017). This particular collaborator spoke of the sense of entitlement these partners had felt with regards to their own sexual pleasure, prioritizing it over the safety, health and emotional comfort of sexual partners.

In addition to this already complicated discussion we also examined and discussed statistics, concepts and specific cases that were quite shocking and emotionally disturbing to the other performers. All members of the collaborative team were inspired many times throughout the workshop to express their experience of an issue under discussion. This emotive response, whether based in anger, fear, grief etc., must be acknowledged as an important part of the collaborative process. Our creativity does not exist in a vacuum, we have already established that it is fuelled by an intellectual understanding of the research, and so too is it fuelled by the emotional response of collaborators. We bring to the process a shared humanity, on some level we all know what it is to be frightened or in pain, but we also bring our subjective and individual

experiences. It is all of these elements, the intellectual, the professional, the universal, and the personal that contributed to the role of each member of our collaboration.

We began each creative section of the workshop with a specific creative construct and thematic concern in mind. We began with an adaptation of an exercise utilized by *The Civilians*, in which their ensemble members, having a focus issue, conduct an interview with a subject connected to this issue, and then perform these interviews shortly afterwards just from memory. This allows for a distillation of character or concept, an “initial and instinctual response” that can then be used further in the improvisation, or script writing process (Kozinn, 2010, p. 190). I found this idea incredibly interesting because one issue I have struggled with in my creative practice is that it is easy to become overwhelmed by the innumerable facets of an issue. While writing *Invisible* (Dow-Hall, 2011), looking at the issues facing those accessing a free mobile health clinic, an excerpt of which is at the beginning of this dissertation, I researched aspects and personal stories contributing to homelessness, such as drug and alcohol abuse, mental illness, abandonment, parental and spousal abuse, debilitating disease, trauma associated with the Stolen Generation, and intellectual and physical disability. Then I tried to write a theatrical piece, but I had no idea where to begin. I didn’t want to leave any aspect out, whether it was statistics or a personal story. I felt that if I didn’t acknowledge every story then I was dishonouring the source, and presenting a half-truth to any future audience. In the end my ‘characters’ were little more than names printed on pages above long, impersonal, convoluted and, ultimately, counter-productive accounts of vulnerability and dispossession. The aim of this particular collaborative exercise was to explore if actor based improvisation as a genesis or inspiration point would place character at the heart of the scene, rather than as a secondary function to socio-humanitarian agenda. The foundation of this exercise is to ascertain what aspects of a focus issue most engaged the performer, the assumption being this would be the information they would retain from one interview. Rather than attempting to provide an all-encompassing analysis of rape culture, this exercise distilled the information to the elements that most interested, shocked, or moved my co-collaborators. These would then provide the basis for further improvisation,

characterisation and scene development.

I adapted the exercise from *The Civilians* and instead of asking Christine, Jeffrey and Robert to find people to interview I provided them each with an excerpt of testimony taken from a study done in New Zealand on how the treatment of female rape complainants by police, specifically whether or not the police were perceived by the complainants to have believed their accounts, affected the women's willingness to officially press charges (Jordan, 2004). This was a particularly interesting study as it contained statements from both complainants and police. I asked the performers to familiarize themselves with the testimony, and then extrapolate from their "initial and instinctive response" to develop a character, which we then used as the foundation for several improvisations. In her discussion of witness and spectator theories in theatre and performance studies Caroline Wake proffers a distinction between the two "in that we are spectators in the moment but witnesses in and through time. In essence, when witnessing a performance the spectator experiences a sort of "after-affect" rather than simply experiencing affect during the performance or the after effects of that affect" (Wake, 2009, p. 4). Wake is referring to an audience as spectator, not performer, but I believe this exercise is predicated on the witness/spectator distinction that Wake outlines, with the inversion of the spectator for the devising collaborator. These performer/devisors were witnesses to the survivor and police testimony, but the basis for their improvisations was the resulting spectatorial after-affects. Their representation of the survivors and police are filtered through this "after-affect", they are the elements of the testimony that most engaged them and shaped their perception of the information provided.

Two of the texts of testimony presented were from complainants of sexual assault, and the third was that of a male police officer. The following text known as testimonial text one helped to inform a character later to be known as Emma (the same as in the testimonial from the New Zealand study) and reads as follows:

What really worried me was that after two hours of sitting there going through all this the gentleman said to me, (Emma), have you really been raped? I just about exploded...When he said, Were you really raped? I said, Ha ha, of course

not! I wake up at 4 o'clock every morning and I think, What am I going to talk about this morning at morning tea? And this morning I thought I'd say, Oh, yes, I've been raped! I was just spitting. I was so angry (that's why ) I just said, Yes, I've made the whole thing up! I think that was something that they really couldn't understand, that I was so calm. There were no tears, there was no hysteria, there was nothing, and I think they couldn't accept that I wasn't dissolving. (Jordan, 2004, p. 3)

Testimonial text two informed the character that later came to be known as Anne and reads as follows:

I didn't have any trouble convincing them about anything so I was fairly lucky about that...the police already knew him as a sex offender...I didn't have to make them believe me, and I know a lot of women do, and have to prove their victimization, prove their sufferance...I think I would have had a completely different experience if it hadn't been so cut and dried. It could have been ghastly, so you got to get lucky about how it happens! (Jordan, 2004, p. 3)

Testimonial text three came to be known as Detective Ian:

I suspect that there's probably a lot of that sort of non consensual sex happening in relationships.... I mean, it's going to sound awful but I call that a non consensual sexual encounter as opposed to rape. You know what I mean and I know it's probably semantics, isn't it, and it's only playing with words. I mean, rape to me is what the Rewa victims went through and what Thompson's victims go through. Whereas some woman who's living in a relationship, if she's living with a guy who's violent towards her, I mean, she has options. (Jordan, 2004, p. 15)

The improvisations that were inspired by the testimonies from the New Zealand study resulted in three distinct characters, with three distinct areas of focus or interest, and we took these characters and continued improvising in a number of settings. We improvised scenes in which 'Anne' and 'Emma', having had two very different experiences with the police, confess to friends and family about having been assaulted, and deal with the varying responses. At this early stage we found that the issues overwhelmed the characterization and that in an eagerness to examine issues such as victim blaming and abuser justification characters became, as I had so often found in

solo writing, somewhat one-dimensional and thematically demonstrative, with dialogue that was overly self-aware in the discussion of theme. For example –

Script excerpt 7 Emma and Friend

Friend: What were you wearing?

Emma: What's that got to do with anything?

Friend: Well, maybe he thought you were...you know...good for it?

Emma: Good for it?

Friend: I just mean, sometimes it's hard to tell a girl like you apart from the skanks, I'm not blaming you, I just-

Emma: Really? I'd hate to hear what blame sounds like. It doesn't matter what I was wearing, I didn't deserve...that.

By conducting both sides of the victim blaming conversation there is a sense that we're telling an audience what to think, as if they're incapable of their own assessment of how these women were being treated. The actors had developed strong characters from their instinctual responses to the interviews, as was the aim of the exercise, but these characters were too articulate in their discussion of the issues, too self-aware, and thus too prescriptive with regards to meaning. This was most apparent in the scenes with the police detective Ian, developed by Jeffrey. I think it was particularly difficult for the actor to separate the issue from the character because in our initial discussions we looked at Jordan's research into the importance of a complainant's perception as to whether the police believe in the veracity of their complaint or not, and the effect on their pursuing justice, including the opinions of several police officers as to the percentage of rape complaints that are false. The actual statistic is between 2-8% (Lonsway, Archambault, & Lisak, 2009, p. 2), but in Jordan's research the officers professed beliefs that women made false rape accusations between 20-80% of the time

(2004, p. 15). The time between the discussion of those statistics and the improvisation of the Detective Ian's character was a matter of hours, so there was a sense of the improvisations being saturated with a determined demonstration of misogyny and insensitivity.

We continued with the improvisations, with the idea that they were for exploring character, not discussing issues. We placed them all in situations surrounding the assault, i.e. police captain asking for an update on a rape complaint Ian and a younger detective are handling, or Emma having a medical examination following the assault, but tried to reference the issues as little as possible. So, for example, Anne had to explain to her mother that she had been sexually assaulted without saying the words "rape" or "sexual assault" –

*Script excerpt 8 Anne and Mum*

Anne: Mum I need to tell you something.

Mum: All right, is everything okay.

Anne: Yes, and no. Can you have a seat?

*Mum sits*

Anne: First of all, I want you to know that I'm fine, and I...I'll be okay.

Mum: Anne..I..

Anne: Mum, I was attacked.

Mum: Attacked? Where?

Anne: Two nights ago, in the city.

Mum: What happened?

Anne: I was walking back to my car when this guy grabbed me, pulled me down a side street and...

*Pause*

Mum: Anne are you trying to tell me you were...raped?

*Anne nods, her mother absorbs this news, and takes her hand.*

Mum: I'm so sorry.

Anne: It's okay Mum, I'm okay.

Mum: Have you been to...have you told the police?

Anne: Yeah, yeah, they know the guy.

Mum: They know him?

Anne: I mean, he's done it before, I guess, to other women.

Mum: Then why isn't he in prison?

Anne: I don't know Mum, I didn't ask.

Mum: If they know...I mean he should be in prison, he should be...

Anne: It's okay Mum. It's good, in its own way.

Mum: Good?

Anne: Not good...I just...sometimes they don't believe...it can be difficult for some women to prove they're a...a...victim...

*Her mother looks confused, Anne explains further, tired.*

Anne: The fact that he's done it before, that they already know he's a...sex offender...it means I don't have to prove it happened. They know I'm not lying.

*Pause.*

Mum: Why would you be lying?

Anne: I don't know Mum, I..ah...I don't know.

*Pause.*

Mum: What happens now.

Anne: Ah, I...I don't know. I, ah, I talked to police. I had..ah..tests done.

Mum: Tests? Do you mean...do you think you might have caught something?

Anne: They do tests for evidence Mum...take photos...of bruises and cuts, and the doctor has to write up...a...a report of my...of the injuries, and yes, they do tests for...diseases.

*Pause*

Mum: What about pregnancy?

Ane: Morning after pill.

*Pause*

Mum: When will you know about the diseases?

Anne: I'll get results this week. Then I'll take the tests again in three months. Then again six months after that.

*Anne's mother starts to cry, and Anne holds her, stroking her hair.*

With this scene, a verbatim transcript of the improvisation, I felt we had a stronger sense of who these characters were, and how they could be written into longer narratives in future solo author writing. Anne was determined not to be a victim, determined that her assault wouldn't overwhelm her life, determined to be as helpful as possible, as calm as possible within an impossibly confusing situation. There was a great sense of Anne's exhaustion that began to emerge from this early development stage, exhaustion with the legal process, exhaustion with the process of pretending to be fine for everyone around her. It is all too easy, I think, to focus on the initial horror of assault, but the ramifications for survivors, their friends and family, their interpersonal relationships are manifold and long-felt. Steve Crossan from *The Civilians* uses the exercise from which I had adapted the above to access a performer's instinct regarding an issue/subject to develop characters and ideas that inspire more text based work (Kozinn, 2010, p. 190), and I could certainly see the potential for that in our work. When I originally discovered the factual text by 'Anne' I was struck by her description of her sexual assault as "lucky", because she didn't have to convince the police that she was attacked, and I wanted to find a way to highlight that awful irony in the dramatic writing. It is the characterization of Anne imbedded in the writing, coming from the actors improvisation, which best highlights that irony though. As we watch a woman experiencing dreadful pain, and a mother's nightmare, it's not necessary to *explain* to an

audience the tragedy of a society so mired in victim blame that women must prove their victimhood.

We took this notion of 'irrefutable victimhood' into an improvisation involving the character based on Detective Ian, referred to as Jeffrey, and a young woman who we established would have obvious physical injuries, so that there could be no question of her victimhood. Robert took the part of the young woman in this improvisation. This representation of 'Robert' as a young female survivor of sexual assault was not intended to be stylised or involve archetypal gender affectations. The scene was played for naturalistic emotional integrity, and the fact that 'Robert' is female is evident through content, rather than performance. The aim in a performance context would be to invite consideration of how gender impacts narrative and context, and their reception by the audience. How does it alter the scene to have a man play Rachel? What does it change for an audience to see a man speak of violation and sexual objectification? How does our response differ when a man is required to justify sneaking out of home, wearing a tight skirt or drinking alcohol? Does our response, as a community both within a performance space and as larger society, to watching a victim recount, in exhaustive detail, the events of their victimisation change when done so by a man? Does having a female sexual assault survivor played by a male performer force us to question the systematic gender inequality that is foundational to sexual violence? The intent was to place gender at the forefront of a consideration of 'rape culture'. That is not to suggest that men are not subject to sexual violence, or victim blaming. The notion of 'rape culture' however identifies a persistent normalisation of sexual violence toward women, and the ideology that supports it. By subverting the gender of performer and character the intent was to destabilise this normalisation.

This was our longest improvisation, about 22 minutes long, and the following is a direct transcript of the improvisation:

Script excerpt 9 When? What? Where? Who? Why? How?

CHRISTINE: Thanks for coming in today. Umm, we appreciate what's gone on for you. We just really want to find out, to talk to you, ah, find out exactly what your account of it is. Obviously, we need to get a statement from you, the first thing we need to do just to talk you through that. You're here on your own today. Okay, so we're just going to use this recording, make sure all bases are covered. So firstly, we must start with, what is the date of the incident you're talking about.

ROBERT: Thursday, two weeks ago. No, no sorry, it was a Friday...Friday, Friday two weeks ago.

JEFFREY: You're sure of that? Friday? The 5<sup>th</sup>?

ROBERT: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Um...And where were you? When the incident occurred?

ROBERT: At..I was at a party...with some of the boys from...from my school...and...they're two forms above me.

CHRISTINE: Okay so umm -

JEFFREY: Where was the party?

ROBERT: Umm...(giggles uncomfortably)...um...

JEFFREY: Was it a house party?

ROBERT: Yeah.

JEFFREY: Do you know the address?

ROBERT: I don't...I don't want to say the address.

CHRISTINE: It's just important that you tell us everything that you can so that we can, ah, obviously make sure that we do our job properly. Cause you have come in here so obviously there's something of concern...to you...

ROBERT: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: And our job is just to get all the details we can, we appreciate it is difficult.

ROBERT: It was in North Perth.

CHRISTINE: And had you been there before?

ROBERT: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: You have? Okay. And why have you gone there previously?

ROBERT: Ah...just...I liked one of the older boys and he invited me home. Just to...look to look his playstation.

CHRISTINE: And um... did anything of a sexual nature happen previously to this night?

ROBERT: No.

CHRISTINE: No? Okay.

ROBERT: He...I think...he...he...might have put his arm around me but we didn't kiss or anything like that.

CHRISTINE: So nothing you would consider of a sexual nature?

ROBERT: Is that sexual? I don't know. He just put his arm around me.

CHRISTINE: Where exactly did he put his arm?

ROBERT: It was there.

CHRISTINE: Okay, on your arm?

ROBERT: He was there.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

ROBERT: But he didn't do it for long, cause I got a bit frightened.

CHRISTINE: You got frightened?

ROBERT: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Okay. And what's this boys name?

ROBERT: (*whispered*) David.

JEFFREY: So what time's this, roughly, the party? Do you know what time you got there?

ROBERT: My parents didn't want me going and so I waited until they were in bed...and it was probably...11:30? No, no, no,

no, it was after the buses had finished, so it would have been...12...12:30?

JEFFREY: Do you do that a lot? Sneak out of home, at night times?

ROBERT: No they just -

JEFFREY: Have you done it before?

ROBERT: Yeah, the last time was to his house.

JEFFREY: So you've snuck out of home before, late at night, and gone to this boy's house?

ROBERT: Yeah but it wasn't late at night, I just said I was going out to the shops and I wasn't gone very long...I was only gone about an hour. I have to, my parents, their rules are so...I can't do anything. I can't go out with my friends. Can't go out on the weekends, can't do anything.

CHRISTINE: So did you go to the party because you knew that your parents wouldn't like that then?

ROBERT: No, I went to the party because my friends were there. And David was there and maybe I wanted him to put his arms around me again. I don't know.

CHRISTINE: But you knew that was breaking the rules of what your parents thought was right?

ROBERT: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: You did?

*Pause.*

CHRISTINE: I know this is hard. We know this is hard.

JEFFREY: Any other people at the party that you knew other than David?

ROBERT: (*getting emotional*) Not really, I know some of his friends, but I don't really talk to them.

JEFFREY: People drinking?

ROBERT: Yeah.

JEFFREY: Were you drinking?

ROBERT: Maybe one or two.

JEFFREY: One or two?...Beers...wines? UDL's.

ROBERT: Vodka and lemonade I think. I hadn't had a drink before.

CHRISTINE: You hadn't had a drink before that..that night? So you have drunk before though?

ROBERT: No.

CHRISTINE: No? And who gave you the alcohol?

ROBERT: David.

CHRISTINE: David did.

ROBERT: David first, then his mate Robbie did it. Kept getting me...kept getting them.

CHRISTINE: And did you at any point think that it wasn't a good idea to have those drinks?

ROBERT: No, I wanted them to like me.

CHRISTINE: How much older are these boys than you? How old are these boys?

ROBERT: 16...maybe 17. And one had an older brother there, I think he was 20, it was at his house.

JEFFREY: Did you do anything else other than drink at this party? Were there any drugs...marijuana? Pills of any sort? Anything like that?

*Pause.*

JEFFREY: We're not going to arrest you for that. You're not in trouble-

ROBERT: No-

JEFFREY: Nothing, you didn't see anyone else doing anything like that?

*Robert shakes her head.*

CHRISTINE: You're absolutely sure?

*Robert nods.*

CHRISTINE: Okay. Okay so now we're going to have to get you to talk us through exactly what happened. So, um, talk us through the incident, the...ah, we appreciate this is difficult, but we just need you to tell us exactly what went on.

ROBERT: The boys were playing playstation...and I was watching, and Dave's brother wanted a go, so Dave...pause...Dave gave him the controller, and he said do you want to see my music, and I said yeah, so we went to his bedroom.

JEFFREY: This is Dave's bedroom?

ROBERT: Yeah, and ah...we got in and he put his arm around me immediately, he didn't show me his music, and I thought it was nice, because I really like him, he's older and he's cool and he smokes.

CHRISTINE: You did say before that when he had put his arm around you it scared you, so what was different about this time?

ROBERT: When I got thinking about it afterwards I thought it was, it wasn't scary, he's a really nice guy, and it felt nice actually, I was just, cause I haven't had it done before, I thought it would be, I wanted it to happen again.

CHRISTINE: So it actually, it felt good the first time when you thought it had frightened you, or you mean this time?

ROBERT: After I thought about it I thought it was probably good and I was only frightened 'cause I hadn't done it before.

JEFFREY: Did the alcohol make you feel different? You felt normal?

*ROBERT shrugs*

CHRISTINE: And what were you wearing?

ROBERT: A short skirt, and my sister's high heels that don't really fit me.

CHRISTINE: And what colour was the skirt?

ROBERT: Black, black pencil skirt.

CHRISTINE: Pencil skirt. So it's quite a tight skirt then?

ROBERT: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: Would you say it's, umm, like when you put it on, would you say it's difficult to get on or-

ROBERT: It has a zip.

CHRISTINE: It has a zip.

JEFFREY: And this was the skirt, what were you wearing on top.

ROBERT: White top.

CHRISTINE: White top. And could you describe the top?

ROBERT: It's kinda gotta a big fat collar that kinda comes down here, a little bit.

CHRISTINE: Would you say it, um, shows your cleavage.

ROBERT: *Laughs*, don't really have any, but yeah, a little bit.

CHRISTINE: Okay, so he's taken you into his room, put his arm around you, what happened next?

ROBERT: He kissed me.

CHRISTINE: He kissed you.

JEFFREY: Where did he kiss you?

ROBERT: On the lips.

CHRISTINE: And that was okay with you?

ROBERT: Yeah. Felt nice.

JEFFREY: You sure?

ROBERT: M-hmm

CHRISTINE: And then what happened?

ROBERT: Then Robbie came in and he said "so you gonna do it"? To David, he wasn't even looking at me. I said "what"? Dave said "will you shut the door".

CHRISTINE: So Dave said shut the door?

ROBERT: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: To Robbie?

ROBERT: Yeah.

CHRISTINE: And did he do that?

ROBERT: Mhm.

CHRISTINE: And did you feel - and how did you feel at the time?

ROBERT: Frightened (*starts to cry*).

CHRISTINE: You felt frightened.

JEFFREY: And did you say anything to Dave or to Robbie?

ROBERT: No.

JEFFREY: So did they know you were frightened?

ROBERT: Uh-huh.

JEFFREY: They did? And how did you think they knew?

