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## A Bell in the Storm: Persistent unexplained pain and the language of the uncanny in the creative neurophenomenal reference

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**Doctor of Philosophy**  
**Department of English (Writing)**  
**Edith Cowan University**

**Course code L02**

***A Bell in the Storm: Persistent***

**unexplained pain and the language of the  
uncanny in the creative neurophenomenal  
reference.**

|                       |                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
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| <b>Submitted</b>      | <b>March, 2006.</b>   |

## USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

*A Bell in the Storm - Persistent unexplained pain and the language of the uncanny in the creative neurophenomenal reference* is a doctoral work comprised of three parts. Part 1 is an exegesis *Persistent unexplained pain and the language of the uncanny in the creative neurophenomenal reference*; Part 2 is *The Plays, A Bell in the Storm* (produced by **deckchair theatre** in May, 2005) and the radio play *To Fall Without Landing* (produced by the **Australian Broadcasting Commission** for **Radio National** in October 2005); and, Part 3 the book of monochord poems, *Secrets of the Driftwood*.

The exegesis begins with specific anecdotes of my experience of a serious car accident in May 2000 and a subsequent persistent unexplained pain state that nonetheless pose deeply theoretical questions about the human experience of pain. The body-mind dualism of Renes Descartes' *L'Homme* and its inculcation into the classical specificity theory of pain in medical discourse is examined. The body-mind classical pain theory is then critiqued initially in light of the mid 1960s' literary theories of Jacques Derrida and then Melzack and Wall's medical Gate Control Theory (1965), through to more recent neurobiological evidence from Szentagothai, Erdi, Maturana and Varela (and others). These recent neurobiological theories challenge the classical theory's supportability through the brain's ability to self-organise, in complex and unpredictable ways that defy the commonsense of medical discourse. Pain and other phenomenal states may emerge in uncanny ways that amounts to a self-referential neurophenomenology that is inseparable from our ontology. Pain and the problem of reference in both language and neurophenomenology are considered in light of the writings of Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, Cathy Caruth and others in what de Man and Caruth describe as the fall. This cooperation between the self-referentiality of language and the brain is theoretically explored, particularly through the creative reference of Lacan, Kristeva, and Scarry. This creative reference is then referenced through both the aleatory photographic creations of Nick Djordjevic and their presence in the stage play *A Bell in the Storm* and Caruth's *fall* into the radio play *To Fall Without Landing*.

In part 2, both plays attempted the practical creative relation of the difficulties and joys, the lack and the gain, the uncanny and the bathos, the fall from and to 'the other' (and how these binaries are never in opposition) that the exegesis theoretically uncovered, within the different mediums of the multi-media stage and radio. The monochords of Part 3 relate to the inexpressibility of pain and its self-referentiality (in particularly the English language) and the uncanny moments glimpsed in single line or chordal expressions.

## DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I need to thank many people for this body of work. Dr John Quintner and Nick Djordjevic have been inspirational to the academic and creative elements. While John is a clinician and Nick a persistent pain sufferer/artist, both have been crucial to the story of my pain and pain in the other, of how it may be understood and communicated – that it can be both a loss and a gain in the mystery of its space in the world and our place in it. In the medical domain, Mr Owen Williamson’s (surgeon) insights into pain and the need to socially authenticate its presence continue to apprehend the aporia of pain with a rare combination of courage, intelligence and generosity of spirit. Associate Professor Milton Cohen and Associate Professor Jim Katz have been outstanding in their contributions to the ongoing debate concerning the meaning of pain for this thesis. The Psychologist Dr Neil Preston’s influence on my day to day wrestle in both the understanding and suffering of pain has formed ideas that continue to transcend the reductive domains of pain’s sufferance. I would like to thank my primary supervisor, Dr Susan Ash, for all the guidance and support she gave throughout this thesis. Lastly, I would like to thank the world of theatre for continuing to accept such unstable ideas that lack common sense into its falling ways.

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# **Part 1**

## **Exegesis**

***Persistent unexplained pain and the language of the uncanny in the creative neurophenomenal reference***

## Introduction

The world becomes its language and its language becomes the world. But it is a world out of control, in flight from ideology, seeking verbal security and finding none beyond that promised by a poetic text, but always a self-unsealing poetic text.

– Murray Kreiger. *A Re-opening of Closure: Organisation Against Itself*.

The thesis of this study enabled me to bring two aspects of my professional life together. The first, as a professional clinical and research nurse of twenty years in psychiatric health care and, the second, as a playwright, poet and musician. When my own body became so painfully volatile after a car serious car accident in May 2000, I was catapulted into a world I was used to professionally observing. Not only that but the very profession I was involved in was the profession that so disbelieved my pain state. I also found there was very little language available to express my pain to my doctors, colleagues, friends, my wife and my children. What was so obvious to me seemed to engender doubt in the others of my life because there seemed no empirical evidence of tissue or bony damage or lesion to explain my persistent pain.

The dominant medical discourse's explanations of pain rely on a drawing in *L'Homme* by Renes Descartes in 1644. In this modest drawing, a boy has his toe too close to a fire. The fire burns the toe

causing pain to ring in the brain through the nerves being pulled like a rope ringing a bell at the other end. Pain, in this discourse, is specifically caused by a lineal and upward process of bodily damage or lesion. My question, then, is how one can have persistent and severe pain without any verifiable bodily lesion – that is to say – obvious damage to the body? Furthermore, if this question has been impossible to prove beyond the sufferer's own experience, then how could the sufferer communicate and functionally live in a world that defies the common sense of the above explanation?