ROBERT: Cause I wasn't saying anything.

*Pause.*

JEFFREY: Where you crying or anything?...That might have told them you were uncomfortable?

ROBERT: No, maybe.

*Roberts moves as if to leave.*

CHRISTINE: Just have a seat, have a seat.

ROBERT: Dave pulled my top down and he pulled my bra down and I was embarrassed and I think I probably started crying then.

CHRISTINE: Did you ask him to not do that?

ROBERT: No.

JEFFREY: So at this point, you're standing? With your...breasts exposed, no top on, or pulled down. Is that correct?

*Robert nods.*

JEFFREY: But you didn't say anything to them?

CHRISTINE: So you're standing...I just want to check, I thought you said before you were sitting on the bed and he put his arm around you.

ROBERT: No.

CHRISTINE: No you didn't say that?

ROBERT: Maybe?

CHRISTINE: I wrote here that you did, what did you -

JEFFREY: I don't have anything about being on the bed, she's in the bedroom.

CHRISTINE: Okay.

JEFFREY: So what was Robbie doing during this point, while Dave was taking your top off?

ROBERT: Looking.

JEFFREY: Was he standing, blocking the door or anything, do you know if the door was locked?

ROBERT: Didn't have a lock.

*Pause, lots of writing.*

JEFFREY: You didn't say anything? About being scared or uncomfortable?

CHRISTINE: And then what happened?

ROBERT: Robbie was laughing

CHRISTINE: He was laughing. And where was Dave's brother?

ROBERT: Don't know.

CHRISTINE: You don't know. Did you think to call out?

*Pause. Robert says nothing.*

CHRISTINE: Okay, so...

ROBERT: I was on the bed and -

JEFFREY: Did one of the boys move you to the bed, or did you go of your own accord?

ROBERT: Dave, he pressed up against me, and I kinda fell.

JEFFREY: So would you say he pushed you onto the bed?

*Robert nods.*

CHRISTINE: And where exactly did he touch you when that happened?

ROBERT: *(Quietly)* On my breasts.

CHRISTINE: On your breasts. So he actually pushed you from that position?

ROBERT: Mh-Hmm.

JEFFREY: And was this with his hands?

ROBERT: He...put...his mouth...on my breast...And I tried to push his head away.

JEFFREY: And what happened when you tried to push him away?

*Robert shakes head and shrugs.*

JEFFREY: He didn't go?

ROBERT: No.

JEFFREY: Did you continue to try and push him off?

ROBERT: Yeah.

JEFFREY: So you kept trying to shove him away while he was doing this?

ROBERT: Yeah but...I'm...I'm not very strong.

JEFFREY: No, I understand.

CHRISTINE: And where was Robbie while this was happening?

ROBERT: Watching.

CHRISTINE: Watching...he was watching still.

JEFFREY: And he didn't try to step in or stop anything?

ROBERT: No...no.

JEFFREY: So what happened after that?

ROBERT: David, he, pulled my...my panties down and ah...he took his thing out...

CHRISTINE: His...his penis?

*Robert nods.*

CHRISTINE: Yeah? Sorry, we need you to...say that's what...that's what it was. We appreciate it's -

*Pause.*

JEFFREY: Could you just verbalise that, for the recording.

*Pause.*

ROBERT: (*Quietly and quickly*) He took his penis out.

JEFFREY: Now at this point, try to remember, was he erect?

ROBERT: Yeah.

JEFFREY: He was?

CHRISTINE: Which hand did he have it in?

ROBERT: I don't know

*Pause.*

CHRISTINE: See if you can just take a moment to remember -

ROBERT: No, he didn't have it in his hand. He had his arms up here, around me.

CHRISTINE: So when you say he took it out -

ROBERT: He took it out, and then he let it go and put his arms around me like that.

JEFFREY: Did he just - did he take any clothes off?

ROBERT: No.

CHRISTINE: We do appreciate this is difficult, we just need to clarify a few things, so did he have a zip, or was it buttons, or what was -

ROBERT: He was wearing jeans.

CHRISTINE: Jeans.

ROBERT: With a button and a zip. And he had a belt as well.

CHRISTINE: A belt.

JEFFREY: He was wearing jeans with buttons and a zip?

ROBERT: No, one button and a zip...like most jeans...I think.

CHRISTINE: You think.

ROBERT: I think so.

CHRISTINE: And so you say he had his hands down, were you across the bed, or were you laying down lengthways?

*Robert shakes her head, she is getting more and more upset.*

CHRISTINE: And where were your hands at this time?

ROBERT: I don't know.

CHRISTINE: You don't know where they were?

ROBERT: *(breaking down)* No

JEFFREY: And did you try anymore to push him off you-

ROBERT: I said stop.

JEFFREY: You told him to stop.

ROBERT: I did. I said stop.

CHRISTINE: And that's the exact word you used?

JEFFREY: Did you say it more than once?

ROBERT: I don't know.

JEFFREY: Do you think he heard you say stop?

ROBERT: I don't know.

JEFFREY: What happened next?

*Pause.*

JEFFREY: You don't remember?

CHRISTINE: Just take a moment.

ROBERT: He hurt me.

CHRISTINE: How did he hurt you?

ROBERT: Do you have a tissue?

*Pause.*

JEFFREY: How did he hurt you?

ROBERT: Down...there.

JEFFREY: With his hands?

ROBERT: No.

JEFFREY: With his penis?

ROBERT: Yeah.

*Pause*

JEFFREY: Did he insert his penis into you?

ROBERT: (*quietly*) Yeah.

JEFFREY: He did?

CHRISTINE: Is that what hurt?

JEFFREY: And just to be clear, this was in to your vagina?

ROBERT: (*quietly*) Shut up.

This improvisation, transcribed verbatim above, was long, relentless, intrusive, uncomfortable, and very upsetting for all of us in the room. Observing on the day, and later listening to the recording, I was struck with the idea that this scene captured an essence of what these proceedings must feel like for some survivors. Twenty minutes is a mere fraction of the time a real police interview may take, but as a piece of theatre it felt interminable. I must note that the real power in this scene came from the actors, Christine and Jeffrey played the interviewing officers, and Robert playing the young assault survivor. I have tried to describe the moments of hesitation, discomfort, and disapproval through pauses and ellipses to indicate hesitation, faltering speech and so on, but you cannot quite capture in text what was conveyed in person. It brings to mind a quote from Anna Deveare Smith that “the not-said is as important as the said... In authentic speak, it is what is felt that is transmitted” (2000, p. 861). Like *The Civilians* Smith’s process begins with interviews, however rather than an inspiration point, these interviews are the entirety of her performance text. Her characters are not inspired by

her subject, but are as exact a representation of them as she can possibly recreate vocally, physically and emotionally (Martin, 2006, p. 82). Smith edits the testimony she receives into a dramatic text (Smith, 2000, p. 3752), as do most theatre-makers who work with true testimony (Wake, 2010b, p. 3). Smith searches for passages that reflect “the psychological and social throughline of each speaker” (Martin, 2006, p. 83). Smith’s focus in this process is a search for authenticity, for “that genuine moment, that ‘real’ connection” (2000, p. 251), for “authentic speech...speech that had the possibility of breaking through the walls of the listener, speech that could get to your heart, and beyond that to someplace else in your consciousness” (2000, p. 1123). While this exercise was not based on Smith’s methods, I felt this particular improvisation captured the concept of the ‘authentic’, although perhaps not the authenticity of the original subject so much as the authentic response of the performers. I believe this improvisation captured both Crossan’s “initial and instinctive response” and a form of the spectatorial “after-affect” that Wake discusses, that in this case they may be the same process; the instinctive, authentic, visceral response of the *improvisers*. The improvisers were, in this case, the spectators, responding to material that was still new, and raw for them. Through improvisation they were able to express the aspects of the material, whether factual, emotional or psychological, that most affected and engaged them, creating their own paradigm of understanding.

It is that quality which makes this collaborative genesis so valuable in the development of my creative practice, because I do not think I could have captured it had I tried to write this alone. On the one hand, the scene is lacking in theatrical construction, there is no sense of a traditional story-telling arc. It felt long, too long, like when a silence stretches for longer than seems socially appropriate, an awkwardness to the length as if, as an audience member, one might start feeling embarrassed for the playwright or actors, as if we got ourselves stuck and couldn’t find a way out. This lack of theatricality made the scene quite alienating, we were all, observers and participants, quite unnerved by it. On the other hand, this unsettling quality was the most compelling aspect of this scene. As if we had just sliced up some small measure of the discomfort felt by survivors and simply said, “make of it what you will”. The power of this scene

was felt, rather than spoken. Had I set out, alone, to write a scene regarding, or involving, the discomfort and isolation complainants of sexual assault felt during the reporting process I would have no doubt felt compelled to be overly descriptive with the scene. Concerned that an audience might not fully comprehend the invasive, exhausting, humiliating process of reporting I would have *described* these feelings in detail, instead of opening up a process that would facilitate performers and an audience sharing in these feelings for themselves – and deriving their own meaning from those feelings. Wake’s witness versus spectator theory is at the heart of the strength of this particular collaborative process. Wake considers the work of writer and cofounder of *Forced Entertainment* Tim Etchells, saying of his theories of performance that “the performance event should function...as a type of trauma that renders us speechless, then garrulous” (Wake, 2009, p. 5). In this exercise this process is repeated twice fold, the actors ‘witnessing’ the raw material of the testimony, then responding through improvisation as a spectator, which (in a performance context) an audience would witness, derive their own meaning, and construct their own spectatorial ‘after-affects’. These after-affects are, ideally, a consideration of the elements of ‘rape culture’ that inspired and were represented in the performance although not overtly described, filtered through the paradigm of individual reception and perception. It is a process, I believe, that encourages more emotional and cognitive gravitas and impact than one that places limitations on meaning-making by seeking to define all possible significance.

I found this scene very moving, and though the original concept of this experiment was to use these improvised scenes as an inspiration point from which I would further develop the scene alone, as a single author, I have come to a different conclusion as to the benefit this exercise could have in creative writing practice. Given that the strength of this process came from the instinctive responses of the performers to raw material, I would be very much inclined to apply that technique to the development of future performance texts. To include, as part of a larger play text, scenes that are comprised wholly of actors’ initial improvisations in response to raw material, not just as a tool for further script development, but to be used as the performance text itself. It would be very much dependent on the context of development and performance, for example the

duration of development and rehearsal, and performance parameters, but as a practitioner whose creative practice is too often overwhelmed in and by fact, this process is immensely valuable in developing what is *felt*, in the *affect* of experience and truth.

When we met again on September 14<sup>th</sup> 2014, we looked at physically based forms of expression. I was eager to work on this in a collaborative setting as I recognize I feel more proficient in text-based creative forms and needed this challenge. We began with an adaption of a scene development process from *the Frantic Assembly book of devising theatre* to develop the scene “Heavenly Legs” (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 69). The initial idea involved taking mundane movements that denote a specific emotion, in the original case the mindless twitching and adjustment of legs associated with unease, and building these simple movements into more animated and stylized choreography (Graham & Hoggett, 2009, p. 69). Their focus was on comedic effect, ours was very different in nature. I was interested in working on a concept called “Schrodinger’s Rapist” (Starling, 2009), appropriating Schrodinger’s theory that a situation can exist in a duality, both possible realities existing simultaneously, until one outcome is proven. In this case it refers to the notion that every man that approaches a woman represents a threat, and a non-threat, and that both realities have to be taken into account behaviourally. This concept of “Schrödinger’s Rapist” means that, for many women, when interacting with a man they’ve recently met they are balancing the possibility of his assaulting her with the possibility that he is not a threat, and even a potential friend, or sexual/romantic partner with whom she would like to develop greater emotional or physical intimacy. Furthermore many women find that this wariness on their part, a response to the rapist side of the duality, can invoke a negative response in some men, who see it as an accusation (Ford, 2016b; Schwyzer, 2011; Weiss, 2016). I wanted to see if we could take the *Frantic Assembly* technique and explore the notion of the inherent threat duality of *all* men, this idea of Schrodinger’s Rapist. We discussed this idea for a while, trying to identify a simple movement or gesture that could represent this wariness. We finally decided that this wariness, not outright fear, but increased caution, could be expressed by the simple act of walking with an awareness of an unidentified

person behind you. The strength of this physical trope was that it was one that would translate to most people; either by experience or by watching any number of films or television shows, that unidentified footsteps signify a potential threat. Our first scene was as follows.

*Script excerpt 10 Cat and Mouse - Scene One*

The stage starts in a black out, a thin corridor of light appears stage left to right. A man starts stage right and walks toward stage left at a slow, stylized pace. Halfway across the stage we hear the sound of footsteps. The man looks behind him but no-one can be seen, the footsteps speed up, the man turns back and continues his journey, moving slightly faster, the footsteps also speed up. The man looks behind him one last time before he disappears off stage left, never knowing if the footsteps were to be feared or not. Out of the shadows stage right a woman appears, mirroring the man's slow, stylized pace. Halfway across the stage she hears footsteps behind her, she turns to look but no-one can be seen. The footsteps increase in pace. The woman turns back and continues her journey stage left, the footsteps getting faster behind. Two more corridors of light appear parallel to the first. In each one a person appears in staggered succession, and walks across stage, only to find that halfway across there are footsteps behind them. As soon as some-one leaves the corridor of light another person enters either from the same side or the opposite, the final effect will be haphazard with a multitude of footsteps echoing.

We wanted to take this sense of potential menace into a more recognizable social scene, and translate it to the wariness evidenced by women when approached by unfamiliar men. It was at this point that we decided to incorporate the idea of a beating heart,

accelerating and decelerating in response to possible threats. The idea was that this beating heart motif would be woven into a musical soundscape. In the first scene the sound of a heartbeat would begin steady and slow, pick up slightly when the footsteps began and increase in tempo as the threat failed to either materialize or alleviate. Our second scene followed on from our first as follows.

*Script excerpt 11 Cat and Mouse - Scene Two*

All performers are on stage, standing in various positions within the corridors of light, suddenly there is a flash of light and the sudden sound of the kind of music commonly played in flashy bars. The stage is completely lit, and the performers either mime holding drinks, or pull various drinking glasses from coat pockets, and handbags and so on. Performers pull off into little groups, chatting, drinking and dancing. One group will take a more central position downstage, with at least one female performer in it. A male performer will emerge from another group and approach the woman, as he does the sound of footsteps will herald his approach, as will the increase of the women's heartbeat. The motif is repeated by a variety of male-female pairs, in a variety of groups. The men should approach the women in different "characters", it is important that it not appear that a certain approach is particularly disconcerting.

We discussed how, if at all, we wanted to resolve the scene. There was the potential to have some of the men follow women from the bar to ask them out, or offer them lifts, or try to separate them from their friends. These would be met with increased wariness, and could potentially result in a demonstration of less confronting forms of interaction, and hence a 'lesson' would be learned. We determined that this idea undermined the central purpose of this scene, whereby the duality of Schrödinger's Rapist stems not from any particular action on his part, but in the simple threat of his being male. In the

end we decided that, rather than place another scene in a specific setting, we would simply leave the motif unresolved, as the question of Schrodinger's Rapist is constantly unresolved for most women. We determined that this simple physical motif could be woven repeatedly through a larger theatrical piece, as it so succinctly established that 'rape culture' was not just a reality for survivors who had already been assaulted, but a state of constant vulnerability for all women.

These exercises were immensely helpful to my own creative practice, as I am given to being overly descriptive with my work. I feel a compulsion to ensure issues are explained, in detail, in a variety of ways. By reducing a thematic concept to a physical trope this tendency is denied, and the thematic concept is simplified, in this case very powerfully. The myriad issues surrounding the 'Schrödinger's Rapist' concept, including questions as to the injustice of men having to regulate their behavior on the basis of a perception of threat they would never fulfill, are all stripped away to a simple physical reality; women living in fear. This simple concept becomes more powerful than an overly descriptive debate.

These workshops were incredibly valuable in the progression and development of my creative writing practice. The two most successful exercises both resulted in concepts, constructs and scenes I would otherwise not have developed without collaboration with performers. The first where actors improvise based on initial and instinctive responses to raw information, and the second where a scene is developed from the literal physical expression of an emotion, where the emphasis is on physicality as creative genesis. It is interesting to note that the scenes that were developed during this section of the research, 'When? What? Where? Who? Why? How?' and 'Cat and Mouse', were both scenes in which non-text based outcomes were considered, by myself at least, as the great strengths. 'When? What? Where? Who? Why? How?' was primarily an exploration of initial visceral, emotional experience, and resulting meaning-making. 'Cat and Mouse' was a physical piece that also relied on aural and visual tropes of increasing heartbeats and physical proximity to represent threat response. In both exercises the parameters

resulted in my, as a writer, being unable to dictate meaning making, and resulting in less thematically restrictive creative process.

## Chapter Three: Enemy Rhetoric

Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children – a play for Gaza* (2010) exploring the violent relationship between Israel and the occupied territory of Gaza, has, unsurprisingly given the highly contentious nature of this conflict, provoked debate (Baroud, 2014; Gardner, 2014). The play is “an uncompromising protest against Israeli militarism” (Kritzer, 2010, p. 612) and yet is, ironically, explored through the context of centuries of persecution endured by those of Jewish faith. Churchill's juxtaposition is clear in the title, it is a play about “Seven Jewish Children” and yet it is “a play for Gaza”. The play does not explicitly focus on the suffering of the Palestinians, and they remain voiceless throughout. The entire play is from the perspective of seven Jewish care-givers, it is never explicitly clear as to their relationship to the children they're speaking of. These unspecified characters are concerned as to how to explain their current circumstances to an unidentified female child. Over the seven chapters the context of those circumstances change, from keeping the child quiet while they hide from unidentified people who have come to kill them, “But don't frighten her/Don't tell her they'll kill her/Tell her it's important to be quiet” (Churchill, 2010, p. 2), to rhetoric of militarism, hate and genocidal ideation;

Tell her we're the iron fist now, tell her it's the fog of war, tell her we won't stop killing them till we're safe, tell her I laughed when I saw the dead policemen, tell her they're animals living in rubble now, tell her I wouldn't care if we wiped them out, the world would hate us is the only thing, tell her I don't care if the world hates us, tell her we're better haters, tell her we're chosen people, tell her I look at one of their children covered in blood and what do I feel? Tell her all I feel is happy it's not her. (Churchill, 2010, p. 8)

Rather than explicitly arguing against Israeli incursions into the Gaza strip, Churchill uses a history of “racial hatred and...almost continual discrimination and ill-informed hostility” (Roses, 2007, p. 18) against Jewish people to frame the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Churchill does not deny the relevance of historical Jewish persecution “Tell her there were people who hated Jews/ Don't tell her/ Tell her it's over now/ Tell her there are people who still hate Jews” (Churchill, 2010, p. 3), or the Zionist argument for a safe homeland “Tell her her great great great great lots of greats grandad lived there/ Don't tell her he was driven out/ Tell her, of course tell her, tell her everyone was driven out

and the country is waiting for us to come home” (Churchill, 2010, p. 4). Churchill uses the Jewish history of persecution and suffering as a polemic against the Israeli occupation of Gaza, drawing parallels between the victimization of the Jewish people and the suffering of the Palestinians.

Tell her they want their children killed to make people sorry for them, tell her I'm not sorry for them, tell her not to be sorry for them, tell her we're the ones to be sorry for, tell her they can't talk suffering to us. (Churchill, 2010, p. 8)

This juxtaposition of victim/oppressor is made more starkly apparent by the lack of any Palestinian voices. While the Israeli characters make their arguments and justifications, the Palestinian perspective is disenfranchised and silenced. Arguments against the Palestinians “Tell her they're terrorists/Tell her they're filth” (Churchill, 2010, p. 8) become all the more vicious when directed against a voiceless opposition with no opportunity to defend themselves. As the polemic against them rages on, Palestinian voices are silenced by unequal power relations in the region, a disparity in wealth and military capabilities, and by the devastating result of extraordinary violence. Much as Jewish voices had been silenced for centuries, it is now, in Churchill's play at least, Palestinian voices rendered mute by violence and oppression.

Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children – a play for Gaza* is a deliberately one sided voicing of a complex conflict, but what is most interesting for me is that Churchill uses the rhetoric of one side in polemic against itself. The paradigm of one belief system becomes the strongest defense of the other, linking opposing ideologies as part of the same paradoxical dilemma. In this sense the cries of the Jewish caregivers are the cries of the voiceless Palestinian caregiver.

Patricia Cornelius also embraces cultural 'rhetoric' as a means to challenge it in her play *Slut* (Cornelius, 2007), as well using the silence of a character to represent their disenfranchisement. *Slut* was inspired by the media coverage of an attack on a young woman, during which her friend and two bystanders were shot dead:

The media talked about her as if she was complicit in the crime, and I was struck by how backward it was...Instead of calling her a 'slut', they called her a 'party

girl', the inference being that she sort of asked for it. (Cornelius as cited in Neutze, 2016, para. 5)

*Slut* examines the life of Lolita, from when she was a baby, through a normal pre-pubescent life, until she turns nine when "everything changed" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 4) and details her transition into "the most amazing slut" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 15). *Slut* is performed by "a group of young women [who] sit in judgment" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 1), who describe Lolita's journey, including her social downfall, subjection to gang-rape, abusive relationship, and the attempt on her life. This journey, and the character of Lolita, are in juxtaposition from the start of the play, to a man who has been killed, "A good man", a man with a wife, and children, and a good job, "Not someone not worth anything" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 3). This "good man" has been killed defending an adult Lolita, and immediately the worth of his life is framed in juxtaposition to Lolita's. From the start of the play human life, a person's character, is positioned to be considered comparative to other lives in terms of worthiness and value.

'Victim blaming' and 'slut shaming' are some of a few widespread social behaviours that make up 'rape culture' and it is the rhetoric of this ideology that Cornelius explores. Instead of creating a character who could be viewed as 'innocent' of all the behaviours associated with 'slut shaming', Cornelius engages with the rhetoric of 'slut shaming' and 'victim blaming' and develops a character who is "such a slut" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 20). Victim blaming is "where individuals find instances within the victims' behavior, such as drinking alcohol, to hold the victim at least partially responsible for the incident" (Hayes et al., 2013, p. 203), and Lolita engages in such behaviours, "She was the first to smoke a joint...She was the first to get drunk" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 12). Victim blaming and slut shaming include accusations of promiscuity, (Bancroft, 2015b), and again, Lolita is characterized as such, "her sexual exploits were numerous" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 15). Cornelius creates in Lolita the epitome of a 'slut', and even the name Lolita is a reference to the title character in Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita*, a name that has become synonymous with the sexualization of young girls. However, Lolita's characterization is juxtaposed powerfully against what may be considered the characterization, or embodiment of society, as Lolita is exposed to consistent sexualisation, objectification, and sexism from

others, mostly adults, at a very young age. “The chorus of judgement” explain how they grew up with Lolita, and the normal childhood antics they engaged in together (Cornelius, 2007, pp. 3-4). For each year of Lolita’s young life a member, or members (depending on performance choices), of the chorus tell of an event they experienced together, the repetition of the words “we”, and “Lolita and I” emphasize that Lolita was very much a normal little girl, who did things that all the other little girls did, until she was nine, “Everything changed/ When Lolita was nine” (Cornelius, 2007, p. 4). The life altering event is puberty – Lolita grows unusually large breasts for her age. People immediately begin to treat her differently, other mothers commenting that she looks “unnatural”, boys staring and grabbing at her body (Cornelius, 2007, p. 5). It is this attention from others, an objectification at such a pivotal stage in childhood sexual development that is implied as the reason for her behavioural change.

Lolita, upon receiving this attention, and who had once been very good at school and known for getting top marks begins to play dumb (Cornelius, 2007, p. 6). The chorus talk about Mr. Markham, the teacher of the then 10 year old Lolita, who seems to be ‘grooming’ Lolita (K. Starling, n.d.), smiling and flirting with her, and becoming quickly “besotted” with her (Cornelius, 2007, p. 7). The chorus acknowledge how girls are sexualized by older men from a young age, saying by age 10 that they had all known what it was like to be looked at, and touched, inappropriately, “From an uncle who put his arm around you and placed his fingertips on the edge of your breast”, and the confusion that followed, “Is this being liked?” (Cornelius, 2007, p. 8). For Lolita puberty resulted in an over or hyper sexualisation, despite the fact that “nothing else had changed”, she was just “a little girl with tits” (Cornelius, 2007, p. 5). Lolita responds to what she sees as positive reinforcement, for conforming to the expectations of others, while the Chorus normalise the idea that pre-pubescent girls are all too familiar with being sexualised by others. Cornelius never explicitly argues against the over-sexualisation of young girls, instead allowing the Chorus’ innocent acceptance of being sexualised by the age of ten, to offer a damning view of societal expectations and norms.

There is a similar sense of Lolita conforming to peer adulation and societal expectation

with the loss of her virginity, the boy is simply picked by committee, “we all agreed on him” (Cornelius, 2007, p. 13), rather than Lolita herself. There is the sense that the act is conducted to meet the expectations of others more than for her own pleasure; “We squealed and danced around her...We screamed and laughed like maniacs when she tried to tell us...It was okay/ Is what she said...Lolita suddenly looked her age/ She was twelve” (Cornelius, 2007, p. 14). The pressure of her girl group is compounded by Lolita’s desire to meet the expectations of others, “I suppose I want to be liked. I’d like that. I’d like to be liked” (Cornelius, 2007, p. 23). The hyper sexualisation and objectification of teenage girls is endemic in our society, as supported by a recent study that surveyed more than 600 girls aged 15-19 across Australia (Reist, 2016 para. 2). The study found that many girls consider sex a performance for the gratification of their male partner, (Reist, 2016 para. 8), that “girls are expected to provide sex acts for tokens of affection” (Reist, 2016) and that many teenage girls have normalised ideology that sexually disenfranchises and objectifies them. This can be seen in the behaviour of Lolita’s peers who, in the beginning, celebrate Lolita for her hyper sexualisation.

Lolita is largely voiceless throughout the play, apart from three very short monologues, or moments. The first is regarding her love of riding bikes (Cornelius, 2007, pp. 3-4), the second relays the fact that she was never given the opportunity to test her physical strength, based on the assumption that, as a girl, she wouldn’t excel at, or enjoy physically rigorous activities (Cornelius, 2007, p. 10), while the final moment follows her gang-rape in the text, although doesn’t refer to it. Instead the last words we hear from Lolita talk of her lack of dreams, her desire to be liked, and her desire to want more in life (Cornelius, 2007, p. 25). The short monologues, or moments, combine to give a sense of a girl with a great more complexity than anyone, including herself, gives her credit for . It is not a comprehensive view of a character, from her own perspective, but a glimpse of who Lolita is under the societal constructs, and of who she might have been if she’d been encouraged to explore all her potential. Lolita is not completely voiceless, yet her limited voice is arguably more powerful than if the entire play had been from her perspective. One critic, viewing a Perth performance, commented on the effect of this silencing.

We never see or hear Lolita. We never gain the slightest insight into her private thoughts, her dreams and fears. As her predicament worsens, her friends distance themselves from her and finally abandon her entirely. Why they, and not she, should be given the platform to tell her story escapes and disturbs me. (Zampatti, 2011)

To my mind, however, this particular review fails to recognise that it is exactly this lack of agency on Lolita's behalf that is the foundation of the play's strength. Cornelius dramatises Lolita's disenfranchisement, how societal expectation and pressure has rendered her mute in her own story. She is constructed, judged and destroyed by those around her, never given the opportunity to really develop, or use, her own voice. Lolita, like the "party girl" that first inspired Cornelius, remains silent while others define and damn her. It is through the 'slut-shaming' rhetoric of others that we see how clearly Lolita was adhering to that rhetoric, following the behavioural prescriptions of those around her, all the while remaining voiceless, and unrepresented. The limited amount that is from Lolita's perspectives offers a glimpse into the mind of a girl who had no opportunity to determine her own identity, who *wanted* to want more from her life, but was restrained by societal constructs from a very young age. The fact that the play mostly speaks for Lolita, silencing her in more ways than one, illustrates her almost complete objectification.

In the final paragraph of the play Lolita's worth is once again juxtaposed against that of the man who tries to save her "And this really good man/Tries to save her and is shot...In the papers they call her a party girl/I suppose they can't call her a slut" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 28). The Chorus are very clear on how they view Lolita, "Better she dies I reckon...To die in shame/Better to hear nothing more of her" (Cornelius, 2007, p. 28). No defense of Lolita is overtly expressed, no one speaks of redemption or innocence. Throughout the play she is described, in detail, as fulfilling the societal stereotype of a 'slut', but it is through this detailed description that the *societal stereotype* is most revealed for what it is; a construct. A societal construct that was placed on Lolita, and which she dutifully adhered to, conceding to the expectations of others. Lolita herself is largely silent, her identity constructed by others, offering only brief monologues that show a young girl who knows little of who she is, but a great deal

of who others think she should be. In *Slut* Cornelius engages the rhetoric of 'slut shaming' by personifying it, creating "the most amazing slut", but it is through this characterisation that Cornelius exposes an ideology of oppression.

Rather than clearly outlining criticism of an ideology or issue, as I have done in my creative practice, Churchill and Cornelius both draw attention to the rhetoric of a particular ideology in order to challenge it. The next three scenes were part of a series I wrote that explored the myriad, occasionally contradictory, and often restrictive actions females are socially expected to undertake to prevent their own victimization (Gerstein, 2014), as well as the unwillingness to talk about sexual conduct despite the fact "the underdevelopment of sexual knowledge could account for various discriminatory and other negative attitudes toward sexuality and, therefore, could explain sexual aggression" (Mallet & Herbe, 2011).

*Script excerpt 12 I want to talk - Scene One*

*Lights up on stage. An adolescent girl (B) is shadow boxing. She is very focused and intent, doing exercises that move her through various physical levels - burpees on the floor, boxing midlevel, jumping jacks with her arms overhead etc. She is wearing short sports shorts, a sports bra and sneakers to accommodate this degree of movement. Her mother (A) enters the room and she stops to talk to her.*

A: I wanted to talk.

B: Okay.

A: About clothes.

B: O-kay.

A: About what clothes to wear, and what clothes not to wear.

B: Okay.

A: About what could happen if you wear the clothes you shouldn't wear.

B: Okay.

A: About what could happen with boys if you wear the clothes you shouldn't wear.

B: Okay.

A: About what boys could do to you if you wear the clothes you shouldn't wear.

B: What could boys do to me if I wear the clothes I shouldn't wear?

A: They could hurt you. Hurt you badly.

B: Oh. Okay. What are the clothes I shouldn't wear?

A: Anything too tight. Or too short.

B: Okay.

A: Anything that shows the shape of your body.

B: The shape of my body will get me hurt?

A: Yes. And the shape of your face. Don't draw attention to your face.

B: What about my hair?

A: Your hair?

B: Yes, I draw attention to my hair. I brush it out, I make it shiny, I style it.

A: Good point. Don't do that. Don't draw attention to your hair.

B: Or my face. Or my body.

A: Yes. Good.

B: What about my voice?

A: Your voice?

B: I've been told I have a nice voice. A sexy voice.

A: Someone said that? A sexy voice?

B: Yes. A sexy voice.

A: You must hide that too. Try not to talk.

B: Because I'll get hurt?

A: Yes, if you have a sexy voice then boys won't be able to control themselves. Don't talk.

B: Can I laugh?

A: I wouldn't. Just to be on the safe side. Now, your walk.

B: My walk?

A: Walk for me.

*The young girl walks away and towards her mother.*

A: That is bad. We all know what that means.

B: What what means?

A: It means she's asking for it.

B: Who is?

A: Maybe you could hide your hips.

B: Wait, she is me?

A: That might work.

B: What is it?

A: What?

B: It.

A: It?

B: That I'm asking for?

*A is perplexed.*

B: I'll hide the shape of my body and the shape of my face and my shiny hair, and the way that I walk. I'll cover it all. You won't even be able to tell it's me!

A: And don't talk. No laughing. You might get hurt.

*B sits silently for a long time.*

A: Yes. Good.

### Scene Two

*An adolescent girl (B) sits in the middle of the stage. She is on an iPod, switching through songs that can be heard by the audience, the lyrics switch quickly from Britney Spear's "Hit Me Baby One More Time", to Robin Thicke's "Blurred Lines", and Ariana Grande's "Side to Side".*

A: I wanted to talk.

B: Okay.

A: About...relationships.

B: Okay.

A: About...sexual...relationships.

B. *pause*. Okay.

A: This is uncomfortable.

B: Very.

A: And awkward.

B: *Very*.

A: Awkward and uncomfortable.

B: Very awkward and uncomfortable.

A: Yes.

*Pause*

B: So...you wanted to talk.

A: Yes...about relationships.

B: Sexual relationships.

A: Yes. *Pause*. You see, the thing about sexual relationships...*Pause*...It's important that...You must remember to...Everyone needs...Everyone deserves...

*Pause.*

It's difficult to talk about. Much more difficult than I'd imagined

B: You imagined this talk?

A: Yes, but I always thought I'd have it when you were older.

B: Older than....

A: Older than however old you ever were at whatever point you were that old.

B: Okay, well, you could wait until I'm older than I ever am. If that would make you more comfortable.

A: It would, it would make me much more comfortable. Much, much more comfortable.

B: Then perhaps you should wait. Until you're comfortable.

A: Yes.

B: Or not at all.

A: Not at all?

B: Well...(sexual relationships)...they're...

*Pause.*

A: Yes?

B: They're a natural type thing aren't they?

A: Yes, a very natural type thing. One of the most natural types of things there are.

B: So I'll probably learn about them naturally, from life, from people, naturally.

A: Yes, from life, from people.

B: And you won't be uncomfortable.

A: I won't be uncomfortable.

*A leaves and B turns the music back on, flipping through songs with suggestive sexual lyrics, while casually reading a tabloid magazine.*

Scene Three

*A young woman (B) is standing in the middle of the stage, she is in stockings and suspenders, and wearing high heels. She is struggling into "shaping underwear". Having got into it she then proceeds to pluck her eyebrows, she then puts on fake eyelashes and puts in some hair extensions before getting into a dress. Her mother (A) enters.*

A: You look lovely.

B: Thank you.

A: You're going out?

B: Yes.

A: With friends?

B: Yes.

A: That's nice. It's nice to spend time with people you care about.

B: Yes.

A: Young people should have fun.

B: *Laughs* Old people should have fun too.

A: Yes. *Pause.* You remember the list?

B: Eyes on your drink at all times, if you lose sight even for a moment then throw it out and buy a new one.

A: Make sure one friend is sober and keeping an eye on everybody. Better that one of you is bored than all of you are dead.

B: If you are being repeatedly hit on lie and say you are in a relationship. That way no one's feelings get hurt, hurt feelings lead to broken bodies. Have a backstory of your fake relationship in case they test you. Make up a name, maybe even carry a photo of some random guy.

A: If you get your ass pinched, or someone grazes up against your chest, just ignore it, you never know if they'll get aggressive if you say something. It might be safe if you're somewhere crowded. Just make sure they don't follow you to the bathroom, or out to your car.

B: Smile a little when someone walks past and says, 'smile for me baby, you'd look so pretty with a smile". Smile enough so they don't get angry, not so much that they get the wrong idea.

A: And?

B: Ah...

A: You missed a couple. I'll print you a copy. You can keep it in your bag.

B: Great.

A: Have fun. You look lovely.

*Finish.*

The scenes explore the restricting and conflicting expectations placed on women, with respect to protecting themselves from assault, but also the unrealistic expectations of 'femininity'. In the first scene the mother, identified simply as A, engages with victim blaming rhetoric, whereby she considers sexual violence a consequence of female sexualisation rather than male entitlement (Grubb & Turner, 2012). The rhetoric is preemptive and protective, rather than retrospective and vicious, but as the scene progresses the paradox becomes clear; the daughter cannot protect against that over which she has no control. The daughter is being conditioned not to incite sexual violence, but inciting factors are everything from her hair to her laugh, her vulnerability is not in anything she does, but in everything she is, in being female. The mother's rhetoric of protection, starting with the recognizable recommendation of 'modest' clothing, descends into an absurdity whereby the daughter will be physically and vocally hidden. This is juxtaposed to the opening action, in which the daughter is wearing very little clothing, specifically so that she can have freedom of movement and physical expression.

The second scene engages in less systemic, and more personal rhetoric, the discomfort in talking to children about sex. Studies indicate that knowledge of sexuality decreases the likelihood of rape-supportive beliefs (Mallet & Herbe, 2011, p. 378), and that sexual knowledge in girls is just as important as that of boys, as rape-supportive beliefs "in girls are likely to implicitly encourage boys to force sex on girls" (Mallet & Herbe, 2011, p. 377). Despite this, parental disinclination to discuss sex is common, largely owing to feelings of discomfort (Drukerman, 2014; Tilsner & Cipriani, 2002). In this scene the mother, identified only as A, struggles to discuss issues of sex and sexuality, only to concede that she would prefer not to have this discussion, and that her daughter will come to understand the issues "naturally". Once again the paradox of this belief system reveals itself, without overt critique, in that a parent's desire to protect against an

awkward discussion leaves a child vulnerable to sexual violence. Rather than explicitly articulating the dangers of a lack of sexual education, this rhetoric of educational abdication from the mother is simply juxtaposed with pop music lyrics, and the presence of tabloid magazines, both of which offer unreliable, and potentially harmful representations of socio-sexual behavior.

The final scene explores the rhetoric of preemptive victim blaming again, this time by examining some of the many behaviours women employ to protect themselves from assault in social situations (Duberman, 2015; Gerstein, 2014). The list is exhaustive, restrictive, absurd, and, as the mother indicates at the end of the scene, incomplete. Once again, rather than articulating a polemic against the unjust and ultimately futile expectation of victims taking responsibility for assault, in this case by accepting the burden of prevention, I instead engaged with the rhetoric of victim blaming beliefs. I utilised the rhetoric employed in the socially accepted imperative placed on women to engage in a variety of behaviours to prevent their own victimization. Simply by exploring this rhetoric in exhaustive detail the absurdity and injustice of these expectations show themselves. While the scene could seem comical in intent, it is the ludicrousness and farcicality of the rhetoric, without any comedic treatment from myself as a writer, that best highlights the injustice of the ideology it supports. The daughter is entreated to “have fun”, and yet her behavior is limited in how she may consume alcohol, how she should talk to people, and once again includes absurdities such as carrying a photograph to support the lie that she has a partner, so as to ward off unwanted advances. The latter is a social paradox in itself as it is not unreasonable to assume that the daughter, referred to as B, may want to pursue romantic opportunities afforded by these social situations, as do many people. Many women (including me on several occasions) find that the most effective way to reject a man’s advances, so that he will accept refusal, is to claim to be in a relationship with another man, as men will recognize the ‘claim’ of another man before they will recognize the autonomy of a woman to decide with whom she will socially, or sexually, engage (Dockterman, 2014; Ford, 2016a). Aside from the unequal gender relations this exposes it also means that many women, like B, must somehow allow for access to desired social interaction, but

develop strategies to deny undesired social interaction. This exhausting social paradox is further highlighted by the recognizable beauty regime that B engages in before the conversation with her mother. Societal pressures demand that women simultaneously be sexually attractive, and vigilant against attracting unwanted sexual interest.

The intent in all three scenes is unlikely to be misinterpreted; to challenge the rhetoric of victim blaming and sexual education denial respectively. Yet, in my opinion, they stop short of dictating meaning. The rhetoric, and its supported ideology, is not overtly deconstructed, but examined through theatrical devices, and allowed to reveal inherent inconsistencies and injustices.

The final scene in this chapter is, in part, an examination of the “just world belief” in which “people view their world as a just and safe place” (Hayes et al., 2013, p. 202), and perceive an individual’s own actions as the determining factor in what happens to them, meaning any negative consequences are their own fault (Hayes et al., 2013, p. 203). For most people some semblance of the ‘just world’ theory is necessary to “maintain their feelings of safety and security” (Hayes et al., 2013, p. 203). This can also be termed “defensive attribution” and is more likely in women, owing to their recognising commonalities with an assault survivor, and engaging in victim blaming to “reduce the cognitive dissonance that is produced by the possibility of also becoming a victim of rape” (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 446). Victim blaming becomes a means of women differentiating themselves from survivors of sexual assault, and therefor comforting themselves that they are unlikely to be assaulted. The following scene explores the rhetoric of victim blaming as a function of the just world theory, or ‘defensive attribution’.