I examine and critique the discourse of medicine's specificity theory of pain, which I argue, is based upon the body-mind dualism of Rene Descartes. That is, either the pain is caused by verifiable damage or lesion to the body or in the absence of this damage or lesion, the pain must be all in the mind. This interpretation also attempts to sweep pain's unexplained and persistent presence under the carpet of *the mind*. I examine the mind's inability to escape the *play* of language and affirm its presence outside of metaphysics. I deliberately employ Jacques Derrida's mid-1960s linguistic theories of play, noncentredness and supplementarity to examine current linguistic and epistemological attributions and definitions of 'the mind'. Since 'the mind', despite Descartes' *res cogitans*, is not comprised of atoms and cells, it lacks a corporeal centre and becomes subject to Derrida's sense of *play*, as any

structurality of *the mind* escapes its own structurality. The centre of *the mind* is always 'elsewhere' because it is trapped in an epistemological and linguistic circle: 'for mind see mind', which is in a never-ending circular search for its noncentred and playful identity and presence. Play, in this sense, is the disruption of *the mind's* presence.

Co-operating with Derrida's linguistic and metaphysical play, I further critique the body-mind problem of pain in light of the Gate Control Theory developed by the medical pain theorists Melzack and Wall, also in mid-1960s. The specificity theory's body-mind explanation of pain relies on the brain being a passive and *hardwired* mechanism much like a computer. The mind then mysteriously reads the printout. The corporeal pain *signal* is therefore always travelling up predictably to the brain from some lesion in the body. If no lesion is detectable then it is axiomatic that any pain must be all in the mind and therefore other than a [corpo]real pain. Melzack and Wall however, explored what they termed the *variable link* of pain, wherein they examined the presence of severe pain without obvious lesion, as well as the absence or delay of pain in the presence of severe injury. They postulated there was some corporeal interference or greater nervous system complexity that behaved like a gate at the dorsal horn (of the spine) along Descartes' rope. Pain signals from a lesion below the dorsal horn could be inhibited or allowed to pass

up to the brain. These signals however, to open or close the gate, had to involve some activating downwards causation from the central nervous system or the brain itself. Furthermore they theorised that pain signals themselves could originate from the central nervous system and descend through the dorsal horn to the body. This meant that the brain did not predictably reflect the painful severity of a lesion but radically modified and in some cases engendered the human experience of pain.

The Gate Control Theory caused much vituperation and division in medical discourse in the 1960s and 1970s but by 1983, this reaction had to acknowledge the growing evidence of dorsal horn modulation and the deep involvement of, to borrow from Freud, the *dark continent* of the neuroplastic brain. In 1984, Janos Szentagothai published his paper *Downwards Causation* in the *Journal of Theoretical Medicine*. By 1993, Szentagothai, along with his colleagues Michael Arbib and Peter Erdi, had found the brain to be autopoietic, or self-organising in ways that were neither monist nor dualist in nature. They also found that this self-organisation occurred in non-centred ways that required the help of professional philosophers to interpret, especially considering they also signposted *negentropy* as an extra phenomenon of the self-organising brain. Negentropy is negative entropy where the output from the brain could exceed the input of the stimulus to it. In terms of pain this may mean pain states can and do emerge from the

brain that exceeds the predictions of input-equals-output reflexive models. Such emergent phenomena though, are in no way, limited to pain but, given the self-referentiality of the brain, defiant of any universal theories of prediction. Erdi argued that no structural theory – no matter how dynamic - could cope with the brain's global self-referentiality and he concluded that the brain ought to be considered as *post-structural*.

The exegesis then investigates a cooperation between the theories of poststructuralist or self-referential linguistics and the self-referential brain. Both engender rather than reflect the phenomenal world in uncanny ways through three essentially cooperative properties: 1. self-organisation or play; 2. this self organisation or play takes place in the context of a noncentred heterogeneous complexity that Derrida termed the presence of the noncentre; and, 3. both linguistic and neural phenomena emerge in uncanny or unpredictable negentropic ways that for linguistics, Derrida termed *supplementarity* and, for neural phenomena, the discourse of neuroscience terms *emergent properties*.

I pursue an inquiry into the cooperative processes between the self-referentiality of language and neurophenomenology through the work of Humberto Maturana's *Biology of Cognition* that argues our neurophenomenology goes the core of our epistemology and humanness as *linguaging beings*. Our neurophenomenology

engenders our ontology and our ontology engenders our neurophenomenology and they are both inseparable from the other. A problem of reference ensues however, because if both our language systems and neurophenomenology are self-referential and, by definition, they are doing more than we know, then how can we gain meaningful access to the world and even consciousness itself? I engage the work of Cathy Caruth and Paul de Man to vantage what Caruth terms the problem of reference through a literal and figurative understanding of *falling*. I consider the important differences between a constative and performative text within the creative reference, which is always engaged in doing more than it knows. Reference to world, de Man tells us, is gained not through access to an objectively stable universal truth but through a literal and theoretical falling. What self-referential theory does is fall, and in falling, it refers.

I examine the creative reference within the aporia of unexplained persistent pain through Elaine Scarry's creative frame and pain's inexpressibility and, the Lacanian and post Lacanian ideas of Julia Kristeva. I engage the creative acts of Nick Djordjevic's storm photography in both their theoretical and practical involvement in the play *A Bell in the Storm*, the radio play *To Fall Without Landing* and the writing of the monochords for *Secrets of the Driftwood*.

This exegesis is a contribution to a co-operation between literary theories of self-referentiality and creativity and interpretations of unexplained and persistent pain, in light of the neuroplastic brain's self-referential involvement in such a pain and creativity's mystery.