#### Script excerpt 13 Worlds Apart

*Lights up on stage. There are several women standing upstage, in any configuration desired. Downstage a woman in suggestive clothing sits on a chair, painting her toenails. She is humming/quietly singing the gospel hymn "Down to the River to*

*pray", which includes the line, "oh sisters let's go down, down to the river to pray". The lines of text below are split between the women upstage, who watch the woman downstage. The lines should be divided without too much apparent 'structure', some lines can be shared, some repeated, there can be pauses etc.*

She stood before me, with blood on her lip and tears in her eyes. There was tension in every line of her body. She was prepared to fight - or to flee. Her eyes met mine, then flickered away, then back. Seeking a connection, fearing a reaction. She wanted to tell me something, I had a fair idea of what it was. And quite suddenly, I hated her. We weren't that different, her and I, not that different. A couple of inches in height, a few kilos in weight, different hair colour sure, and she had darker eyes but in essence we were the same. In her I could easily see myself, *my* split lip, *my* watery eyes, the sharp pain in *my* wrist, the dull ache of bruises along *my* arms, the rising bile in *my* throat, and, what I knew would be a deep tearing pain inside *me*. I could already imagine *my* own struggle, I could hear *my* own voice saying no, *my* own cries of pain. I could imagine the weight pinning *me* down, and the vicious pulling of *my* own skin as hands gripped *my* arms, squeezed *my* throat. I could imagine *my* fear as I realised there was no escape, no help. I imagined the deep, twisting pain inside *me* as *my* flesh was torn. Ripped, battered, violated. I felt *my* own horror at *my* own vulnerability and I hated her. Hated her for being a mirror to *my* fears, hated her for bringing to life *my* nightmares. But she wasn't *me*. Not quite. Not exactly. And the more not exactly the same I could make her, the safer I felt.

Now it is my bleeding lip, my teary eyes, my bruises. And it's your hatred, your fear. I understand, when you ask me what I was wearing, what I was drinking, if I had said yes before, how many times, and to whom. I understand. What you're really asking me. For a reason why. Any reason why. Any reason why this won't happen to you. Any reason why this won't happen to your daughter. Any reason you can give yourself why your mother could never, ever have felt the way I do. Any reason why I asked for this in a way you, she, he, they, you never, ever would. Any reason why your world is not quite exactly the same as mine.

*The women upstage leave the performance space. The seated woman downstage continues to paint her nails, singing softly.*

In my previous creative practice I would have been inclined to specifically, and academically, declare or declaim the concept of the 'just world' theory in the dramatic writing. Instead this scene explores the concept 'from the inside', offering a perspective on 'defensive attribution' using the rhetoric that supports it. Once again by examining the rhetoric the inherent paradox is revealed; attributing blame to a survivor because we are reminded of our own vulnerability to assault. Much like the previous scenes in this chapter, or indeed *Seven Jewish Children – a play for Gaza* or *Slut*, the intent is clear, but the language is not dismissive. The scene does not belittle the understandable fears that drive the 'just world' theory or 'defensive attribution', instead it seeks to understand it, and encourage others to consider their own belief systems.

The practice of examining paradoxical ideological rhetoric dramatically, rather than overtly criticizing it, allows for the processes, beliefs and behaviours that support oppressive systems to be revealed. Within my own creative practice it enabled me to develop scenes that were more theatrically nuanced and less thematically prescriptive than has previously been evident in my creative practice.

## Chapter Four: Subversive Representation

Critique of an ideology through focus on its supporting rhetoric is also a tenet of the work of Australian theatrical group *version 1.0*. Equally fundamental to their work is the subversion of how that ideology is represented theatrically, inviting deeper consideration and critique. *CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* is a piece from 2004 inspired by the Senate Select Committee into A Certain Maritime Incident, a government inquiry into accusations made in 2001 by several government ministers that asylum seekers aboard the SIEV 4 (Suspected Illegal Entry Vessel) had thrown their children overboard in order to force rescue from the Australian Navy (Wake, 2012, p. xi). The play is based on the 2188 pages of transcript that came from the 140 hours of hearings, and testimony from the survivors of the SIEV X, and as such fits Erwin Piscator's definition of documentary theatre whereby "political document is the sole base for text and scenic work" (as cited in Irmer, 2006, p. 18). Paul Dwyer however, dramaturg on *CMI*, asserts that *CMI* is not "a straight forward piece of documentary drama" (2006), because of the manner in which the material is performed, namely without any attempt to "embody characteristic postures, gestures and movements of the senators and witnesses", and instead engaging with more subversive techniques of presentation (Dwyer, 2006). Dwyer wrote that their style could jokingly be referred to as Brecht 10A (Dwyer, 2006), and this comparison seems fair, although it is somewhat removed from the pioneer of *Verfremdungseffekt*/Alienation effect and his version of political theatre. It is not an entirely naturalistic experience confined to the particular space and time of performance, although there are elements of this, and the primary aim appears to be to provoke consideration of political events outside the performance. Jill Dolan argues the strength of the "Marxist/Brechtian analysis that breaks open conventional forms" is in its ability to provide "fertile resources for our investigations into representation" (2008, p. 436). Dolan was specifically referring to feminist concerns of the representation of gender and unequal gender-based power relations, while *version 1.0* were concerned with different forms of representation that perpetuate oppressive belief systems within the Australian political system. Their focus was the representation of asylum seekers in Australia, specifically by Australian politicians, "to pull apart the 'ideological lining' of

the many statements in which our elected representatives tried to frame and contain that experience, to package it for us” (Dwyer, 2006, p. 135).

Brecht said of his own socio-humanitarian theatre, “the aim was the historication of the events presented” (2009, p. 18), in which performers must present the material in a manner that inspires intellectual critique, “[they] must make it possible for the audience to understand the motives behind it...[they] must make protest possible” (2009, p. 19). This aligns well with the central premise of *CMI*, in which “the ‘problem’ lies in the Australian body politic, not in the bodies of refugees held under Australian power” (Williams, 2008, p. 202). Brecht envisioned a style of performance where performers “no longer threw themselves completely into their roles but maintained a certain distance from the character performed by them, even distinctly inviting criticism” (2009b, p. 24). It is this Brechtian concept of creating “a critically distanced attitude to the subject matter of performance” (Garde, Mumford, & Wake, 2010, p. 13) which *version 1.0* embraced in *CMI*. In this way “*version 1.0* has pioneered a distinctly subversive...type of documentary theatre” (Wake, 2012, p. xi). The performance style distances the presentation from literal characterisation and instead draws focus to what Brecht calls “the historical nature of a given social condition” (2009, p. 19). In this case highlighting what David Williams, artistic director or CEO of *version 1.0*, refers to as the “rhetorical performances” of refugee policy by government ministers, (2008, p. 199); a maelstrom of misinformation, emotional manipulation and deliberate silencing. The asylum seekers around whom the inquiry revolves are never represented in it, are never called as witnesses, and are, therefore, rendered politically mute. This, claims Caroline Wake, is a very deliberate strategy of representation by the Australian government, “Far from accidental, this deafness has been part of deliberate government strategy, which attempts to make asylum seekers both inaudible and invisible” (2008, p. 187).

It is this inaudibility and invisibility that *version 1.0* are representing, rather than “giving voice to the voiceless” as work of this nature often aims to do (Wake, 2010c, p. 8). For the vast bulk of the play asylum seekers remain voiceless, as other people testify to their degree of suffering, intent, and circumstances, until in the final scene asylum seeker

testimony is heard. Even then, *version 1.0* remain committed to staging the voicelessness and invisibility of asylum seekers, as their testimony is presented not by an actor, but rather a disembodied computerised voice as it reads the tragic testimony of survivors from the SIEV X (Williams, 2012, p. 39). The deliberate de-humanisation of the asylum seekers is chilling. Stories of unimaginable suffering are told without human intonation or inflection. The focus is not just on what is being said, or what these people have endured, but on the manner in which they are being represented; not just in that moment, in that performance space, but their de-humanisation in the broader scope of Australian political and cultural rhetoric.

This examination of representation can be seen throughout *CMI*, namely through the way in which asylum seekers and Australian immigration policy are represented to the Australian people. The words of the Senate Select Committee into A Certain Maritime Incident, even the ambiguity and de-humanising nature of the name itself, are examined for 'motive', are re-staged in performance styles that encourage an audience to "re-view and, indeed, review" them (Wake, 2010c, p. 8). Sometimes with theatrical devices as simple as reading the official testimony of the Chief of the Royal Australian Navy from a beer coaster (Williams, 2012, p. 8), Williams and his collaborators utilise techniques that serve to encourage an audience not to accept apparent representations of 'truth' in the political performance of rhetoric, but to consider and critique their form and intent.

Paul Brown and Caroline Wake acknowledge that a facet of documentary theatre is the implication of 'truth', the belief in audiences that a performance based on tangible documentation is more accurate in its representation than "fully imagined plays" (2010, p. 19). They also acknowledge that owing to dramaturgical decisions of editing and representation, the perspectives presented in documentary theatre are, to some degree, a creative construction (2010, pg. 20). *version 1.0* acknowledge their dramaturgical input by including references to their own editing process in the performance text, for example by including comments referring to each other by name suggesting that testimony is "going on too long" and that they should fast forward to a later page in the Inquiry (Williams, 2012, p. 11), or describing dramaturgical process "Sunday. Rehearsal

strategies. Pick a witness...Play with story-telling modes...Try to make sense. Make it happy, make it sexy, make it boring, make it up” (Williams, 2012, p. 32). They acknowledge their own editing and rehearsal process, and present the political testimony to be examined in the same way. *CMI* question the veracity and intent of political rhetoric by having a child attached to a lie detector deliver the verbatim words of former Defence Minister Peter Reith, ending the scene with the line “Thank you Minister Reith. That was much better than you did last time” (Williams, 2012, p. 5). The representation of Minister Reith, a child rehearsing words attempting to beat a lie detector test, calls in to question the degree of rehearsal, performance and truthfulness in *politics* as much as theatre. Overhead projections raise questions as to the reliability of the testimony presented at the Inquiry, “Is hearsay narration or recollection” (Williams, 2012, p. 22), and “Chinese Whispers and Tearoom Gossip”, a cacophony of ringing phones and misinformation that calls into question the credibility of governmental chains of information (Williams, 2012, p. 25). Testimony is broken up by raucous parties to celebrate the “professionalism” of everyone involved (Williams, 2012, p. 29), drawing attention to the fact that although misinformation was presented to the Australian public, and that this misinformation took months to redress, those involved repeatedly attested to the “professionalism” with which the matter was handled.

In *version 1.0* a clear distinction between performer and character is repeatedly made, for example the overhead projector reading “We know that you know we are not really the Senators who took part in the CMI Senate Inquiry. Stephen is a lot shorter than Senator Cook and Deborah who plays Senator Faulkner is actually a woman” (Williams, 2012, p. 13). This distinction between performer and character, and by extension distance between audience and character, is “necessary for the criticism of society and for historical reporting” (Brecht, 2009, p. 20). Furthermore modes of presentation and representation within the performance are used to question and critique modes of presentation and representation in political rhetoric, particularly the political rhetoric surrounding asylum seekers in Australia. Just as an audience are encouraged to recognise the dramaturgical choices and creative constructs involved in theatre-making,

so too are they encouraged to consider the dramaturgy of political rhetoric. Subversive performance techniques embrace the distance between reality and performance in the theatre space, but also encourage consideration of reality and performance in the political sphere.

Caryl Churchill's early work, *Cloud 9* (1978), also employs techniques that create a distancing effect between performer and character, as a device to encourage audience engagement with broader social issues, rather than the trials of individual characters. Amelia Howe Kritzer states that "Churchill remained close to the Brechtian spirit of encouraging the audience to actively criticize institutions and ideologies they have previously taken for granted" (1991, p. 122). Churchill is concerned with unequal power relations, and draws parallels between the social structures that oppress and constrain women, and non hetero-normative identities, and social structures that oppress and constrain colonised cultures, "the colonization of races, the patriarchal subjugation of gender and the culturally determined gendering and sexuating process" (Godiwala, 2004, p. 9). Rather than have an audience concentrate on the plight of individual characters, existing in the finite time and space of performance, Churchill draws attention to historical means of oppression and their continued influence in contemporary society and culture. What Churchill employs is "a radical representation of history itself - not as a backdrop or setting but as a narrative text which insistently shapes or interrupts the dramatic present and thus alters audience perspective on the event" (Diamond, 1985, p. 275). *version 1.0* and Caryl Churchill both use dramatic methods of representation, albeit very different ones, to challenge 'real-life' representations of identity and culture, and to highlight oppressive cultural systems. While nearly four decades have passed since its premiere *Cloud 9* still resonates as an example of a potent political theatre text that survives in significance beyond its particular cultural and historical context.

Act One of *Cloud 9* is set in British colonial Africa in the Victorian era, a bastion of white male privilege. This setting draws into focus this concept of "the historical nature of a given social condition" (Brecht, 2009, p. 19), supported by Churchill's representation of the impact of those historical social conditions. Churchill differs the gender and race of

the actor from the gender and/or race of the character being performed. Clive is a typical male of the Victorian era, basking in patriarchal and colonial privilege, and is played by a man. Betty, Clive's wife, is, however, also played by a man. Joshua, a black servant is played by a white actor. Edward, Betty and Clive's son, is played by a woman, and their daughter Victoria, is represented by a ventriloquist's dummy – able only to voice the opinions of others.

This non-literal casting highlights the incongruity of forced socialisation, with identities oppressed and constricted to conform to social expectations. The distancing effect created by subverting expected methods of dramatic representation serves to highlight the particular social conditioning to which the character is subjected, “destabilizing our notions of gender, sexual, and racial identity” (Klein, 2006, p. 15). Social constructivist theories of gender performativity, most notably those of Judith Butler, argue gender is not innate from birth, but a performed re-presentation of societal constructions relentlessly enforced through repetitive, normative acts – “what we take to be an internal essence of gender is manufactured through a sustained set of acts, posited through the gendered stylization of the body” (Butler, 2002, p. 18). Churchill dramatizes this ‘gendered stylization’ by subverting expected performance representations. While an audience might never question the representation of a woman in Betty's role, submissive, domestic and determined to please her husband, these traits are called into question by the performance of Betty by a male actor. The societally ‘normalised’ representation of a woman is suddenly challenged; what makes these traits considered ‘natural’ to a woman, and ‘unnatural’ to a man? The subverted performance representation makes clear the ‘performative acts’ that construct gender, as we see quite overtly when a male actor plays the ‘role’ of a woman. This subversion of the performance representation of gender goes one step further argues Elin Diamond, silencing the female voice completely in the representation of Betty. Betty, in being played by a man, voices only a male construction of a woman “What remains is a dress, a palpitation, a scream, all encoded female behaviours adding up to a trace denoting absence” (Diamond, 1985, p. 277). Betty, as a performance, as a historication of social conditioning, is a set of repetitive, normalising behaviours constructed by a man. Betty's

representation in performance echoes the representation of women in greater society, socialised to adhere to specific behaviours as enforced by a patriarchal society. Rather than explaining notions of gender constructivism, or articulating a polemic against oppressive gender constructions, Churchill dramatizes these systemic injustices.

This construct of dramatic representation highlighting social representation is also evident in the representation of Joshua. The fact that Joshua is a black character played by a white actor serves to highlight the roles forced on the colonized, not simply the unjust nature of subjugation and servitude, but also the destruction of indigenous culture and the permeation of colonial culture. Joshua's cultural identity has been destroyed, and replaced by British colonial culture, he must adopt the normative behaviours that enforce an alien culture. Churchill said she wanted to explore "the parallel between colonial and sexual oppression" (1978, p. 3894), and Joshua's servitude is positioned in relationship to the oppression of Harry and Ellen, two homosexual characters who are forced to marry, subsumed in hetero-normative discourse. Harry and Ellen, like Joshua, are forced to perform identities that are alien and oppressive, in order to conform to societal strictures.

The second act of *Cloud 9* further emphasizes consideration of historical social conditioning, and its contemporary ramifications, by setting the action in a London park in 1979. Many of the characters return from act one, played by different actors, and with only 25 years passing for them within the narrative, the latter meaning any notion of its being a linear, chronological, naturalistic narrative is further destabilized. The social conditioning of these characters is not relegated to a single moment in history, but spans centuries, continents and cultures, "because of the time shift, the fears and indecisions we witness in Act II are lifted out of the causality of personal history and become evidence of the socio-sexual configurations we saw represented in Act I" (Diamond, 1985, p. 278). In this second act there is a greater sense of personal freedom, in which "a feminine and less authoritarian feeling is reflected" (Churchill, 1978, p. 3907). Betty is now played by a woman as she feels free to express her own needs and not simply function as an expression of her husband's wants, Edward is now a man in a

similar expression of individuality, and Victoria is played by an actor, no longer silenced by the gender expectations of the Victorian age. There are still references to the sexual and colonial oppression of the previous act however; Cathy, a young girl, is played by a man, “to show more clearly the issues involved in learning what is considered correct behaviour for a girl” (Churchill, 1978, p. 3914), and one character references her elder brother dying in the Northern Ireland conflict, a conflict born of British colonial rule. Act Two acknowledges developments in personal freedoms, but suggests individuals are still restricted by expectations to conform to gender and cultural constructs of ‘normality’. Arguably the historical oppressions of the first act are still prevalent, and harmful, in the second act, it is just that they manifest differently. These shifting but ultimately still oppressive constructions of gender and cultural socialisation encourage an audience to consider what role these constructions play in their own lives, or what role they, the audience, might play in perpetuating them.

The performance of representation, rather than its description, encourages an audience to consider the historicisation of social conditioning and its continued oppressive influence today, “we are able to ‘read’ Churchill's historical narrative because our conventional habits of reading a performance have been, at least to some extent, interrupted and refocused” (Diamond, 1985, p. 278). *version 1.0* also employ methods of disrupting expected performance representation to challenge representation in ‘real life’. In the case of *CMI* it is the representation of asylum seekers by Australian politicians, and the representation of ‘truth’ in Australian politics. In both *CMI* and *Cloud 9*, albeit through different methods and styles, issues and concerns of representation are enacted through performance representation, rather than overt discussion, resulting in a theatre where socio-humanitarian “impressions are formed dramaturgically rather than polemically” (Aston, 2010, p. 576).

To apply this to my own creative practice I considered the representation of unequal gender relations, gender role socialisation/normalisation and sexual violence. Gender role socialization, in which men and women are socially conditioned to conform to certain gendered stereotypes and constructs, begins “very early on in life” and “influences numerous types of human behaviour, including that of sexual behaviour”

(Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 446). Adherence to, and belief in traditional gender roles, such as a belief in the passivity and domesticity of women, and the aggression and greater sexual drive of men, increases the likelihood of rape myth acceptance in both men and women (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 447). What is more “men who accepted traditional roles or believed in male domination were more likely than other men to have engaged in verbal sexual coercion and forceful rape” (Grubb & Turner, 2012, p. 447). I wanted to explore, in my dramatic writing, the colloquial representation of sexual violence and systemic harm minimization beliefs. A significant focus in ‘rape culture’ is language, including the pervasive use of misogynistic and sexually violent humour (Ridgway, 2014). Some people are of the opinion that jokes are harmless, that “jokes have no real or significant social consequence. Objecting to jokes infringes on the rights of individuals in general, humourists in particular, to express their sense of humour” (Perez & Greene, 2016, p. 266). While many others feel that jokes that degrade, belittle, or are sexually aggressive toward women, foster attitudes that contribute to ‘rape culture’, with Bemiller and Schneider citing several quantitative studies that drew correlations between sexist humour and real life acts of misogyny (2010, p. 460). My intention with the following scene was to examine how sexual violence is colloquially represented in humour (“Rape Jokes General,” 2014), and juxtapose this with statistics regarding the reality of sexual and domestic violence in Australia (Mouzos & Makkai, 2004). I wanted to find a form of dramatic representation that invited consideration of normalised or internalised unequal gender relations and gender role socialization, and what relationship they might have to the acceptance of sexual violence. The result was the following scene.

*Script excerpt 14 Merry Fucking Christmas*

*We open to the sound of Christmas music playing. Lights up on an empty stage, with a Christmas tree in the middle, surrounded by presents.*

*Two children race excitedly on stage, and start opening the presents. They are a collection of dolls, all kinds, from*

*action figures to cabbage patch dolls and Barbies. The children start playing.*

*Three to four adult actors walk on stage, preferably half or more women. They are dressed to go to a party, and are carrying bottles of champagne and glasses, as well as boxes of Christmas crackers. From the moment they walk on stage they talk animatedly, having a good time, and already a little inebriated. They pour champagne, and start pulling apart the Christmas crackers and reading the jokes aloud. They laugh uproariously after each joke, and chatter inaudibly amongst themselves until the next joke is read. As the scene progresses the characterisation and theatre elements (lighting, sound, and so on) becomes increasingly grotesque and hyper-real.*

*Meanwhile, on the back screen a visual display shows the following statistics written in the cursive font, as if written in a child's hand in crayon.*

***In Australia, on average almost two women a week are killed in an act of domestic violence***

Performer: Schools now have Domestic Violence Prevention classes to teach girls how to stop themselves becoming victims of abuse by their partners.

We had something similar back in my day except it was called Home Economics."

***...and one in six women have been sexually assaulted.***

Performer: The waiting room at my doctor's surgery has a

poster with a bruised woman, a phone number, and the slogan

"Domestic abuse - why wait?".

So I went straight home and beat the fuck out of the wife.

***57% of Australian women have experienced sexual or physical violence at some stage from the age of 15.***

Performer: I saw a group of women loudly protesting against domestic violence and the abuse of women, which is ironic because opening their mouths is what caused the problem in the first place.

***Over 90% of sexual assault victims identify their attacker as "family, friend or partner".***

Performer: I recently read that domestic abuse happens 25% more often over the winter period. That fact sickens me.

Those 25% need to learn that wife beating is for life, not just for Christmas."

***80% of sexual assaults are not reported out of fear and shame.***

Performer: I was raping a woman the other night and she cried, "Please, think of my children!"

Kinky bitch.

***One in five Australians think violence is caused by a man's need for sex or not being able to control his anger.***

Performer: Who here wants to play a game of rape?

No? That's the spirit!

***One in five Australians believe a woman who has been drinking is "partly responsible" for her own rape.***

Performer: I bought a rape whistle the other day - it's been great! Really helps to mask the screaming.

***One in six Australians believe that when women say no to sex, they actually mean yes.***

Performer: After strangulation, which organ in the female body remains warm after death?

A cock.

*The children run back on stage, one child pushes the other over and takes their doll. The first child cries. One of the adult actors goes over to them and hugs them.*

Performer: Aww...don't cry honey, he/she only pushes you because he/she likes you"

*Lights down.*

The intent was to represent the incongruity of finding humour in misogyny and gender based violence through the context of Christmas celebrations, events socially associated with kindness, goodwill and the innocent joy of children. There were many problems with this scene, not least of which is the inclusion of a religious holiday that for many will invite context other than what was intended. The scene is also quite overtly didactic. If I am to consider my practice reflexively, I must acknowledge a personal

frustration and a very clear tone of anger, which has resulted in my being overly prescriptive with meaning, even without overtly describing the connections I am trying to represent.

The above scene is saturated with information, the meaning is repetitive and forced. I needed to reduce meaning to a single construct of representation. I wanted to keep the image of children playing, to connect the statistic relayed to the gender socialization that starts from birth. The use of dolls, a clear derivative from Churchill's *Cloud 9*, is, I think, a very powerful motif to represent not only childhood socialization, but also the oppression and seeds of violence that stem from unequal gender constructs and representations. A doll is mute, created for the use, amusement and aesthetic enjoyment of others, and entirely vulnerable to their treatment. Rather than a single scene, I think there is potential in the above framework as a motif, or shorter scenes, threading through a larger performance text. In this way the representation of sexual violence and gender socialization provides a context for a broader work, without losing impact in the repetition of a longer scene.

#### Two a Week

*A young girl sits on stage, holding a doll. She brushes its hair, and dresses it in a variety of outfits. Overhead, on a screen behind her, in cursive font, in the manner of child writing with crayon, appear the words: **In Australia, on average almost two women a week are killed in an act of domestic violence...and one in six Australian women have been sexually assaulted.***

#### Biff! Pow! Kazam!

*A young boy and girl sit on stage, the girl is playing with Barbie dolls, the boy is playing with action figures, making "fighting" noises. Overhead, on a screen behind them, in*

*cursive font, in the manner of child writing with crayon, appear the words: **One in five Australians think violence is caused by a man's need for sex or not being able to control his anger.***

#### Tea Party

*A young girl sits on the stage, having a tea party with dolls. Overhead, on a screen behind her, in cursive font, in the manner of child writing with crayon, appear the words: **One in five Australians believe a woman who has been drinking is "partly responsible" for her own rape.***

#### Blurred Lines

*A young boy sits on stage, playing with action figures. Beside him sits the doll and hairbrush the young girl has been playing with earlier. The boy is making his action figures fight again. He notices the girl's doll, and picks it up. Overhead, on a screen behind him, in cursive font, in the manner of child writing with crayon, appear the words: **One in six Australians believe that when women say no to sex, they actually mean yes.***

*The boy picks up the brush and begins to gently brush the doll's hair.*

One of the most recognisable symbols of gendered socialisation is a child's toy; girls are taught to groom and nurse their dolls, boys are taught to fight and conquer with theirs. The physical scenes, of children conforming to gender socialisation, connect thematically with the statistic above their head(s), linking these gender constructs to rape-supportive beliefs. The final image, a young boy gently brushing a female doll's

hair questions the impact this gender socialisation has on identity and sense of self, and also the possibility for more positive socio-sexual conduct if this socialisation is deconstructed. In my previous creative practice I would have been inclined to specifically articulate the link between gender socialisation and rape-supportive attitudes, to the point of citing the actual studies. I have some concern that these four scenes will not provide enough statistical information to fully impart my desired meaning, but through this research I have consistently acknowledged an inclination in my own practice to saturate creative work with information, and I must err on the side of limiting this. The problem with a work that is steeped in information is that its intent is to educate and therefore, as distinct from theatre in or for education, which I acknowledge as a different genre, the work does all the *work*. I am not interested in doing all the work for the audience, but rather in facilitating the audience making meaning for themselves, and in turn having them do the work needed to relate what they see to their own lived experience. A less didactic approach is not only more interesting artistically, but also more engaging thematically. There is 'space' for an audience to connect their perspective of gender socialisation with their own beliefs regarding sexual assault and domestic violence, allowing for a less accusatory presentation.

Both *version 1.0* and Churchill employ techniques that stage voicelessness and disenfranchisement. Focusing on representations of disenfranchisement and voicelessness, as well as subversive performance techniques I began to consider the representation of sexual assault survivors and their experience. This research has discussed 'victim blaming' and 'slut shaming' representations of sexual assault survivors, representations perpetuated by media reporting of sexual assault (O'Hara, 2012). The narrative perpetuated by so many media outlets is one of objectification and blame prior to the assault, and voicelessness following the assault. The individuality, humanity and vulnerability of survivors are largely ignored by wider social commentary. I wanted to challenge this de-humanising representation by considering aspects of survivor experience that are rarely considered in representations of sexual assault, particularly in the media. I sought to explore the 'tonic immobility response', whereby "a large proportion of sexual assault victims experience an involuntary

paralysis during the assault” (Finn, 2003, p. 1). Studies indicate that this number may be as high as 75% of adult victims experiencing a moderate to high degree of paralysis in the course of being sexually assaulted (Finn, 2003, p. 1). It is thought to be a survival mechanism, an evolutionary response to survive the approach of a predator (Finn, 2003, p. 1). Unfortunately a lack of active resistance has often been viewed as a mitigating factor in rape allegations, the suggestion being that the victim’s passivity could have led to an assumption of consent by the perpetrator (Finn, 2003, p. 1). It also often intensifies feelings of shame and self-blame by the victim, who may fail to understand that tonic immobility is an unlearned, involuntary and unavoidable response to sexual assault (Finn, 2003, p. 1). The following scene dramatises the tonic immobility response through the internal monologue of survivors, and also the dissonance between external action and internal suffering. The aim is to invite consideration of what survivors might be feeling beyond what they verbally express.

### Frozen

*Audio: Sounds of an assault, struggling, heavy breathing, clothing rustling, some small sounds of whimpering, and throughout it all the steady sound of a panicked heart beat.*

*The actors are on stage, having a very normal picnic or BBQ. They play with a football, cook food, or make sandwiches, some people read, others are chatting. Anything that seems very banal, and easily sociable. Every so often each of the actors will disengage from the action, and take a small moment to calm themselves, before putting on a “brave face” and rejoining the action.*

*The audio reads over the top of the scene, each line is a different actor. The gender of each line is mostly unimportant, but it would be good to have a cross-section of all genders and orientations. The lines are mostly in quick*

*succession of one another and while some should overlap, there can be pauses.*

I say no

At least, I think I say no.

I'm pretty sure I said stop.

I tried to push him off.

I tried to roll away.

I can't remember what I said.

I couldn't move.

I tried to leave.

I didn't know what was happening.

I knew it would be easier to just let it happen, like it happened before.

I couldn't move.

I couldn't breathe.

I couldn't make her stop.

I didn't want to hurt him.

I couldn't say anything, I tried.

But I couldn't.

I froze.

They do tests, swabs up inside me.

They hurt.

They're embarrassing.

I don't say anything.

I don't move.

I just lay there, very still.

I bite my lip to stop from crying, but I've already bitten through it, so the scab just comes off. There's blood in my mouth.

Mum's crying.

My boyfriend can't look at me.

Dad's been great, really nice, but not too nice, if you know what I mean.

My brother came to pick me up, he's crying, I tell him it's okay, it'll be okay, I hug him, I tell him I'm all right, I don't remember much anyway, nothing's broken, I say, I barely have any bruises. I hold him tight and tell him it's no big deal.

I see a shrink.

I talk to the cops.

I talk to a psychologist.

She tells me...

He tells me...

They tell me...

It's normal.

To freeze.

Around 75% of us

Of...rape victims

8/10 people who are assaulted

Freeze.

It's normal.

It's the reptilian centre of the brain, she says. A survival mechanism.

Fight or Flight...

Or Freeze.

Like when a gecko gets scared, she says. It freezes. Of course, she says, it also loses its tail. And grows a new one.

I think about that a lot. About being able to lose that part of myself. To throw it away, and start again, grow something new.

My friend asks why I didn't punch him.

She says maybe he didn't know I wasn't in to it. Maybe she's right. Maybe he thought everything was fine.

Maybe if I'd said no, one more time.

Maybe if I wasn't drunk, I could've done more.

Maybe I shouldn't have invited him in...

Gone back to her place...

Said yes in the beginning, I should've known I wasn't ready.

I say I'm sorry. The policeman says what for? I say, for not fighting, or screaming. That would make it easier right? To prosecute? To prove? He says, you did nothing wrong. It's perfectly normal...

You couldn't help it.

Couldn't fight it.

Couldn't move.

It's perfectly normal he says.

Completely normal she says.

All: To Freeze.

This scene was, to my mind, too long, and saturated with emotively heavy information, and academic consideration of the issue. I feel, as before, that meaning is being dictated to the audience; the concept of tonic immobility, a perception of what it would be like to experience it, survivor shame, statistics on tonic immobility, the normalisation of it, and a suggestion of how survivors should be treated. There is little for the audience to consider themselves.

In the next draft, I decided to focus singularly on representing the physical disenfranchisement and dissociation of tonic immobility. Continuing with the performance concept of using a doll to represent the disenfranchised, as drawn from Churchill's *Cloud 9*, I decided to have actors stand in as 'living' dolls, conscious, but unable to govern their own bodies. A computerized voice reads the lines, inspired by the same technique in *version 1.0's CMI*. The computerized voice dissociates the lines from the actors on stage, representing the dissociation from their bodies that many survivors report feeling, and the dissociation from society they experience following the assault.

#### Script excerpt 15 Frozen

*Audio: Sounds of an assault, struggling, heavy breathing, clothing rustling, some small sounds of whimpering, and throughout it all the steady sound of a panicked heart beat.*

*On stage a man and a woman stand, immobile. They do not move of their accord for the entirety of the scene. They should be frozen, but not mechanically so. A second woman stands behind the first, and begins brushing her hair, reminiscent of the young girl previously scene. As the scene progresses the*

*second woman grooms the man and woman as if they are dolls, fixing their hair, and even removing items of clothing to replace them with others.*

*As the action on stage progresses the following lines are heard as voice-over, as if in the actors' heads. A computerized voice reads the lines.*

*Voice over:*

*No.*

*I say no.*

*I think I say no.*

*Stop.*

*Stop it.*

*Don't touch me.*

*I try to push him off.*

*I try to roll away.*

*I can't remember what I said.*

*I can't move.*

*Leave.*

*Just get up and leave.*

Open your mouth and scream.

It would be easier to just let it happen, like it happened before.

I can't move.

Can't breathe.

I can't make her stop.

Get him off me.

I don't want to hurt him.

I'm frozen.

Maybe he thinks everything is fine.

Maybe if I wasn't drunk.

I shouldn't have invited him in..

Gone back to her place..

Said yes in the beginning, I should've known I wasn't ready.

They do tests.

They hurt.

They're embarrassing.

I don't say anything.

I don't move.

I just lay there, very still.

I say I'm sorry. They say what for? I say, for not fighting, or screaming. They say, you did nothing wrong. It's perfectly normal...

You couldn't help it.

Couldn't fight it.

Couldn't move.

It's perfectly normal they say.

To Freeze.

*Finish.*

The scene, as a performed representation rather than a description, invites consideration of the personal and emotional experience and consequences of the 'tonic immobility' response, rather than a more clinical explanation. This engages with the opportunity afforded by live theatre to personify an experience, to offer a physical and emotional component in addition to text based expression. The physical manipulation of the actors on stage is not sexual, and deliberately controlled by a female. The physical dominance is not reliant on strength, or the physical aptitude of either 'living doll' to resist. It is simply a physical representation of the concept of being trapped inside one's own body, while being physically appropriated for the enjoyment of another. The voice-over is explicit, but a disembodied, computerized voice dissociates the internal dialogue from the emotions of the experience, focusing instead on the process of tonic immobility. Rather than simply describing the physical dissociation, the physical alienation is also explored through the actual performed representation of tonic

immobility. The computerized voice also represents the disenfranchisement of sexual assault survivors by the wider community, much as it did for asylum seekers in *CMI*. Their words, their experiences, are de-humanised, denied emotional, vocal and physical representation.

Fundamental to *version 1.0's CMI* and Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9*, is that they highlight the incongruity and oppression of commonly held beliefs by subverting normative behavior performatively reiterated in every day life, and re-presented on stage thus inviting the audience to contemplate the impact and veracity of these beliefs. By focusing on methods of performing representation, rather than a more descriptive analysis, I have been able to develop scenes that I suggest are more artistically engaging, and less prescriptive of meaning than in my previous creative practice. The distanced performance styles encourage consideration of the issues beyond the immediate performance, while also contributing to meaning by offering modes of reception other than overt presentation.

## Chapter Five: Allegory

Another literary technique utilized by Brecht, as well as playwright Timberlake Wertenbaker, is the examination of a particular socio-humanitarian issue through an allegorical premise. Encyclopedia Britannica describes allegory, and its subsets fable and parable, as a literary device in which readers/listeners are encouraged to consider meaning beyond the literal interpretation of the text, where “details – when interpreted – are found to correspond to the details of some other system of details” (Fletcher, 2015, p. 49). This allows for consideration of an issue as its most fundamental function, free from a cultural, political or social context that may inhibit reception or inflame biases; for example, sexual assault as a function of entitlement and the rejection of the bodily autonomy of another, irrespective of contexts such gender socialization, defense attribution, and perpetrator mitigation.

Six days after the declaration of World War Two, on September 1<sup>st</sup> 1939, Brecht began writing *Mother Courage and her children*, “about a war that which would range devastatingly across great tracts of Europe, creating heroes and profiteers, imposing order and ideologies” (Willet & Manheim, 2009, p. 82). Brecht, then in exile in Denmark, would later note that as he wrote, “I imagined that the playwright’s warning voice would be heard from the stages of various great cities, proclaiming that he who would sup with the devil must have a long spoon” (as cited in Willet & Manheim, 2009, p. 82). *Mother Courage* is an allegorical exploration of the “catastrophic effects of the Thirty Years War, which thus became the natural analogy for [Brecht’s] pessimistic warnings” (Willet & Manheim, 2009, p. 98). Brecht’s allegorical premise allowed him to examine the ramifications of war retrospectively, “to alert the spectator that the events that are unfolding are not inevitable but that there are or were alternative courses of action. The action...[is]set in the past...so that the spectator may more easily contemplate events at a distance” (Patterson, 2003, p. 18). This historical allegory offered a framework to consider the barbaric nature of war, and the unequal burden placed on the average person by oppressive and war-mongering governments, without specific reference to the Nazi regime. Although he was in exile, direct criticism of the Nazi regime was still very dangerous, and potentially unhelpful in Brecht’s desire to destabilize support for

Nazi militarism. A direct attack on an ideology can provoke instant defense and rejection, but placing its foundational function, in this case the act of war, within a separate context, can invite examination free from social, cultural or political attachments. In hindsight Brecht's warning on the brutal effects of war, *Mother Courage*, does not come close to describing the horrors of the conflict and the Holocaust, bringing to mind more the profit-mongering of recent conflicts (Calio & Hess, 2014). The allegorical premise, however, is powerful in its examination of the effects of war as a function of nationalism and governmental militarism, without literal reference to the specific social, cultural or political circumstances to pre WWII Germany.

Use of allegory can be seen in Timberlake Wertenbaker's *The Love of the Nightingale*, creating "a paradigm to explain several of society's ills" (Syna, 1993). Wertenbaker's paradigm is not based on actual historical parallels like Brecht, instead Wertenbaker appropriates the ancient Greek tale of Philomena. Philomena, called Philomele in Wertenbaker's adaptation, is sister to Procne, who marries Tereus, King of Thrace. Tereus then becomes infatuated with Philomele, later abducting and raping her, before cutting out her tongue to ensure her silence. Procne and Philomena seek revenge by killing Tereus' son with Procne and feeding him to Tereus. When Tereus realises what they've done and attempts to kill them the Gods turn all three adults into birds, with Philomele becoming a nightingale.

Wertenbaker uses this allegorical paradigm to explore issues of sexual violence, voicelessness and the culpability of silent bystanders, using "various meta-theatrical devices to remind the audience of the contemporary relevance of this ancient myth" (S. L. Green, 2005, p. 159). These devices include two separate choruses, one male, one female, and a play-within-the-play, in which the tale of Phaedra is performed for the characters. It is during this play-within-a-play that the sisters' mother comments, "Listen to the chorus. The playwright always speaks through the chorus" (Wertenbaker, 1996, p. 5377), a directive for the modern day audience to listen, but also a reminder that the chorus is a fundamental aspect of the allegorical paradigm Wertenbaker has employed, the ancient Greek myth (Hopman, 2012, p. 244). One of the defining

characteristics of ancient Greek theatre was the Chorus, who would comment on the events of play and the actions of the characters, as “a means to give coherence to the action and heighten its moral and ethical significance” (Hopman, 2012, p. 245). This means Wertebaker’s choruses could overtly discuss the issues of the play as an established aspect of the allegorical premise.

The male chorus in *The Love of the Nightingale* focuses heavily on the culpability of those who do not question authority “Questions. The child’s instinct suppressed in the adult/For the sake of order, peace./ But at what price?” (Wertebaker, 1996, p. 5656). Within the play the question pertains to characters adhering to Tereus’ orders, but draws broader connections to dissidence as an essential function of freedom, and the ramifications for those who do not question their leaders “What hasn’t been said and done in the name of the future?...We asked no more questions and at night, we slept soundly, and did not see” (Wertebaker, 1996, p. 5723). Wertebaker’s allegorical consideration of the importance of questioning authority and convention could apply to any number of social, cultural or political contexts, be they gender socialization or immigration policy. The focus becomes the function of questioning, not necessarily the context of the questions.

The female chorus questions humanity’s inexhaustible capacity for violence, “Why do countries make war? Why are races exterminated? Why do white people cut off the words of the blacks?...Why are little girls raped and murdered in the car parks of dark cities” (Wertebaker, 1996, p. 6239), linking the allegorical paradigm to contemporary acts of violence. Wertebaker’s allegory does not look back at past violence as Brecht’s did, but forward, connecting this violent mythology of Ancient Greece with the millennia of violence that followed. Perhaps in Tereus’ acts of violence consideration can be made of the roots of all violence, products of power, fear, greed and hate. Can Tereus’ reasons for silencing Philomele, fear, and arguably shame, resonate with those who perpetuate unequal race relations?

The direct moral commentary of the Chorus has the potential to be overtly didactic, and while that still may be said of Wertebaker’s play, this is lessened by the fact that it is an

accepted convention of the genre employed. Furthermore, the didactic nature of the Chorus is lessened by the lack of contextual specificity afforded by the allegorical construct. The Chorus deconstructs certain power relations, such as those between citizen and leader, enfranchised and disenfranchised, without making commentary on specific, contemporary examples. The Chorus does make parallels between the events in the play and modern contexts, but the allegorical premise, including the mystical elements of physical transformation, allows a distance between the themes of the play and contexts that might incite defensiveness and disaffect an audience.

The allegorical premise of *The Love of the Nightingale* allows Wertebaker to explore and challenge these issues free from the context of contemporary social, cultural and political justifications that might inhibit reception. Allegory allows for the examination of the historical, and foundational functions of oppression and violence, including rape, as a power relation between the entitled, and the physically, politically or socially disenfranchised.