# Chapter 1

## *The Big Bang*

On the evening of Friday the nineteenth of May, 2000, I was driving my wife's Saab home from a poetry reading. At a red light only a minute from our home, I wondered which Friday night film I would watch with our children, then aged ten and seven, and if I would be back in time for its start at eight-thirty. I noticed the car clock displayed 8.28 pm. David Sylvian's *Secrets of the Bullfight* was playing on the car stereo. I put my left hand on the volume knob to turn the music down and ring my wife just as 'Simon' did in the opening scene of the play *A Bell in the Storm*:

**Simon**            **(To himself) Come the Sabbath???** **(Long Pause... then into the mobile)** Steph? It's me... **(Pause)** Yes I'm driving, but it's Ok... I'm stationary at a red light... **(Pause)** Yes... **(Pause)** About a minute and half away... Tell her I'm sorry I'm late...I'll watch the movie with her just as soon as I get home... **(Pause)** How was the reading? **(Truck headlights are incoming like munitions. Music up to effect this)** The poetry was Ok but she's got this big name now and...

**The lights explode into Simon... Stage effects to effect *The thinning...*** (Buchanan, 2005, p 185).

I am still unsure about the bang, the impact, the concussion of sound and energy caused by a four wheel drive hitting my car without braking, doing what one witness described as at least

'90ks'. I say 'unsure about the bang', because I cannot, even now, distinguish between the external event of the impact, in what I have come to call *the big bang* and my deeply perturbed, confused and synaesthetic apprehension of what happened to me in the driver's seat of that car. The explosion of metallic sound emanated from deep inside me, as the sheer violence of the accident seemed to have been always already in my every blood cell, something that I could at once taste, see, smell as well as hear: colourful, pungent, bitter. I could neither inhale nor exhale an air that seemed so instantly charged with this energy of a storm raging in a space that was neither internal nor external but, whatever it was, I was somehow strewn across both as if the external and internal had never been in opposition. I knew that if I were to be strewn too much, too far, too widely that I would probably die. I do not recall feeling anxious, or sad, or fearful, or even curious because what was happening to me seemed so obvious and inevitable that it was simply the way of the *big bang*. What I do recall though is the profound presence of something that I would come to know intimately over the coming years that would though elude any language I used to describe it and conjure doubt in everyone else I loved, knew, or was clinically treated by: **pain**.

Pain was with me when I woke in the ambulance and again in hospital. As I was stabilised (as one nurse in the Emergency unit put it), I recognized that this pain wasn't something external, that is

something that was *with* me but, something that *was* me. I complained of this pain to the nurse and then again to the physicians treating me. They were highly concerned and attentive. I was given morphine and taken to be X-rayed and CT scanned. As the orderly pushed me through the hospital corridors, I thought I was flying through the air looking down at the ceiling which I thought to be a map of this dynamic new world I had entered. I smiled, undoubtedly stoned, and the orderly in noticing gave me a look that was to become the most familiar non-verbal expression I would notice in others relating to my pain over the next five years: the eyes narrowing, the gaze straying slightly in Elaine Scarry's edict on pain:

To have pain is to have *certainty*. To hear about pain is to have *doubt*. (Scarry, 1984, p 13).

Scarry's edict of *doubt* concerning the validation of pain in others became institutionalized in my case when all the X-rays, CT scans, MRI scans revealed *No Abnormalities Detected (NAD)*. This institutional doubt would become a concentrated and aggressive ideological disparagement (Merskey and Teassel, 2000, p 259). Such disparagement is redolent of Louis Althusser's notion of interpellation: "Hey you – why are you in pain?" or even worse, "Hey you – you can not be in pain" (Althusser, 1962, p 152). An ideology concerning whether or not the suffering of pain is bona fide, seems to exist and pervade a discourse that operates within

insurance agencies, medico-legal practice, the workplace, and even within the 'institution' of my marriage.

I was sent home from the Emergency Department the following morning, with no medications for pain or anything else. I was told there was nothing wrong with me, and if I did need follow-up to see my GP. By then the morphine had well and truly worn off. I could barely walk. As I left the unit a nurse approached me and said "I'd buy a lottery ticket if I were you... You were lucky... Hardly scratched." This was a sentiment echoed by the investigating police officer over the phone on the Sunday evening: "You're lucky mate – I can't usually talk to people who have been hit as hard as you were... Ya car's completely written off. We've charged the joker who hit you – he left the scene of the accident and fronted up at the station with his father, who's a lawyer, at one-in-the-morning, drinking from a bottle of Scotch. I can't tell you what he's been charged with – that'd be a breach of privacy – but here's his full name and address, date of birth and place of work..." Still concussed, I scribbled down the driver's details through the fog of an obtunded consciousness, unable to keep up with the officer's ever-growing impatience. When I hung up the phone I scrawled in large letters: *HIT AND RUN... DRUNK DRIVER... PRIVACY!*

### ***Either/Or***

From the horrors of World War 1 and its high explosive detonations pounding a concentration of men in their trenches, and in the open carnage of *no-mans-land* (Le terrain vagues, as the French called it), came three groups of those who were afflicted by something that was named *War Neuroses and Shell Shock* (Mott, 1919, p 1 – 47). The first group was killed instantly “yet no visible injury has been found to account for it.” (Mott, 1919, p 1). The second group had external and visible injuries that were however, incongruent with the symptoms suffered, which “... leads one to consider that in a large proportion of cases of shell shock... there are factors at work in the production of the nervous symptoms besides the actual aerial forces generated by the explosive.” (Mott, 1919, p 1). “The third group includes affections of the central nervous system without visible external injury.” (Mott, 1919, p 1). In the play *A Bell in the Storm*, Andrew’s expert medical testimony addresses the court on these mysterious afflictions:

- |               |  |
|---------------|--|
| <b>Andrew</b> | In World War 1 soldiers were subject to high explosive blasts that caused no obvious injuries yet they fell either unconscious or were killed instantly.   |
| <b>Sally</b>  | I still can’t work out why some were killed and some weren’t!  |
| <b>Andrew</b> | It was a mystery. It was termed <i>commotio cerebri</i> : meaning a commoted brain or shell shock. But the many soldiers who survived these blasts, woke up in pain, sometimes not being able to talk – they even lost the use of limbs. Many of them, including |

the ones who were killed, had any obvious injuries. So, their symptoms were diagnosed as being “all in the mind”, when it was a brain and nervous system disturbance all along. (Buchanan, 2005, p 230).

Mott then divided up the causation of shell shock into two categories: *Physical trauma*, which he described as *commotio cerebri* and *Psychic trauma*, which he described as *emmotio cerebri*. Mott actually considered the psychogenic factors to be:

...by far the most frequent and important cause of shell shock followed by a psychoneurosis, particularly hysteria... being dependent in a great measure upon the personality of the individual soldier, his mental attitude, and bodily condition at the time of the shock (whether of emotional or commotional origin) which led to his collapse.” (Mott, 1919, p 2).

Mott was to later describe these men as “naturally of a timorous dispossession.” (Mott, 1919, p 16). I still recall my grandfather sitting at his kitchen table in the 1960s. He had his head in his hands, unable to cope anymore with his pain that was ‘all through him’ and had plagued him since those same battles had seen him ‘blown to hell and back’:

“What’s wrong with Grandpa?”

“Nothing... He has one of his headaches again.” My Grandma would reply.

These *headaches* were never discussed openly. In contrast his dramatic episodes when newly married were recounted around the

dining table like myths. My grandmother would recall with pride how he would wake to the roars of the lions in the South Perth Zoo across Matilda Bay, and, would throw her on the floor, with him on top to protect her from the dawn shells raining in from the Somme, Passchendaele or Pozieres. Such actions were considered not only heroic but readily understandable. His pain however was neither heroic nor understandable. No obvious physical injury was detectable. Even less obvious, that is to say, kept hidden and secret was his suffering the shame and indignation in being denied a Veteran's pension in the 1960s, on the grounds he *suffered from no discernable injury* even though he had been twice decorated for valour and bravery with the Military Medal and Military Medal with Bar from the battles of Passchendaele and Pozieres (one of only 437 soldiers from the AIF to be so decorated throughout the entire war). The suffering of persistent pain is often kept hidden and secret because as Patrick Wall put it:

They move like draught horses, uncomplaining, heads down in continuous driving snow. Not only have their multiple treatments failed, but they have suffered the indignity of being told that their pain will go away and/or that it is all in their heads. (Wall, 1999, p 8 – 9).

Implicit in this suffering is a sense of shame as for Scarry's edict: "To hear about pain is to have doubt" (Scarry, 1984, p 13), that is it is all in their heads and this leads to an explicit personal shame. Even so he was determined to fight the decision that denied him not only his pain and a heart attack he suffered in his fifties, but, his

actual experience of a war he had never really recovered from since 1919. Indeed, 1919 was the same year Dr Frederick Mott M.D., LL.D., F.R.S., F.R.C.P., ; BREVET LT.-COL. R.A.M.C. (T) concluded about such afflictions:

...from a far greater experience I have come to recognize the fact that the psychogenic factor is the predominant causal agent in "War Psychoneuroses," and that a large proportion of cases which were regarded as shell shock did not owe their condition to any pathological changes which would have been recognizable in the central nervous system by any known methods of microscopic investigation; *in fact, they were functional psychoneuroses.* (My italics, Mott, 1919, p 5).

For Mott, like so many others that followed him, such afflictions were a case of "either-or". That is, either the pain my grandfather suffered was evidenced by bodily damage or it was not. If it was not, then it was axiomatic: it was psychogenic, that is, all in his mind.

In this sense there is a body-mind dualism at work here that predicated Mott's conclusion of more than eighty years ago. This dualism was at work to deny my grandfather's pension in the 1960s, and was still at work in my own case, in all but one of the specialist physicians I saw in the first months after my accident in the year 2000. This one doctor was Dr John Quintner; a Rheumatologist and Pain Medicine Physician who had joined forces with a colleague in Pain Medicine from the University of New South Wales, Associate Professor Milton Cohen to, "make our



colleagues in medical practice see beyond the dualism which limits their practice and prejudices their patients” (Personal correspondence, Quinter, 2000).

### ***Prove it...***

My introductory session with Dr Quintner however, did not start well. It was some six weeks since the accident. I was in increasing difficulty and tremendous pain. I felt my life had changed so much that the person I was before the accident was almost unrecognizable to me let alone to my wife and children. I couldn't sleep, I wasn't eating properly and occasionally the pain would flare up to such a degree that it left me without prospect of comfort. The medications I had been given were not only unhelpful but gave me side effects that compounded the pain.

Above all though, I had this awful feeling that has never really left me since the accident. This feeling is difficult to describe, but I sensed the accident had strewn me or some how disrupted or ontologically dislocated my sense of self. I sensed that *things* were greatly disturbed. I couldn't see properly; my bowels were not working as they had and they leaked an almost clear fluid. I couldn't empty my bladder and despite sometimes standing over the toilet for many minutes I would have what was to be called terminal dribbling for up to half an hour later. I also couldn't think very clearly at all, sometimes mangling sentences that would have flowed

before the accident. Mostly though, the pain manifested itself through my neck, particularly the left side and, it would spread down my left arm to make my thumb, fore and middle finger tingling sore. It would continue down my back, into my left leg to produce a strangely painful semi-inflated balloon for the sole of my left foot. The headaches too were literally and figuratively blinding. On the few occasions my wife and I had tried to make love, what had been for me, the most beautiful of dances was horribly staggered, and pain flared down my neck, left arm, back and left leg before inflating the balloon that had become my left foot.