What I aimed to explore through an allegorical premise was the fundamentally abusive power relation in all incidents of sexual assault, irrespective of any of the situational or personal characteristics that seem to lead to harm minimization and victim blaming, for example prior relationship between survivor and perpetrator, the perceived social status and aesthetic value of the two, and the previous sexual history of the perpetrator (Yamawaki et al., 2007). At its most essential level sexual assault is a denial of bodily autonomy, a deprivation of liberty, of one's right to determine what happens to their own body. It is, at its most basic function, the same principle that underpins slavery; one person's wants supersede another's personal freedoms. In her article *Taking Rape Seriously: Rape as Slavery*, Jane Kim argues that rape fulfills the requisite conditions of slavery as outlined in the American Constitution's Thirteenth Amendment and should be prosecuted as such under federal jurisdiction (2012, p. 265). Amar R. Akhil and Daniel Widawsky define slavery as "a power relation of domination, degradation, and subservience" (1992, p. 1365). I had considered drawing allegorical parallels between sexual assault and slavery, but decided against it, largely because my aim was the distillation of these issues to that basic power relation, and there is nothing basic or

simple in writing about slavery. Eventually, much like Wertebaker, I used an established story-telling paradigm, in my case a fairy-tale, and used it to explore the elementary principle that making someone do something against their will, no matter what it is, or who the perpetrator is, is unjust and harmful.

*Script excerpt 16 Voiceless: a monologue play*

Once upon a time, in a land far away, there lived a beautiful Princess. The Princess was kind and gentle, wise and witty, however it was not for these gifts she was renowned, but for the beauty of her voice. When the Princess spoke, when she uttered but one word all around her fell silent so that they might hear her every sigh and syllable. Should the Princess raise her voice in song the wind itself would die down, ashamed to compete with the rare beauty of the Princess' voice. The Princess loved to speak, often she could be found in the village square reading storybooks to children, her voice rich and golden with pleasure. In bold, presumptive tones she spoke of adventure, of dragons slain, and maidens saved. So beautifully did she tell of love and passion that to hear her was to feel oneself in the gentle caress of a lover. But to know true glory was to hear the Princess sing. Not often did she do this in public, for her songs were a private token of affection, of gratitude, of pride. Her songs were part of her, woven into the fabric of who she was, of who she hoped she might grow to be. When the Princess sang her heart and soul was in every note, every rise and fall came from that special place inside her where rested her hopes, her dreams, everything she held to be right, fair and true. And so her songs were for those she loved, or, more often than not, for herself. The Princess sang in private as she bathed herself, as she brushed her hair, as she sat at her daily lessons, as

she walked alone in the forest, as she lay down at night in pursuit of sleep. The Princess and her songs kept good, gentle company together.

One day there was great excitement in the court where the Princess lived, they were to have very important visitors! A Prince and all his princely entourage, his princely knights and their princely horses, his princely servants their princely servants' servants, the princely advisors, and the princely jestors, the princely cake maker and the princely shoe polisher and all manner of princely additions. The Prince was a very important person, and had known the Princess' family for years. Her father the King and his father the King were old friends and had done many Kingly things together, like play poker, hunt foxes and annex smaller, neighboring countries. The Princess was very excited to see the Prince again, she remembered playing with him when she was very small. He had been very kind and patient when they played throw and catch, and she kept dropping the ball. He had played hide and seek with her for hours and pretended not to know where she was, even though she hid in the candelabra cupboard every single time. She was nervous about seeing him now, would he remember her? Would they still be friends? She wasn't, truth be told, very good at catching a ball now either. What if he thought her silly? Or stupid? Or, much worse, ugly?

The day of the Prince's arrival was one of much pomp and ceremony, indeed the Princess had never seen so much pomp and ceremony, the royal pomp and ceremony statistician said the pomp and ceremony was quite literally off the pomp and ceremony chart. It was all quite overwhelming. And the Prince? The Prince was everything the Princess had hoped he would be,

he was kind, he laughed at her jokes, and complimented her hair and his teeth were all perfectly straight and even, with not even the smallest piece of spinach stuck between them.

The Prince and his princely party settled into the palace, and so started a routine of dances, and fox hunts, and poker and nostalgic reminiscing about annexing smaller, neighboring countries. There were, however, a lot of people around. A lot of people bustling here and there, washing this doublet, skinning that fox, so many people that the Princess longed for the times when she could be alone, alone with her thoughts, and her songs.

One day the Princess decided to go for a walk in the woods, she walked down the garden path, passed the iron gates of the castle, into the tall trees of the forest, she walked its winding paths, down passed the river, by the grove of daffodils, and down to the little clearing where she liked to sit under a large oak tree, and sing. She did this every afternoon, for four days. On the fifth day, as she sat there singing, she thought she heard a noise, a rustle of a bush perhaps, or a foot on a twig. At first she was afraid and stopped singing immediately, but then, much to her relief, the Prince stepped into view from behind a tree. He smiled at her, and exclaimed in delight at the beauty and wonder of her singing. She blushed. She was a goddess! he said. An angel of music and light! he said. Why he was almost hurt she had not sung to him before, he said. Such music as hers should be shared with all those who might appreciate it, he said. The Princess smiled, and blushed, and put herself down slightly, because a prideful woman is most unattractive. Then the Prince and the Princess walked back to the castle together.

The next day the Princess went to walk down to the forest again, only to find that the Prince was waiting for her at the iron gates of the castle. He had hoped, he said, to walk with her and listen to her sing. The Princess was confused, she liked the Prince, he was very nice, and very complimentary, and she had only seen him with spinach stuck in his teeth that one time, but singing was something she did for herself, and the people she loved. She liked the Prince, but she didn't know him very well, and she wasn't sure she wanted to sing for him. So she told him she was very sorry, but not today, for today she had a sore throat. Perhaps another day, she said.

And so it went, everyday the Prince would wait by the gates, and ask her to sing for him, and everyday she found a reason not to, one more day to keep singing for herself, a part of who she was, only to be shared with a special few.

One day the Princess went down to the iron gates only to find the Prince was not there. Perhaps he had given up, she thought. She was a little disappointed, but mostly relieved that she could once again sing as she wished to. And so she walked into the tall trees of the forest, she walked its winding paths, down passed the river, by the grove of daffodils, and down to the little clearing where she sat underneath her oak tree and sang.

As she was singing she heard a rustle, much as she had heard before. She stopped singing immediately and looked around and, as she had suspected he might, the Prince stepped out from behind a bush. He laughed, he was embarrassed, he said. He had so wanted to hear her sing, he said. He lay awake at night, thinking of her singing, he said. He slept with wondrous

dreams of her singing, he said. He could not eat, he said, for all he wanted to consume was the sound of her song, he said. Surely, he smiled, she could not be so cruel as to deny him one song, he said. The Princess did not want to sing for him, but she felt guilty, and a little bit rude. And so the Princess sang, just a little song, a little nothing song, a short, little nothing song that didn't mean anything, that she closed her eyes for, and didn't really think about. A short, little, nothing song that she quickly finished singing and then suggested they might leave the forest. Oh no, said the Prince. He couldn't possibly. Not after such a glorious little song, he said. Why, his heart was beating fast, and his ears, his poor ears, were in such a state, his ears were in such a state of longing. They couldn't possibly leave his ears in such a state. But the Princess was determined now, she wanted to go. Oh, no, said the Prince, and he wrapped his hand around her wrist. Oh no, said the Prince, I couldn't possibly let you go until I've heard another song. One more song, said the Prince. Come now, said the Prince, you know you love to sing. Why else would you be here? Why else come all this way to sing, he said. His eyes were kind, and his smile was sweet and free of spinach, but his grip on her wrist was strong, and starting to hurt. The princess tried to step away, but the Prince stepped closer, maybe a little too close the Princess thought, just a little bit too close. And now he held her wrist at a very uncomfortable angle, yes a most uncomfortable angle. The oak tree, *her* oak tree pressed against her back, and the Prince stood smiling in front of her. Come now, he said, you know you love to sing, what will it cost you to sing one little song for me, I so want to hear you sing. And so the Princess sang, she sang one of her favourites, but it didn't feel like it usually felt. Her stomach felt sick, and her

breath was shaky, and her mouth could barely form the words. But she sang, she sang beautifully, because she was a beautiful singer, and to hear her no one would ever know that the special place inside her where her songs came from, where rested her hopes, her dreams, everything she held to be right, fair and true, to hear her no one would ever know that special place was dying - shaking? Quaking? Crumbling?

The Prince let the Princess go and they walked up to the castle together, the Prince was laughing all the way, happy he said, so happy to have heard her sing. The Princess felt ill, she wanted to cry, but also to scream, to hide, but also to fight. And yet the Prince, he seemed so...Perhaps he didn't realise how much she hadn't wanted to sing, she thought. She hadn't really told him properly had she, she thought. Perhaps he just didn't understand, she thought, because she knew he would never do anything that he knew would upset her.

"Perhaps I had asked for it", she thought to herself. "I had sung for him, I was there."

The weeks went by and the Prince was very busy with her father, the King. There were still neighboring countries that had yet to be annexed, and they had great fun making up plans for war, and playing charades, as Kings and Princes are wont to do. Sometimes the Princess would see the Prince at dinner, and he would smile, and the Princess would find it difficult to eat, and very difficult to speak. Her father, the King, said that he missed hearing her talk, so lovely was her voice. But the Princess didn't feel like talking anymore, not even for her father. The thought of talking, of speaking, of making any sound at all made her all at once hot and cold. It make

her shiver and shake. It made her want to run away so very desperately, but she could barely make a move to blink her eyes, let alone pick up her dainty princess feet and run away. Sometimes she would meet the Prince by accident in the stables, or gardens full of fresh flowers and brightly coloured birds. Sometimes the Prince would give her a compliment, or pick for her a flower, or sometimes just smile his smile at her. And the Princess would have to run away so she could cry, sometimes in her bedroom, sometimes in a secluded corner of the garden, sometimes under the old oak tree in the forest. She would cry, and cry, and cry until she could cry no more.

Eventually the Prince and his princely entourage left. The Prince kissed her hand, smiled that smile and told her that she was the most beautiful singer in the world. He would forever cherish her songs, he said. The Princess barely made it to the stables before she emptied her stomach right on the floor. One of the horses ate it, horses are like that, even Princessly horses.

Once the Prince was gone, the Princess waited to feel better, she waited to feel happy again, she waited to want to sing again. But the wanting never came. She would walk down to the forest, down passed the daffodils, and the river, down to the old oak tree. She would sit for hours, trying and hoping and longing to want to sing again. But the wanting never came. Her father began to get angry with her, for being so very silent, and so very boring. What good was a Princess, he said, who would not speak with her lovely voice, and sing her lovely songs. What on earth, he said, was he to do with her. One time, just once, she tried to talk to her father, the King.

She tried to tell him, so that, perhaps, he would be less angry that she was sad all the time. Perhaps he would hold her like he used to, and tell her that it was fine, and sing with her until she wanted to sing again. But her father, the King, did not understand. Because the Prince was so very nice, and so very kind, and so rarely had spinach in his teeth. Yes, she had a beautiful voice, but any Princess in any country, annexed or otherwise, would surely love to sing for the Prince. He did not need to *force* a Princess to sing. She must have misunderstood, or, perhaps she had done something to confuse the Prince. After all, everybody knew how much she loved to use her voice. Everybody knew, he said, how she loved to tell stories, and everybody knew how she loved, oh how she loved, to sing. The Princess told him he was right, of course he was right, and she so looked forward to seeing the Prince when he next visited. And the Princess went down to the forest, passed the daffodils, and she cried.

The Princess cried often after that. She cried so often that the salt of her tears left scars down her face, she cried so often that her eyes turned completely clear, she cried so often that her maids had to take turns scooping up the water in her bedroom with little buckets, like they were on a sinking ship. She cried so often that she woke one day to find she could not speak, she could not sing, she had no voice. She had cried her voice away.

The Prince came to visit again that summer. He was so distraught to hear of the Princess' loss of voice, he said. He had so loved her voice, he said. He had longed to hear it again, he said. Nothing in his life had given him so much joy as when she had agreed to sing for him, he said. Nothing was

more beautiful than the look in her eyes when she wanted to sing for him, he said. She, of course, said nothing.

In both *The Love of the Nightingale* and *Mother Courage*, female characters are rendered mute owing to the violence and dominance of men, Philomele when her tongue is cut out in an attempt to cover up her abduction and rape, and Kattrin when a “soldier stuffed something in her mouth” (Brecht, 2009a, p. 1371). This physical voicelessness also works as an allegory itself, for the generations of women silenced and disenfranchised by a patriarchal society that ensured their subjugation. It represents the voicelessness of the roughly 80% of rape survivors, in first world countries such as Australia, who do not report their rape, and never see their attacker face the criminal justice system (Cook, David, & Grant, 2001, p. 10). It was this concept of the fundamentally empowering nature of being able to speak for oneself, and the crippling nature of political, social or physiological voicelessness, that I decided to explore with my fairy-tale allegory. For this reason the value of the Princess character, and the focus of her assault, was the beauty and power of her voice. The intention for this scene was to explore how being forced into any action, even one that, by its very nature, is seen as enjoyable to the victim, is a violation of a persons’ most fundamental rights. Central to this concern is the Princess’ power relation to the Prince, whose physical attractiveness, relationship to the Princess, and high socio-economic status would be seen as harm minimizing factors in our society. The point is not that the Princess was forced to do something as ‘harmless’ as singing, by someone she, and society at large, admired, but that she was forced to do anything at all. The Princess is stripped of her sense of autonomy and security. She is blamed, by herself and others, for her own victimization. She is forced to continue a social relationship with her attacker, as he retains his privileged position in society. Her relationship with her social network, to the concept of interpersonal interaction, and with a previously much loved activity, is damaged and degraded. She is anxious, isolated, and completely voiceless.

The Princess in the above allegorical scene represents the experience, or part thereof, of so many victims of sexual assault. The aim of employing an allegorical structure is to

examine this experience without context that could potentially inhibit reception, to avoid biases, prejudices and beliefs that could disengage and disaffect an audience. By engaging with allegory I sought to distill the power relation of sexual violence to its primary function; the effect that force has on the forced. This primary function may then offer alternative perspectives or added dimension to the consideration of sexual violence in the 'real world'.

## Chapter Six: Voiceless – a play in bits

The original intent was not to develop a larger performance text largely owing to my assumption that the disparate nature of the writing constructs explored would disallow for a cohesive performance text. However, as I developed my writing and reflective practice, and began to understand my creative responses to theme, form, and intent more fully, I began to consider how the scenes developed during the research would work together as a single performance text. I was interested to examine how the scenes would inform meaning when placed in conjunction with one another.

As a cohesive play text I found that a less traditional linear, realistic narrative form allowed for the examination of several aspects of ‘rape culture’. I believe it would be difficult to develop a realistic, or naturalistic play text that encompassed so many elements of ‘rape culture’, without becoming overtly didactic, and overwhelmed with ‘fact’ at the expense of character and narrative complexity. That is not to say *Voiceless – a play in bits*, is not clear in its intent; to explore, through dramatic form and theatrical perspective, issues relating to ‘rape culture’. To return to a criticism given of *Guantanamo; honor bound to defend freedom* by Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovo, “from the very first moments...*Guantanamo* produces diatribe rather than dialogue” (Claycomb, 2006, p. 703), the aim of this research is that while *Voiceless – a play in bits* is clear in its intent to promote dialogue, it does not devolve into diatribe. The audience are surely aware of the subject under examination, but are given the thematic space to contribute to the examination, and meaning making, through their own social, political and personal paradigms of reception.

While placing them within a larger play text did not demonstrably alter the form or meaning of most of the scenes, the editing of *Voiceless – a play in bits*, did result in the alteration of some of the scenes from how they existed in previous chapters of this dissertation. Some of these alterations are the minor changing of words, or addition/subtraction of lines, while others are more fundamentally altered in form. The first of which is ‘Scene One’, which is to begin as soon as an audience enters the space, with house lights still on, and none of the usual lighting to separate performance and

seating spaces. This is a construct drawn from the opening of *version 1.0's CMI*, "The audience enters through a single corridor down the centre of the theatre space. Along the corridor are a number of naked bodies prepared for mortuary storage that the audience has to step over to reach their seats" (Williams, 2012, p. 5). Whether a potential audience for *Voicelless* would be required to pass through the performance space or not, the aim is to give a sense of inclusion in, and intrusion into, the scene. Rather than being entirely settled in the seats, separate from the long, distressing interview scene on stage, potential audience members must find their seats, and make decisions about whether to engage in conversation, or any other pre-performance activities in which they might otherwise indulge. They are not able to disappear into a group, but are individually made aware of their intrusion into this space and their proximity to the action as they walk past, or through, the performance. As the character of Rachel is made to testify to being violated, the audience are made party to further intrusion into her privacy, pain and narrative. In her examination of spectator and witness theories Caroline Wake discusses Derrida's notion of self-presence at an event, a reflexive awareness of oneself in the act of witnessing, "of being and having been sufficiently *self-present as such* . . . sufficiently conscious of himself, sufficiently self-present to know what he is talking about" (2009, p. 5). Elin Diamond concurs, "spectating requires a double awareness of one's own response and of the activity of responding" (Diamond, 1985, p. 277). This construct of having a potential audience move through a scene, to be required to acknowledge their intrusion into the scene, their disruption of it, their very *presence* in it, aims to encourage consideration of a reflexive relationship to the issues explored on stage. They are present, and aware, of watching, and potentially affecting, dramatic performance, a parallel to the world outside the performance space where they may also become aware of watching, and influencing, aspects of 'rape culture'. This is a personal context that aims to inform the rest of the work, a persistent self-awareness that promotes the Brechtian ideal of, as described earlier in this dissertation "a critically distanced attitude to the subject matter of performance" (Garde et al., 2010, p. 13).

It should also be noted that the decision was made to identify the sexual assault survivor in this scene by the name Rachel, as opposed in the previous chapter when she was identified as Robert. Although the character is still to be played by a male actor, this change was to further clarify that the *character* identifies as female, is female biologically within the context of the narrative, and her experience of sexual violence is framed thusly. Subverting the gender of the performer playing her is a performance choice, not a narrative one.

The allegorical fairy-tale is also altered somewhat in the larger play text, amalgamated as it is with the recurring motif of children playing with dolls, and statistics regarding gendered violence. The scenes inform one another well, as the telling of fairy-tales is also a recognisable trope of childhood, and gendered socialisation. As a child plays with gender-specific toys, and the familiar structures of a fairy-tale are heard, representations of normalised gender behaviours are challenged, not only as constructs, but harmful ones that perpetuate violence.

‘Scene Three’ makes a small adjustment to the ‘Cat and Mouse’ scenes inspired by the devising techniques of *Frantic Assembly*. The physical motif representing the notion of ‘Schrödinger’s Rapist’ is still there, but the scene leads into the ‘Different Worlds’ scene exploring the notions of the ‘just world theory’ and ‘defensive attribution’. Voice-over instead of direct actor address is used here, to represent this as belief system, rather than verbalised rhetoric. The intent is to represent unacknowledged and unexplored beliefs we might have, that contribute to the acceptance and perpetuation of ‘rape culture’.

The next scene to be altered in the larger play text is ‘Frozen’, the scene representing ‘tonic immobility’. I have inserted a short explanation of ‘tonic immobility’ onto the screen overhead. Owing to this being an established construct within the play text, I did not feel it would seem stylistically incongruous and overly didactic. I also felt it was necessary to have the scene informed by the concept of ‘tonic immobility’. I also changed the physical action of the scene. Previously the objectification of the ‘living dolls’ was not overtly sexual, I felt however that having the ‘living dolls’ naked and left

alone on stage, defenceless, for the computerised reading of the internal 'frozen' monologue heightened the vulnerability and exploitation of the scene.

The second 'Cat and Mouse' is also altered in the larger play text, following on from the second conversation between the unnamed mother and daughter (A & B) in 'Scene Eight'. This places the scene, and its exploration of the notion of 'Schrodinger's Rapist', in the context of the conversation before it; that of constant vigilance against sexual assault. The notion of 'Schrodinger's Rapist', the concept of a man representing the duality of threat and non-threat simultaneously is furthered by the final moment of 'Scene Eight'. A male actor steps from the action to tell a (misogynistic) joke, and while the other men on stage are clearly uncomfortable they accede to traditional masculine social expectations and laugh, instead of decrying his attitude. The sound of a heartbeat, intended to evoke concepts of fear and vulnerability, follows this moment. The scenes work together to represent different perspectives of threat and vulnerability, to raise questions as to how language and social expectation perpetuate and support 'rape culture'.

The final image follows the end of the fairy-tale, in which the Princess is rendered voiceless by her attack. The young boy stands over the young girl watching her groom her doll. The intent is to create an image that suggests potential violence, that the boy, being fascinated by the doll, will take it from the girl, perpetuating gender normative socialisation by adopting respective dominant and submissive roles. Instead he is invited by the young girl, in active consent and under her instruction, to play with the doll. This final moment aims to destabilise the normalised gender socialisation that supports 'rape culture', notions that prescribe dominance, aggression and entitlement as male attributes, and subjugate and objectify women. The children in the scene have not yet yielded to societal pressure to conform to gender normative behaviours, and the final image is one of gentleness and reciprocity.