What really worried me however, was this feeling of being strewn too far, too wide. Secretly I felt I might even after such a period, be dying. I also had flashbacks of the accident itself. I was suddenly lying down in the car. The backseat was under the front seat, the boot was where the backseat used to be and my driver's seat had collapsed over it all. I couldn't breathe. There was a man starring in at me from the middle of the road. He had a lit cigarette and breathed smoke onto the pane. I tried to get him to help me but I couldn't move. He turned away with a numbing indifference. I still couldn't breathe and I started to become thin, to again spread out. Then I was in the ambulance with an oxygen mask on my face with this officer reassuring me. I heard the siren going every now and then and each bump in the road striking through me like lightning. Then I was getting thin again, strewn again.

I still have the greatest difficulty discussing this with trained psychologists let alone loved ones. The following excerpt from the play between Sally and Simon portrays such an experience:

**Sally**            Simon Sharrin?  
**Simon**            I used to be...  
**Sally**            Tell me about your pain?  
**Simon**            It was a four wheel drive...  
**Sally**            He was drunk.  
**Simon**            I got so... thinned... like I was becoming a gas  
**Sally**            Tell me about your pain.  
**Simon**            It's the price I pay...  
**Sally**            For not dying? What is *it* – your pain?  
**Simon**            There aren't the words...  
**Sally**            Never?  
**Simon**            There are no words...  
**Sally**            There's always hope... (Buchanan, 2005, p 186).

I walked into John Quintner's office and wanted to tell him about all these things. Instead I found myself telling him the usual facts about the accident. I was hit by a hit-and-run drunk driver who left the scene of the accident. He had hit me doing 90 kilometres per hour. He couldn't have seen my car stationary at a red light. I was knocked out and taken to Fremantle Hospital by ambulance.

I was gob-smacked when he replied "I don't care what the accident was like." I had an inclination to stand up and walk out then and there. Instead I said: "I'm in terrible pain!" He just looked at me and said: "Prove it..." I looked at him as if he was mad, but then I saw in

his eyes that this clause, “prove it”, was the great issue surrounding my ‘condition’.

I left his office feeling something that has never left me since. How could my pain, which was so overwhelmingly obvious to me be the cause of so much doubt in others?

## **Chapter 2**

## Ringing the Bell...

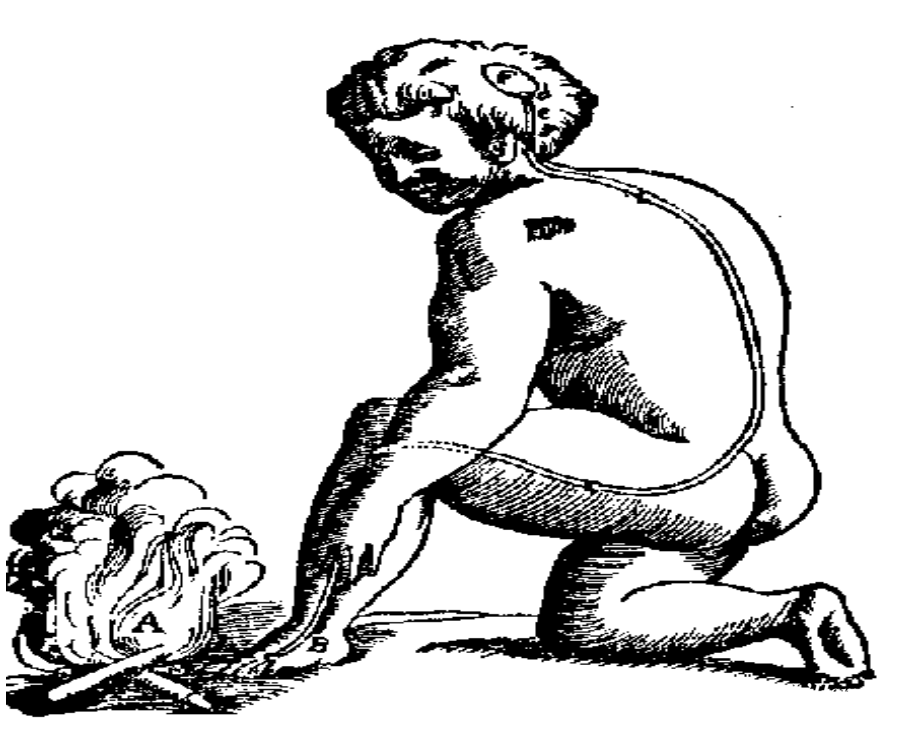
Immanuel Kant argued that the experience of pain was proof of life:

Pain is the spur to activity, and only through pain do we feel ourselves to be fully alive. Without pain we should be lifeless. (Kant, 1798, p 392).

This is a maxim summed by the aphorism: in life is pain, in pain is life. Proving however, that pain exists in any one person at any one point in time, is a matter that has confounded and indeed still confounds the full spectrum of multi-disciplined healthcare professionals, legal systems, insurance and governmental institutions right down to the sufferer and their most intimately known and lived relationships and subjective experiences (Scarry, 1984, p 3). The empirical conundrum of pain can be summed up by the notion that while we know that it exists, we have little idea how it works (Chapman, 2004). Pain represents theoretically at least, an *aporia* or a *space to which we are denied access* if only because we are denied access to the space of its secrets, and yet, it will not allow us to be free of it either (Derrida, 1994, p 12) [1]. Like Derrida's vantage on death – 'My death cannot be held as death itself holds what I am' (Derrida, 1994, p 54), my pain cannot be held as pain itself holds what I am.

In terms of clinical practice *what may be happening* with people in pain has been and often is still informed by the single most influential hermeneutic for pain: the classical specificity theory of

pain (Melzack, 1977, p 126 – 7). [2]. The classical specificity theory undoubtedly owes its origins to the drawing *L'Homme* and subsequent explanation by Renes Descartes in 1644:



(Descartes, 1644, cited in Melzack, 1977, p 127)

We can see above that this boy has his toe, marked *B*, too close to the small fire, marked *A*. The line (or rope) drawn between *B* and a small circle or centre in the brain marked *F*, is marked *C*. Melzack and Wall consider this single drawing and its lineal and mechanistic explanation of pain to be the rock upon which the classical theory of pain has been built. (Melzack and Wall, 1984, p137) As Descartes' own explanation attests, pain is, for this classical theory, always the predictable result of an obvious lesion caused by an equally obvious external force:

If for example fire comes near the foot, the minute particles of this fire, which as you know move with great velocity, have the power to set in motion the spot of the skin of the foot which they touch, and by this means pulling upon the delicate thread which is attached to the spot of the skin, they open up at the instant the pore against which the delicate thread ends, just as by pulling at one end of a rope makes to strike at the same instant a bell which hangs at the other end. (Descartes, cited in Melzack, 1977, p 127).

There is a syllogism at work here in the ringing of *Descartes' Bell* that entails more than just without fire there can be no pain. Indeed, this syllogism is bound to the idea that the brain and its nervous system are hardwired, that is to say a causally reflexive and structured mechanism that is inherently predictable in terms of any input reflecting a congruent, predictable and reflexive output. (Melzack, 1973, p 127). As the terminal clause of Descartes' explanation suggests; there must be a fire or some external spatial phenomenon that causes material tissue damage. This tissue damage (*A & B*) in turn is lineally and temporally relayed as an upwardly mobile message that is *at the same instant* conveyed by the nerves (*just as by pulling at one end of a rope*) *C*, strikes a bell *which hangs at the other end*, *F*. The syllogism is, then, unless you have fire in real time causing actual tissue damage, the rope of the nervous system cannot be pulled and the bell of pain in the brain cannot ring. In short, without tissue damage of the instant there can be no physical pain as the following dialogue from the play explores this as it is inculcated into psycho-medical discourse:

**Andrew** ...In 1644, he drew a little bloke with his toe getting burnt by fire... which pulled on a bloody rope that was attached to a bell in the brain! Fire, pulls the rope, rings the bell – pain! **(He goes through the routine)** Descartes' bell. And the moral of Simon's story is... if there's no fire – there can be no pain. (Buchanan, 2005, p 202).

The problem that arises here is that Simon, like myself and many thousands of others, experience a persistent pain sans fire. When there seems to be no temporal, spatial or material causality for the experience of pain, the experience of pain must be due to the nonphysical phenomena of the mind. (Besson, 1999, p 1610). This is then the flip side of this same wholly physical Cartesian syllogism of pain: if there is no lesion to be found in the body, any experience of pain must be the product of the mind. This theory of pain which we can call 'classical', differentiates two distinct and utterly separate types of pain. The first is bodily or physical pain and the other is all in the mind (Quintner and Cohen, 1999, p 1092).

In the absence of a verifiable lesion afflicting someone then any pain must be the product of Mott's *psychoneurosis* (1919) or as clinician's such as Ferrari and Shorter (2003), Barsky (1992) and Lucire (2003) argue: *somatisation*. All of which, as one barrister for the Insurance Commission of Western Australia put it when arguing against the validity of a sufferer's claim of pain, amounts to a



*phantom pain* falling into line with Descartes' bell (Peace, 2002, p 12).

The risk inherent in the above body-mind explanations is when a bodily cause cannot be found, they may delegitimise the experience of pain as phantom pain *because* it is all in the mind. The signifier *mind* however, is at the very least, subject to that which Derrida termed 'the metaphysics of presence', since linguistically the signified of *the mind* assumes the presence of a locus, a centre or a natural site. Derrida points out that such a linguistic presence is metaphysical:

Since these concepts are not elements or atoms, and since they are taken from a syntax and a system, every particular borrowing brings along with it the whole of metaphysics. (Derrida, 1978, p 355).

Derrida argues here that the metaphysics of the mind, lacks any actuality of elements and atoms, and thus entails a presence of the mind's locus or centre only within the construction of syntax. So, just what the mind actually *is* has always been historically enigmatic dating right back to Empedocles and continuing through modernist thinking, as D.B. Klein outlines:

The perennial nature of the mind-body problem in history is revealed by recurrent references to it age after age from ancient Greek times to present. ...The notion of a cleavage between mental life and the bodily organism was already manifest in Plato's concept of a separate realm of universal ideas, in his doctrine of reminiscence, as well as in his mystical belief in reminiscence. Both he and Aristotle, had something to say about the bodily locus of mind, with

Plato selecting the head and Aristotle, following an earlier teaching of Empedocles, selecting the heart. (Klein,1970, p 228 - 29)

It wasn't until the 1600s however, that Rene Descartes refined the presence of the mind to something which constituted a thing, or, as he described it, the *res cogitans* (*the thinking thing*). Descartes' *res cogitans* has undeniable influence on philosophy from its inculcation into the reason of the enlightenment and its subsequent inculcation into medical and psychological discourse over the last three centuries (Melzack, 1977, p 134). If Aristotle and Plato gave conceptual weight to the mind's metaphysical premise and mystery, then Descartes elevated the status of the mind to that of a thing, working in an utterly distinct way from the body. In *A Bell in the Storm*, Andrew discusses this presence with Sally (Simon's psychologist) in relation to Simon's experience of pain, in the prevailing medico-legal explanations of pain without verifiable lesion:

**Andrew** But if he complains of pain – then **(he taps his head)** it must be a 'phantom' pain and he's referred to someone like you who deals with *the mind* and he won't get a brass razoo cos his pain's not real!  
(Buchanan, 2005 p 202).