While I did not intend for the scenes developed as part of this research to form a cohesive play text I saw some synergy between scenes that work to offer different perspectives through which to examine various aspects of 'rape culture'. It is further

evidence, for myself at least, that my own creative practice best lends itself to forms other than realism and more traditional Aristotelian drama. Rebecca Prichard takes a similar stance on her work, avoiding “social realism which feels like it can affirm or concretize a particular reality” in favour of forms that can “offer some sort of axis for social change, and leave a crack of light open for alternative realities”(as cited in Aston, 2010, p. 585). I feel I often reduce realistic scripts to a litany of existing oppression, rather than exploring different perspectives of an issue, and potential means of addressing it. While I expect the text would require significant development through script consultation, dramaturgical support and workshop with actors, through this research I was able to develop scenes that fashioned together a play text examining and exploring issues pertaining to ‘rape culture’ from a range of thematic and structural perspectives, allowing for less finite and restrictive constructions of meaning.

Voiceless: a play in bits

By Siobhan Dow-Hall

List of Characters

Police Interviewer One (female)

Police Interviewer Two (male)

Rachel (to be performed as an adolescent female, but performed by a male actor)

A little girl (around 10 years)

A little boy (around 10 years)

Storyteller

A (a mother)

B (A's daughter)

Several scenes involve all performers on stage, in non-verbal scenes that have no character designation.

The scenes are non-linear, setting is suggested through lighting and sound rather than elaborate set construction. Information is occasionally displayed visually on screens.

Scene One

*The play begins as soon as the audience are entering the performance space. A table sits in the middle of the stage, two Police Interviewers sit on one side, Rachel sits on the other side. The Police Interviewers take notes, and have a recording device next to them. House lights remain on for the entirety of the scene.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Thanks for coming in today. Umm we appreciate what's gone on for you. We just really want to find out, to talk to you, ah, find out exactly what your account of it is. Obviously, we need to get a statement from you, the first thing we need to do is just to talk you through that. You're here on your own today. Okay, so we're just going to use this recording, make sure all bases are covered. So firstly, we must start with, what is the date of the incident you're talking about?

RACHEL: Thursday, two weeks ago. No, no sorry, it was a Friday...Friday, Friday two weeks ago.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: You're sure of that? Friday? The 5<sup>th</sup>?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Um...And where were you? When the incident occurred?

RACHEL: At...I was at a party...with some of the boys from...from my school...and...they're two forms above me.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Okay so umm -

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Where was the party?

RACHEL: Umm...(*giggles uncomfortably*)...um...

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Was it a house party?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Do you know the address?

RACHEL: I don't...I don't want to say the address.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: It's just important that you tell us everything that you can so that we can, ah, obviously make sure that we do our job properly. Cause you have come in here so obviously there's something of concern...to you...

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And our job is just to get all the details we can, we appreciate it is difficult.

RACHEL: It was in North Perth.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And had you been there before?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You have? Okay. And why have you gone there previously?

RACHEL: Ah... just...I liked one of the older boys and he invited me home. Just to...look to look his playstation.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And um... did anything of a sexual nature happen previously to this night?

RACHEL: No.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: No? Okay.

RACHEL: He...I think...he...he...might have put his arm around me but we didn't kiss or anything like that.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: So nothing you would consider of a sexual nature?

RACHEL: Is that sexual? I don't know. He just put his arm around me.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Where exactly did he put his arm?

RACHEL: It was there.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Okay, on your arm?

RACHEL: He was there.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Okay.

RACHEL: But he didn't do it for long, cause I got a bit frightened.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You got frightened?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Okay. And what's this boys name?

RACHEL: (*whispered*) David.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: So what time's this, roughly, the party? Do you know what time you got there?

RACHEL: My parents didn't want me going and so I waited until they were in bed...and it was probably...11:30? No, no, no, no, it was after the buses had finished, so it would have been..12...12:30?

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Do you do that a lot? Sneak out of home, at night times?

RACHEL: No they just -

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Have you done it before?

RACHEL: Yeah, the last time was to his house.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: So you've snuck out of home before, late at night, and gone to this boys house?

RACHEL: Yeah but it wasn't late at night, I just said I was going out to the shops and I wasn't gone very long...I was only gone about an hour. I have to, my parents, their rules are so...I can't do anything. I can't go out with my friends. Can't go out on the weekends, can't do anything.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: So did you go to the party because you knew that your parents wouldn't like that then?

RACHEL: No, I went to the party because my friends were there. And David was there and maybe I wanted him to put his arms around me again. I don't know.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: But you knew that was breaking the rules of what your parents thought was right?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You did?

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: I know this is hard. We know this is hard.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Any other people at the party that you knew other than David?

RACHEL: (*getting emotional*) Not really, I know some of his friends, but I don't really talk to them.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: People drinking?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Were you drinking?

RACHEL: Maybe one or two.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: One or two?...Beers...wines? UDL's?

RACHEL: Vodka and lemonade I think. I hadn't had a drink before.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You hadn't had a drink before that...that night? So you have drunk before though?

RACHEL: No.

Police Interviewer One: No? And who gave you the alcohol?

RACHEL: David.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: David did.

RACHEL: David first, then his mate Robbie did it. Kept getting me...kept getting them.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And did you at any point think that it wasn't a good idea to have those drinks?

RACHEL: No, I wanted them to like me.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: How much older are these boys than you? How old are these boys?

RACHEL: 16...maybe 17. And one had an older brother there, I think he was 20.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Did you do anything else other than drink at this party? Were there any drugs...marijuana? Pills of any sort? Anything like that?

*Pause.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: We're not going to arrest you for that. You're not in trouble-

RACHEL: No-

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Nothing, you didn't see anyone else doing anything like that?

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You're absolutely sure?

*Rachel nods.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Okay. Okay so now we're going to have to get you to talk us through exactly what happened. So, um, talk us through the incident, the...ah, we appreciate this is difficult, but we just need you to tell us exactly what went on.

RACHEL: The boys were playing playstation...and I was watching, and Dave's brother wanted a go, so Dave...*pause*...Dave gave him the controller, and he said do you want to see my music, and I said yeah, so we went to his bedroom...

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: This is Dave's bedroom?

RACHEL: Yeah, and ah...we got in and he put his arm around me immediately, he didn't show me his music, and I thought it was nice, because I really like him, he's older and he's cool and he smokes.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You did say before that when he had put his arm around you it scared you, so what was different about this time?

RACHEL: When I got thinking about it afterwards I thought it was...it wasn't scary, he's a really nice guy, and it felt nice

actually, I was just...cause I haven't had it done before, I thought it would be...I wanted it to happen again.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: So it actually, it felt good the first time when you thought it had frightened you, or you mean this time?

RACHEL: After I thought about it I thought it was probably good, and I was only frightened 'cause I hadn't done it before.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Did the alcohol make you feel different? You felt normal?

*Rachel shrugs.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And what were you wearing?

RACHEL: A short skirt, and my sister's high heels that don't really fit me.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And what colour was the skirt?

RACHEL: Black, black pencil skirt.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Pencil skirt. So it's quite a tight skirt then?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Would you say it's, umm, like when you put it on, would you say it's difficult to get on or-

RACHEL: It has a zip.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: It has a zip.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: And this was the skirt, what were you wearing on top.

RACHEL: White top.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: White top. And could you describe the top?

RACHEL: It's kinda gotta a big fat collar that kinda comes down here, a little bit.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Would you say it, um, shows your cleavage.

RACHEL: *Laughs*. Don't really have any, but yeah, a little bit.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Okay, So he's taken you into his room, put his arm around you, what happened next?

RACHEL: He kissed me.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: He kissed you.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Where did he kiss you?

RACHEL: On the lips.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And that was okay with you?

RACHEL: Yeah. Felt nice.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: You sure?

RACHEL: M-hmm.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And then what happened?

RACHEL: Then Robbie came in and he said "so you gonna do it?" To David, he wasn't even looking at me. I said "what?" Dave said "will you shut the door."

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: So Dave said shut the door?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: To Robbie?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And did he do that?

RACHEL: Mhm.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And did you feel - and how did you feel at the time?

RACHEL: Frightened (*starts to cry*)

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You felt frightened.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: And did you say anything to Dave or to Robbie?

RACHEL: No.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: So did they know you were frightened?

RACHEL: Uh-huh.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: They did? And how did you think they knew?

RACHEL: Cause I wasn't saying anything.

*Pause.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Were you crying or anything?...That might have told them you were uncomfortable?

RACHEL: No, maybe.

*Rachel moves as if to get out of her chair.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Just have a seat, have a seat.

RACHEL: Dave pulled my top down and he pulled my bra down and I was embarrassed and I think I probably started crying then.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Did you ask him to not do that?

RACHEL: No.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: So at this point, you're standing? With your...breasts exposed, no top on, or pulled down. Is that correct?

*Rachel nods.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: But you didn't say anything to them?

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: So you're standing...I just want to check, I thought you said before you were sitting on the bed and he put his arm around you.

RACHEL: No.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: No you didn't say that?

RACHEL: Maybe?

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: I wrote here that you did, what did you -

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: I don't have anything about being on the bed, she's in the bedroom.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Okay.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: So what was Robbie doing during this point, while Dave was taking your top off?

RACHEL: Looking.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Was he standing, blocking the door or anything, do you know if the door was locked?

RACHEL: Didn't have a lock.

*Pause, the police interviewers are writing.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: You didn't say anything? About being scared or uncomfortable?

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And then what happened?

RACHEL: Robbie was laughing.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: He was laughing. And where was Dave's brother?

RACHEL: Don't know.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You don't know. Did you think to call out?

*Pause. Rachel says nothing.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Okay, so...

RACHEL: I was on the bed and -

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Did one of the boys move you to the bed, or did you go of your own accord?

RACHEL: Dave, he pressed up against me, and I kinda fell.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: So would you say he pushed you onto the bed?

*Rachel nods.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And where exactly did he touch you when that happened?

RACHEL: *(Quietly)* On my breasts.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: On your breasts. So he actually pushed you from that position.

RACHEL: Mh-Hmm.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: And was this with his hands?

RACHEL: He...put...his mouth...on my breast...And I tried to push his head away.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: And what happened when you tried to push him away?

*Rachel shakes her head and shrugs.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: He didn't go?

RACHEL: No.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Did you continue to try and push him off?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: So you kept trying to shove him away while he was doing this?

RACHEL: Yeah but...I'm...I'm not very strong.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: No, I understand.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And where was Robbie while this was happening?

RACHEL: Watching.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Watching...he was watching still.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: And he didn't try to step in or stop anything?

RACHEL: No...no.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: So what happened after that?

RACHEL: David, he, pulled my...my knickers down and ah...he took his thing out...

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: His penis?

*Rachel nods.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Yeah? Sorry, we need you to...say that's what...that's what it was. We appreciate it's -

*Pause.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Could you just verbalise that, for the recording.

*Pause.*

RACHEL: *(Quietly and quickly)* He took his penis out.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Now at this point, try to remember, was he erect?

RACHEL: Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: He was?

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Which hand did he have it in?

RACHEL: I don't know.

*Pause*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: See if you can just take a moment to remember -

RACHEL: No, he didn't have it in his hand. He had his arms up here, around me.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: So when you say he took it out -

RACHEL: He took it out, and then he let it go and put his arms around me like that.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Did he just - did he take any clothes off.

RACHEL: No.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: We do appreciate this is difficult, we just need to clarify a few things, so did he have a zip, or was it buttons, or what was -

RACHEL: He was wearing jeans.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Jeans.

RACHEL: With a button and a zip. And he had a belt as well.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: A belt.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: He was wearing jeans with buttons and a zip?

RACHEL: No one button and a zip...like most jeans...I think.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You think.

RACHEL: I think so.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And so you say he had his hands down, were you across the bed, or were you laying down lengthways?

*Rachel shakes her head, unable to remember, or possibly understand the question. Rachel is getting more and more upset.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And where were your hands at this time?

RACHEL: I don't know.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: You don't know where they were?

RACHEL: *(breaking down)* No.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: And did you try anymore to push him off you-

RACHEL: I said stop.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: You told him to stop.

RACHEL: I did. I said stop.

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: And that's the exact word you used?

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Did you say it more than once?

RACHEL: I don't know.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Do you think he heard you say stop?

RACHEL: I don't know.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: What happened next?

*Pause.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: You don't remember?

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Just take a moment.

RACHEL: He hurt me

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: How did he hurt you?

RACHEL: Do you have a tissue?

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: How did he hurt you?

RACHEL: Down...there.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: With his hands?

RACHEL: No.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: With his penis?

RACHEL: Yeah.

*Pause.*

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: Did he insert his penis into you?

RACHEL: *(quietly)* Yeah.

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: He did?

POLICE INTERVIEWER ONE: Is that what hurt?

POLICE INTERVIEWER TWO: And just to be clear, this was in to your vagina?

RACHEL: *(quietly)* Shut up.

*House lights now dim to separate audience from the performance space.*

### Scene Two

*A little girl, around ten years of age, sits on stage, holding a doll. She brushes its hair, and dresses it in a variety of outfits.*

*A storyteller sits on stage behind her, reading from an oversized storybook.*

Storyteller: Once upon a time, in a land far away, there lived a beautiful Princess. The Princess was kind and gentle, wise

and witty, however it was not for these gifts she was renowned, but for the beauty of her voice. When the Princess spoke, when she uttered but one word all around her fell silent so that they might hear her every sigh and syllable. Should the Princess raise her voice in song the wind itself would die down, ashamed to compete with the rare beauty of the Princess' voice. The Princess loved to speak, often she could be found in the village square reading storybooks to children, her voice rich and golden with pleasure. In bold, presumptive tones she spoke of adventure, of dragons slain, and maidens saved. So beautifully did she tell of love and passion that to hear her was to feel oneself in the gentle caress of a lover. But to know true glory was to hear the Princess sing. Not often did she do this in public, for her songs were a private token of affection, of gratitude, of pride. Her songs were part of her, weft into the fabric of who she was, of who she hoped she might grow to be. When the Princess sang her heart and soul was in every note, every rise and fall came from that special place inside her where rested her hopes, her dreams, everything she held to be right, fair and true. And so her songs were for those she loved, or, more often than not, for herself. The Princess sang in private as she bathed herself, as she brushed her hair, as she sat at her daily lessons, as she walked alone in the forest, as she lay down at night in pursuit of sleep. The Princess and her songs kept good, gentle company together.

One day there was great excitement in the court where the Princess lived, they were to have very important visitors! A Prince and all his princely entourage, his princely knights and their princely horses, his princely servants their princely servants' servants, the princely advisors, and the

princely jesters, the princely cake maker and the princely shoe polisher and all manner of princely additions. The Prince was a very important person, and had known the Princess' family for years. Her father the King and his father the King were old friends and had done many Kingly things together, like play poker, hunt foxes and annex smaller, neighboring countries. The Princess was very excited to see the Prince again, she remembered playing with him when she was very small. He had been very kind and patient when they played throw and catch, and she kept dropping the ball. He had played hide and seek with her for hours and pretended not to know where she was, even though she hid in the candelabra cupboard every single time. She was nervous about seeing him now, would he remember her? Would they still be friends? She wasn't, truth be told, very good at catching a ball now either. What if he thought her silly? Or stupid? Or, much worse, ugly?

*On stage, overhead, on a screen behind the child, in cursive font in the manner of child writing with crayon, appear the words:*

One in six Australian women have been sexually assaulted.

### Scene Three

*The stage starts in a black out, a thin corridor of light appears stage left to right. A man starts stage right and walks toward stage left at a slow, stylized pace. Halfway across the stage we hear the sound of footsteps. The man looks behind him but no-one can be seen, the footsteps speed up, the man turns back and continues his journey, moving slightly faster, while the footsteps also speed up. The man looks*

*behind him one last time before he disappears off stage left, never knowing if the footsteps were to be feared or not. Out of the shadows stage right a woman appears, mirroring the man's slow, stylized pace. Halfway across the stage she hears footsteps behind her, she turns to look but no-one can be seen. The footsteps increase in pace. The woman turns back and continues her journey stage left, the footsteps getting faster behind her. Two more corridors of light appear parallel to the first. In each one a person appears, and in staggered succession walks across stage only to find that halfway across there are footsteps behind them. As soon as some-one leaves the corridor of light another person enters either from the same side or the opposite, the final effect will be haphazard with a multitude of footsteps echoing.*

*Blackout and the footsteps stop.*

*Lights up and one female performer stands in the middle of the stage, in spotlight, staring at the audience. The remaining performers standing behind her in an informal formation, staring at her.*

(Voice-over): She stood before me, with blood on her lip and tears in her eyes. There was tension in every line of her body. She wanted to tell me something, I had a fair idea of what it was. And quite suddenly, I hated her. We weren't that different, her and I, not that different. A couple of inches in height, a few kilos in weight, different hair colour sure, and she had darker eyes but in essence we were the same. In her I could easily see myself, *my split lip, my watery eyes.* I could already imagine my own struggle, I could hear my own voice saying no, my own cries of pain. I could imagine the

weight pinning *me* down, and the vicious pulling of my own skin as hands gripped my arms, squeezed my throat. I could imagine my fear as I realised there was no escape, no help. I imagined the deep, twisting pain inside me as my flesh was torn.

Ripped, battered, violated. I felt my own horror at my own intense vulnerability and I hated her. Hated her for being a mirror to my fears, hated her for bringing to life *my* nightmares. But she wasn't me. Not quite. Not exactly. And the more not exactly the same I could make her, the safer I felt.

Now it is my bleeding lip, my teary eyes, my bruises. And it's your hatred, your fear. I understand, when you ask me what I was wearing, what I was drinking, if I had said yes before, how many times, and to whom. I understand. What you're really asking me. For a reason why. Any reason why. Any reason why this won't happen to you. Any reason why this won't happen to your daughter. Any reason you can give yourself why your mother could never, ever have felt the way I do. Any reason why I asked for this in a way you, she, he, they, you never, ever would. Any reason why your world is not quite exactly the same as mine.

*Lights down.*

#### Scene Four

*A little boy and girl sit on stage. The girl is playing with Barbie dolls, the boy is playing with action figures, making "fighting" noises. Overhead, on a screen behind them, in cursive font, in the manner of child writing with crayon, appear the words:*

***One in five Australians think violence is caused by a man's need for sex or not being able to control his anger.***

*The boy becomes quiet while the storyteller begins to read, although both children remain on stage.*

Storyteller: The day of the Prince's arrival was one of much pomp and ceremony, indeed the Princess had never seen so much pomp and ceremony, the royal pomp and ceremony statistician said the pomp and ceremony was quite literally off the pomp and ceremony chart. It was all quite overwhelming. And the Prince? The Prince was everything the Princess had hoped he would be, he was kind, he laughed at her jokes, and complimented her hair and his teeth were all perfectly straight and even, with not even the smallest piece of spinach stuck between them.

The Prince and his princely party settled into the palace, and so started a routine of dances, and fox hunts, and poker and nostalgic reminiscing about annexing smaller, neighboring countries. There were, however, a lot of people around. A lot of people bustling here and there, washing this doublet, skinning that fox, so many people that the Princess longed for the times when she could be alone, alone with her thoughts, and her songs.

One day the Princess decided to go for a walk in the woods, she walked down the garden path, passed the iron gates of the castle, into the tall trees of the forest, she walked its winding paths, down passed the river, by the grove of daffodils, and down to the little clearing where she liked to sit under a large oak tree, and sing. She did this every

afternoon, for four days. On the fifth day, as she sat there singing, she thought she heard a noise, a rustle of a bush perhaps, or a foot on a twig. At first she was afraid and stopped singing immediately, for she thought it might be a wolf, but then, much to her relief, the Prince stepped into view from behind a tree. He smiled at her, and exclaimed in delight at the beauty and wonder of her singing. She blushed. 'She was a goddess!' he said. 'An angel of music and light!' he said. 'Why he was almost hurt she had not sung to him before,' he said. 'Such music as hers should be shared with all those who might appreciate it,' he said. The Princess smiled, and blushed, and put herself down slightly, because a prideful woman is most unattractive. Then the Prince and the Princess walked back to the castle together.

The next day the Princess went to walk down to the forest again, only to find that the Prince was waiting for her at the iron gates of the castle. He had hoped, he said, to walk with her and listen to her sing. The Princess was confused, she liked the Prince, he was very nice, and very complimentary, and she had only seen him with spinach stuck in his teeth that one time, but singing was something she did for herself, and the people she loved. She liked the Prince, but she didn't know him very well, and she wasn't sure she wanted to sing for him. So she told him she was very sorry, but not today, for today she had a sore throat. Perhaps another day, she said.

#### Scene Five

*Lights shift. All performers run on stage performing various, high energy exercises - running, jumping jacks, commando crawls etc.*

*Lights shift again, a spotlight on an adolescent girl (B) who is shadow boxing. All other performers leave the stage. The girl, B, is very focused and intent, doing exercises that move her through various physical levels. She is wearing short sports shorts, a sports bra and sneakers to accommodate this degree of movement.*

*Her mother, A, enters, and B stops to talk to her.*

A: I wanted to talk.

B: Okay.

A: About clothes.

B: O-kay.

A: About what clothes to wear, and what clothes not to wear.

B: Okay.

A: About what could happen if you wear the clothes you shouldn't wear.

B: Okay.

A: About what could happen with boys if you wear the clothes you shouldn't wear.

B: Okay.

A: About what boys could do to you if you wear the clothes you shouldn't wear.

B: What could boys do to me if I wear the clothes I shouldn't wear?

A: They could hurt you. Hurt you badly.

B: Oh. Okay. What are the clothes I shouldn't wear?

A: Anything too tight. Or too short.

B: Okay.

A: Anything that shows the shape of your body.

B: The shape of my body will get me hurt?

A: Yes. And the shape of your face. Don't draw attention to your face.

B: What about my hair?

A: Your hair?

B: Yes, I draw attention to my hair. I brush it out, I make it shiny, I style it.

A: Good point. Don't do that. Don't draw attention to your hair.

B: Or my face. Or my body.

A: Yes. Good.

B: What about my voice?

A: Your voice?

B: I've been told I have a nice voice. A sexy voice.

A: Someone said that? A sexy voice?

B: Yes. A sexy voice.

A: You must hide that too. Try not to talk.

B: Because I'll get hurt?

A: Yes, if you have a sexy voice then boys won't be able to control themselves. Don't talk.

B: Can I laugh?

A: I wouldn't. Just to be on the safe side. Now, your walk.

B: My walk?

A: Walk for me.

*The young girl walks away and towards her mother.*

A: That is bad. We all know what that means.

B: What what means?

A: It means she's asking for it.

B: Who is?

A: Maybe you could hide your hips.

B: Wait, she is me?

A: That might work.

B: And what is *it*?

*Pause.*

A: What?

B: It.

A: It?

B: That I'm asking for?

*A is perplexed.*

B: I'll hide the shape of my body and the shape of my face and my shiny hair, and the way that I walk. I'll cover it all. You won't even be able to tell it's me!

A: And don't talk. No laughing. You might get hurt.

*B stands silently for a long time.*

A: Yes. Good girl.

*Blackout*

Scene Six

*Lights up.*

*On stage a man and a woman stand, immobile. They do not move of their own accord for the entirety of the scene. They should be frozen, but not mechanically so - they are 'living dolls'.*

*On the screen overhead read the words:*

Around 75% of people who are sexually assaulted, both male and female, experience 'Tonic Immobility' during their attack. A survival mechanism similar to 'fight or flight', victims find themselves involuntarily immobile. Frozen.

*The second (mobile) woman grooms the man and woman as if they are dolls, fixing their hair, and then proceeds to strip them naked. Once they are naked, the mobile woman leaves the stage, leaving the 'living dolls' naked on stage, and the following lines are heard as voice-over, as if in the actors' heads. A computerized voice reads the lines.*

Voice over: No.

I say no.

I think I say no.

Stop.

Stop it.

Don't touch me.

I try to push him off.

I try to roll away.

I can't remember what I said.

I can't move.

Leave.

Just get up and leave.

Open your mouth and scream.

It would be easier to just let it happen, like it happened before.

I can't move.

Can't breathe.

I can't make her stop.

Get him off me.

I don't want to hurt him.

I can't...

Maybe he thinks everything is fine.

Maybe if I wasn't drunk.

I shouldn't have invited him in...

Gone back to her place...

Said yes in the beginning, I should've known I wasn't ready.

They do tests.

They hurt.

They're embarrassing.

I don't say anything.

I don't move.

I just lay there, very still.

I say I'm sorry. They say what for? I say, for not fighting,  
or screaming.

You couldn't help it.

Couldn't fight it.

Couldn't move.

It's perfectly normal they say.

To Freeze.

*Blackout.*

### Scene Seven

*A young girl sits on the stage, having a tea party with dolls.  
The story-teller, with their over-sized book, sits behind her.*

Storyteller: And so it went, everyday the Prince would wait by  
the gates, and ask her to sing for him, and everyday she found

a reason not to, one more day to keep singing for herself, a part of who she was, only to be shared with a special few.

One day the Princess went down to the iron gates only to find the Prince was not there. Perhaps he had given up, she thought. She was a little disappointed, but mostly relieved that she could once again sing as she wished to. And so she walked into the tall trees of the forest, she walked its winding paths, down past the river, by the grove of daffodils, and down to the little clearing where she sat underneath her oak tree and sang.

As she was singing she heard a rustle, much as she had heard before. She stopped singing immediately and looked around and, as she had suspected he might, the Prince stepped out from behind a bush. He laughed, he was embarrassed, he said. He had so wanted to hear her sing, he said. He lay awake at night, thinking of her singing, he said. He slept with wondrous dreams of her singing, he said. He could not eat, he said, for all he wanted to consume was the sound of her song, he said. Surely, he smiled, she could not be so cruel as to deny him one song, he said. The Princess did not want to sing for him, but she felt guilty, and a little bit rude. And so the Princess sang, just a little song, a little nothing song, a short, little nothing song that didn't mean anything, that she closed her eyes for, and didn't really think about. A short, little, nothing song that she quickly finished singing and then suggested they might leave the forest. Oh no, said the Prince. He couldn't possibly. Not after such a glorious little song, he said. Why, his heart was beating fast, and his ears, his poor ears, were in such a state, his ears were in such a state of longing. They couldn't possibly leave his ears in

such a state. But the Princess was determined now, she wanted to go. Oh, no, said the Prince, and he wrapped his hand around her wrist. Oh no, said the Prince, I couldn't possibly let you go until I've heard another song. One more song, said the Prince. Come now, said the Prince, you know you love to sing. Why else would you be here? Why else come all this way to sing, he said. His eyes were kind, and his smile was sweet and free of spinach, but his grip on her wrist was strong, and starting to hurt. The princess tried to step away, but the Prince stepped closer, maybe a little too close the Princess thought, just a little bit too close. And now he held her wrist at a very uncomfortable angle, yes a most uncomfortable angle. The oak tree, *her* oak tree pressed against her back, and the Prince stood smiling in front of her. Come now, he said, you know you love to sing, what will it cost you to sing one little song for me, I so want to hear you sing. And so the Princess sang, she sang one of her favourites, but it didn't feel like it usually felt. Her stomach felt sick, and her breath was shaky, and her mouth could barely form the words. But she sang, she sang beautifully, because she was a beautiful singer, and to hear her no one would ever know that the special place inside her where her songs came from, where rested her hopes, her dreams, everything she held to be right, fair and true, to hear her no one would ever know that special place was dying - shaking? Quaking? Crumbling? .

The Prince let the Princess go and they walked up to the castle together, the Prince was laughing all the way, happy he said, so happy to have heard her sing. The Princess felt ill, she wanted to cry, but also to scream, to hide, but also to fight. And yet the Prince, he seemed so...Perhaps he didn't realise how much she hadn't wanted to sing, she thought. She

hadn't really told him properly had she, she thought. Perhaps he just didn't understand, she thought, because she knew he would never do anything that he knew would upset her.

"Perhaps I had asked for it", she thought to herself. "I had sung for him, I was there."

The weeks went by and the Prince was very busy with her father, the King. There were still yet neighboring countries that had yet to be annexed, and they had great fun making up plans for war, and playing charades, as Kings and Princes are wont to do. Sometimes the Princess would see the Prince at dinner, and he would smile, and the Princess would find it difficult to eat, and very difficult to speak. Her father, the King, said that he missed hearing her talk, so lovely was her voice. But the Princess didn't feel like talking anymore, not even for her father. The thought of talking, of speaking, of making any sound at all made her all at once hot and cold. It made her shiver and shake. It made her want to run away so very desperately, but she could barely make a move to blink her eyes, let alone pick up her dainty princess feet and run away. Sometimes she would meet the Prince by accident in the stables, or gardens full of fresh flowers and brightly coloured birds. Sometimes the Prince would give her a compliment, or pick for her a flower, or sometimes just smile his smile at her. And the Princess would have to run away so she could cry, sometimes in her bedroom, sometimes in a secluded corner of the garden, sometimes under the old oak tree in the forest. She would cry, and cry, and cry until she could cry no more.

Eventually the Prince and his princely entourage left. The Prince kissed her hand, smiled that smile and told her that she was the most beautiful singer in the world. He would forever cherish her songs, he said. The Princess barely made it to the stables before she emptied her stomach right on the floor. One of the horses ate it, horses are like that, even Princessly horses.

Once the Prince was gone, the Princess waited to feel better, she waited to feel happy again, she waited to want to sing again. But the wanting never came. She would walk down to the forest, down passed the daffodils, and the river, down to the old oak tree. She would sit for hours, trying and hoping and longing to want to sing again. But the wanting never came. Her father began to get angry with her, for being so very silent, and so very boring. What good was a Princess, he said, who would not speak with her lovely voice, and sing her lovely songs. What on earth, he said, was he to do with her. One time, just once, she tried to talk to her father, the King. She tried to tell him, so that, perhaps, he would be less angry that she was sad all the time. Perhaps he would hold her like he used to, and tell her that it was fine, and sing with her until she wanted to sing again. But her father, the King, did not understand. Because the Prince was so very nice, and so very kind, and so rarely had spinach in his teeth. Yes, she had a beautiful voice, but any Princess in any country, annexed or otherwise, would surely love to sing for the Prince. He did not need to *force* a Princess to sing. She must have misunderstood, or, perhaps she had done something to confuse the Prince. After all, everybody knew how much she loved to use her voice. Everybody knew, he said, how she loved to tell stories, and everybody knew how she loved, oh how she

loved, to sing. The Princess told him he was right, of course he was right, and she so looked forward to seeing the Prince when he next visited. And the Princess went down to the forest, passed the daffodils, and she cried.

*Over the child's head, on a screen behind her, in cursive font, in the manner of child writing with crayon, appear the words: **One in five Australians believe a woman who has been drinking is "partly responsible" for her own rape.***

### Scene Eight

*Lights start flashing, loud pop music plays and all performers run on dancing wildly, as if at the end of a night clubbing. Their movements are bold, and stylised. Suddenly the music stops and all the performers freeze, except for a young woman (B). B is standing downstage wearing a 'party dress', she is applying make-up, plucking her eyebrows, and checking her reflection in a mimed mirror. Her mother (A) enters from behind the frozen performers.*

A: You look lovely.

B: Thank you.

A: You're going out?

B: Yes.

A: With friends?

B: Yes.

A: That's nice. It's nice to spend time with people you care about.

B: Yes.

A: Young people should have fun.

B: *Laughs*. Old people should have fun too.

A: Yes. *Pause*. You remember the list?

B: Eyes on your drink at all times, if you lose sight even for a moment then throw it out and buy a new one.

A: Make sure one friend is sober and keeping an eye on everybody. Better that one of you is bored than all of you are dead.

B: If you are being repeatedly hit on lie and say you are in a relationship. That way no one's feelings get hurt, hurt feelings lead to broken bodies. Have a backstory of your fake relationship in case they test you. Make up a name, carry a photo of a random guy for proof.

A: If you get your ass pinched, or someone grazes up against your chest, just ignore it, you never know if they'll get aggressive if you say something. Just make sure they don't follow you to the bathroom, or out to your car.

B: Smile a little when someone walks past and says, 'smile for me baby, you'd look so pretty with a smile". Smile enough so

they don't get angry, not so much that they get the wrong idea.

A: And?

B: Ah...

A: You missed a couple. I'll print you a copy. You can keep it in your bag.

B: Great.

A: Have fun. You look lovely.

*The music begins again and all performers, including A and B, stand in groups talking, or dancing, as if at a bar or nightclub. Performers either mime holding drinks, or pull various drinking glasses from coat pockets, and handbags etc. Performers pull off into little groups, chatting, drinking and dancing. One group will take a more central position downstage, with at least one female performer in it. A male performer will emerge from another group and approach the woman, as he does the music stops and instead there is the sound of footsteps, and the sound of a heartbeat that increases in pace as the male performer approaches - connecting to the earlier scene. The motif is repeated by a variety of male-female pairs, in a variety of groups. The men should approach the women in different "characters", it is important that it not appear that a certain approach is particularly disconcerting but rather establishing the simple fact that any male represents a threat to the females.*

*Finally one of the men, standing in a group of men, breaks the action, and the footsteps/heartbeat stops.*

Man: Have you heard this one? After strangulation, which organ in the female body remains warm after death?

My cock.

*The heartbeat returns. There is a prolonged silence amongst the men, as the other men look at each other awkwardly - before finally laughing falsely, but loudly. The sound of the heartbeat increases.*

#### Scene Nine

*A little boy and girl sit on stage, the girl playing with a doll, brushing her hair, and the boy playing with action figures. The boy is making his action figures fight again.*

*The Story-teller sits behind them.*

Storyteller: The Princess cried often. She cried so often that the salt of her tears left scars down her face, she cried so often that her eyes turned completely clear, she cried so often that her maids had to take turns scooping up the water in her bedroom with little buckets, like they were on a sinking ship. She cried so often that she woke one day to find she could not speak, she could not sing, she had no voice. She had cried her voice away.

The Prince came to visit again that summer. 'He was so distraught to hear of the Princess' loss of voice,' he said. 'He had so loved her voice,' he said. 'He had longed to hear

it again,' he said. 'Nothing in his life had given him so much joy as when she had agreed to sing for him,' he said. 'Nothing was more beautiful than the look in her eyes when she wanted to sing for him,' he said. The Princess said nothing at all.

*The little boy notices the little girl's doll and stares, intrigued. He puts down the action figure, and moves closer to the girl, standing over her, watching her brush the doll's hair. Overhead, on a screen behind them, in cursive font, in the manner of child writing with crayon, appear the words:*

***One in six Australians believe that when women say no to sex, they actually mean yes.***

*The little girl offers the doll to the little boy, who takes it, sits down and, under instruction from the little girl, very gently begins to brush her hair.*

## Conclusion

Having identified methods and constructs employed by my chosen playwrights and theatre-makers, all engaged in a community of practice that seeks to promote issues of socio-humanitarian concern through dramatic and theatrical treatment, through the course of this practice-led research I applied these methods and constructs to my own creative practice. The aim was to develop my creative practice beyond what I had identified as being overly prescriptive with regards to meaning. This research involved trialing these methods and constructs, and considering my practice not only in terms of product but also process and to consider my practice reflexively and to acknowledge biases, habits and weaknesses that affect and inform my work.

Throughout this research I was forced to acknowledge a compulsion to present my belief systems, at great and descriptive length in dramatic writing. The methods and constructs drawn from the work of others, provided a framework of practice to steer my style away from literal and dogmatic interpretations of my own personal beliefs and/or perspectives, and to employ techniques that examine rather than lecture, that promote discussion rather than diatribe. While I have no intention of being less political in my belief systems I understand that dogmatism in dramatic re/presentation leaves less room for individual spectatorial action, or perhaps the witnessing alluded to by Caroline Wake. Interestingly, while I was also able to identify methods that I feel improved my engagement with realism, I have concluded throughout this research that my own creative practice best serves less traditional narrative structures, such as those associated with Aristotelian drama, with a realistic performance style set within a three act structure.

While in a workshop to experiment with a collaborative approach to creative genesis I identified two methods that were particularly helpful. The first was to employ the initial response improvisations of actors to raw material. These initial response improvisations, drawn from the work of *The Civilians* and Steve Crossan (Kozinn, 2010), capture the instinctive response of actors to the material provided, providing different perspectives, and distilling the raw material into that which the actors found most

affecting or engaging. These improvisations can be used as the basis for further writing, or even as the actual play text itself. The improvisations left unedited represent the authentic reaction and response of the actors, and this authentic response, lacking in theatrical form, can offer a perspective potentially lost in a more structured scene.

The second exercise was drawn from the work of *Frantic Assembly* (Graham & Hoggett, 2009), and sought to represent a theme or concept in a simple, mundane movement that is then the basis for a physical performance. This exercise was particularly helpful to my creative practice as I am much more inclined toward text based work, and was ill equipped in my creative practice to develop more movement based work. This exercise reduced one side of a contentious social debate, the concept of 'Schrödinger's Rapist', to a simple but incredibly powerful reality; fear. At the heart of this debate is the reality of this fear, simplified and physicalized on the page/stage.

From Caryl Churchill's *Seven Jewish Children – a play for Gaza* (2010), and Patricia Cornelius' *Slut* (2007) I drew the construct of employing the rhetoric of oppressive paradoxical ideology within the performance text, to allow for its inconsistencies and inequalities to reveal themselves. This meant that rather than articulating and describing criticism of this ideology, as I would have done in my previous creative practice, I set parameters to my creative writing practice which only allowed for my employing the rhetoric of this oppositional ideology. Meaning is not described and prescribed for an audience, instead thematic space is allowed for potential audience members to determine their own response to the ideology and its supporting rhetoric.

Inspired by fascinating yet different texts by *version 1.0's CMI (A Certain Maritime Incident)* (Williams, 2012) and Caryl Churchill's *Cloud 9* (1978), I determined to concentrate on practice that *performed* oppressive social structures and representation through the subversion of expected performance representation. Instead of practice that described and decried these issues, I focused on developing scenes that suggested meaning through juxtaposition and connections made through performance, not text. The issues are represented in such a way as to invite alternate readings and responses, setting parameters on creative practice that focus on subversive representational

methods of conveying information, rather than overt articulation.

The final component of research drew from the work of Bertolt Brecht, *Mother Courage* (2009a), and Timberlake Wertenbaker, *The love of the nightingale* (1996), both of which employ allegorical form. This allows for the issue at hand to be distilled to a foundational function, free from the specificities of political, social, cultural or personal contexts that might inhibit reception. Rather than considering an issue through the context of a single event, which may invite specific biases, prejudices or sympathies, the issue may be examined for its foundational function, the primary power relation, or cultural dynamic, at the heart of the issue.

Throughout this research I found the constructs and development method trialed challenged and extended my creative writing practice, most notably in establishing parameters or structure. Having acknowledged a tendency to allow personal frustrations, biases and beliefs to saturate a dramatic text with extended description, limited perspective and forced prescriptions of meaning, I found that being specific about the parameters of context, construct or technique reduced this tendency. By placing parameters on delivery, for example by focusing practice on the subversion of performance representations, or through the use of allegory, I extended practice beyond a more demonstrative, all-encompassing delivery in which there is little space for nuance, or the decoding of thematic 'signs'. When the focus of practice is specific, and has clear parameters, I found I was able, although it may take several drafts, to draw my practice away from attempting to saturate the work with meaning and intent. By setting parameters of content, such as the examination of rhetoric supporting oppositional ideologies, or the improvisational text of a workshop collaboration, I reduced overly descriptive polemic. The physicalisation trope inspired by *Frantic Assembly* is perhaps the best example of creative parameters developing creative practice. The method of development was very specific, the genesis point had to be a single, common gesture that represented an emotion. It was the parameters provided by the various constructs and means of delivery explored throughout this dissertation that focused my often overly verbose and prescriptive creative practice on a simple, powerful, concept; 'rape culture' represents the fear many women consistently live with. Other contextual,

conceptual arguments may have merit, but that simple concept is at the heart of any examination of 'rape culture'. By placing clear and specific parameters on my creative practice I was able to prevent myself from employing the overly didactic and prescriptive methods of previous practice.

The methods and constructs outlined in this dissertation were beneficial to the development of my socio-humanitarian creative writing practice, and they offer modes of creative practice development that may be applicable for others seeking to develop creative writing practice. The modes of analysis and practice developed can also be applied further to my work as a playwright. Through this research I developed modes of practice that have allowed me to develop clear methods of analyzing a selected work, drawing from it specific dramatic constructs or concepts, to employ in my own creative practice. It is a practice-led research methodology that may be applied repeatedly in the future throughout the continued development of my creative writing practice.

By identifying, outlining and trialing various methods and constructs employed by others in a community of practice that hold to the belief "that the micro-level of individual shows and the macro-level of the socio-political order might somehow productively interact" (Kershaw, 1992, p. 1), I was able to develop my creative practice of the writing of *socio-humanitarian drama* beyond the overtly didactic. I have identified personally held socio-political beliefs that have impacted the way I write and subsequently, upon reflexive *thinking* and *doing* in the dissection of my writing practice, I have been able to build various pathways ways through this. In so doing I was able to further develop modes of practice that will, in the future, inform the scholarship and artistry of socio-humanitarian drama.

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