Clearly the suffering of a pain state that resides *in the mind* not only poses the question of whether or not the pain is real or phantom but, entails a consequent skepticism, doubt and even disparagement towards the sufferer by others and institutions alike

who are influenced by the dominant discourse of the classical theory (Merskey and Teassel, 2000). In the clinical practice of treating pain in those without verifiable lesion, the presence of *the mind* as the cause of this pain is rarely challenged (Quintner and Cohen, 1999, p 1094). Little wonder that so many sufferers are diagnosed with somatisation and excluded from compensation claims and the sense of having a legitimate pain state (Lucire, 2003) [3]. The presence of *the mind* in medical and psychological discourse and practice has assumed the weight of common sense, but how this presence is defined is rarely scrutinized.

The Macquarie Dictionary lists forty two different definitions for *mind* (Delbridge et al Ed., 1999, p1368). I would however, like to focus on just three of them: definition one, two, and twelve, since the others seem to merely outline the semantics of an uncontested and already assumed or received metaphysics of presence.

Definition one defines the noun *mind* as:

...that which thinks, feels and wills, exercises perception, judgment, reflection, etc., as in a human or other conscious being: *the processes of the mind.*" (Delbridge et al Ed., 1999, p1368 – their italics).

"That which thinks, feels..." is undoubtedly informed by Descartes' (1664) *res cogitans* (*res* – *the thing*, *cogitans* – *thoughts* or the infinitive *to think*) because the definition considers the mind to be something with the agency and power to be 'that which thinks,

feels...’, that is Descartes’ thing that thinks. The epistemological problem here is the qualification necessary to establish the connection of the *res* or *the thing* to these thoughts is circular, because the premise asserts rather than proves its conclusion and vice versa. What we end up with in this argument is a circle: for *mind*, see *mind*. In the absence of Derrida’s *elements and atoms*, Descartes’ proclamation of *res cogitans* asserts a unique essence or centre in terms of the signified *mind* without ever proving its essence. This practice of “...giving it a centre or referring it to a point of presence, a fixed origin” hits a metaphysical brick wall but, possesses none-the-less, an important function necessary for its currency in any discourse. As Derrida argues:

The function of this centre was not only to orient, balance and organise the structure ... but above all to make sure that the organising principle of the structure would limit what we might call the *play* of the structure. (Derrida, 1978, p 352).

In other words, the existence and structure of the body and the mind is limited to structures that are governed by organizing principles that as Belsey has argued, “...inhere timelessly and universally to each of us” (Belsey, 1982, p 7). Derrida argued that the centrality of *the thing*, which in this case is the *res cogitans*, was imposed or constructed by a desire to orient, balance and organize a structure that produces predictable and coherent phenotypes in order to project a (pseudo) security that *we know*. There is of course a contradiction in this position because without the presence

of *elements and atoms*, that is some corporeal reference, we can never have the security that *we know*. As Derrida again points out:

Thus it was always thought that the centre, which is by definition unique, constituted that very thing within a structure which while governing the structure, escapes structurality. ... The centre is not the centre. ... And as always, coherence in contradiction expresses the force of a desire. (Derrida, 1978, p 352)

The metaphysical problem of the mind is always faced with the unprovable structure. The mind's *thing-ness* is simply not there to be centred; we face a circular contradiction and enforce coherence through a desire for an organizing principle of security and as Derrida suggested, "...even today the notion of a structure lacking a centre represents the unthinkable itself." (Derrida, 1978, p 352).

Indeed it seems almost unthinkable to consider that the vast discourse of the mind (philosophy, psychology, psychiatry, medicine, and nursing to name but a few members) would challenge its own lack of centrality, its own absence rather than presence. At stake here is the question does the mind as *the thing (res cogitans)* exist, outside the play of this desire and the language that engenders it?

The MacQuarie's second definition of *mind* italicizes its own definitive premise: "*Psychology* the psyche; the totality of conscious and unconscious activities of the organism." (Delbridge et al Ed., 1999, p 1368) Here, the mind as a thing has gone on to be explored and colonised by the practice of psychology and indeed

psychology entrenches the mind as presence into not only its own discourse but a general one as well, as Harold Bloom remarked:

Psychology has gone on to become the most powerful mythology of our age.” (Bloom, 2000, p 123).

The problem with this mythology being passed off as a scientific knowledge base has been acknowledged even within psychology, and, it is explicitly conceded in terms of the psychophysical riddle.

As Klein observed thirty-five years ago:

All such theorizing was, of course, little better than vague speculation; but it does suggest an incipient recognition of what in later centuries developed into explicit recognition of the psychophysical riddle: how is the mind as known to psychologists related to the body as known to physiologists? (Klein, 1970, p 229).

Why is not this psychophysical riddle foregrounded when considering diagnoses like somatisation for the understanding and treatment of pain? Even if persistent unexplained pain (that is, pain without a verifiable lesion) is considered to be a product of the mind, then surely this begs a bigger question: how does this pain produced by the mind, relate to the pain that is said to be experienced in the body? How can practitioners and interpreters of the mind be so sure of their diagnoses when their Freudian epistemological base is itself unprovable? As Wittgenstein objected in a Berkely lecture, “Freud is essentially speculation, not even reaching the level of hypothesis!” (Cited in Bloom, 2000, p 113).

Wittgenstein's objection seems to uphold Derrida's concerns of a metaphysics of presence in the absence of anything other than the psychophysical discourse's desire for the mind's presence.

Descartes' mind has evolved into the practice of *Psychology*, and has through such an philosophical evolution (from Cartesian to Freudian thinking), presumed a presence complete with conscious and unconscious, with ids, egos and super-egos to comprise the hidden structures of the modernist subject (Derrida, 1978, p 246 - 291).

It is the question surrounding psychology's structures though, that foregrounds its linguistic presence and the subsequent currency within its discourse, that continually encounter the intrinsic epistemic and linguistic problems of being 'trapped in a circle' (Derrida, 1978, p 355): for *Psychology*, see *Psychology*. This circle is essentially the same as the one *for mind see mind* as it can only assert rather than prove its presence. This circle gives us the sense that we are going forward and making a kind of teleological progress when we are only circling an aporia we can but speculate upon, as Derrida points out: "There is no sense of doing without the concept of metaphysics in order to shake metaphysics." (Derrida, 1978, p 354). When it comes to the presence of the mind outside of language we must acknowledge an absence an elsewhere-ness. Far from the security of *we know*, we apprehend instead a profound epistemological vantage point that James K Smith describes as

'kenotic humility' (Smith, 2004, p 4). That is, in apprehending this riddle of the mind, we are both emptied and humbled rather than being full of a constructed certitude.

Derrida's use of Montaigne's aphorism seems fitting here: "*We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things.*" (Cited Derrida, 1978, p 351, his italics). This theoretical position though invites hostility, as Culler points out: "A good deal of hostility to theory comes from the fact that to admit the importance of theory is to make an open-ended commitment, to leave yourself in a position where there are always important things you don't know." (Culler, 1997, p 16) We are caught within this history of metaphysics, which always already has the inherent paradox of its own heuristic endeavour – that is, is every theory just a story in a language system of differences? Culler poses this intrinsic theoretical dilemma through his engagement with theory and our desire to reflect the world vying with our need to tell stories about it in order to plug the gaps of our inabilities *to know*. Culler argues that:

...the basic question for theory in the domain of narrative is this: is narrative a fundamental form of knowledge (giving knowledge of the world through its sense making) or is it a rhetorical structure that distorts as much as it reveals? Is the knowledge it purports to present a knowledge that is the effect of desire? (Culler, 1997, p 94)

The idea that the mind's knowledge base is an oscillation between sense-making and desire for sense, poses enormous questions for



the discourse of the mind, which any attempt to answer will always conflict between reflecting or constating the world as it *is* and narrating the world we desire *to have and see*. Culler elaborates further:

To answer these questions we would need both knowledge of the world that is *independent* of narratives and some basis for deeming this knowledge more authoritative than what narratives provide... But whether there is such authoritative knowledge separate from narrative is precisely what's at stake in the question of whether narrative is a source of knowledge or of illusion. So it seems likely that we cannot answer this question, if indeed it has an answer. (Culler, 1997, p 95)

Without due consideration and apprehension of Culler's narrative and the aporia it encounters in the insuperable oscillation between sense-making and desire-for-sense, 'Psychology' may continue to appropriate the enforcement of a totality in order to empower its own desire for its very existence. Even psychologists are recognizing and openly discussing this problem. For example, the noted psychologist Carl Vanderwoolfe explains:

It has been repeatedly pointed out that psychology, in contrast to other scientific fields...has made very limited progress in the past century... despite strong institutional support and a phenomenal increase in the number of psychologists. It seems to me that a major cause of this state of affairs is the failure to abandon an outdated set of concepts which pose misleading or insoluble problems and encourage the continued use of ineffectual methods. (Vanderwoolfe, 1998, p135)

Vanderwoolfe's argument highlights the same problem of the insoluble circularity for *mind see mind*. His use of "misleading or insoluble problems" explicitly refers to psychology's inherent

epistemological problem of asserting the mind as a *thing* complete with a centre that desires a natural site when any determination of this position is insoluble. Theoretically, psychology begins in this sense to encounter that which Derrida termed the noncentre and play in the discourse of literary theory in the 1960s:

Henceforth, it was necessary to begin thinking that there was no centre, that the centre could not be thought in the form of a present-being, that the centre had no natural site, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of nonlocus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play. (Derrida, 1978, p 353)

This play invited Montaigne's need to interpret interpretations in any practice rather to desire the one true historically present presence, which adhered timelessly to a structured and fixed natural site.

There exists here a tension between not just the history of the mind but, its presence as well. As Derrida suggested concerning a more universal epistemology:

Besides the tension between play and history, there is also the tension between play and presence. Play is the disruption of presence. (Derrida, 1978, p 369)

The notion of Psychology and the mind having a *natural site* confers upon both of them a presence, which we have seen, is not only circular in its desire to make sense of itself but, is disrupted by a centre that is not a centre and, as Derrida wrote:

Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the probability of play and not the other way around. (Derrida, 1978, p 369).

Psychology's *Being* confers upon itself the status of a natural site or a locus that "...seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign and which leaves the necessity of interpretation as an exile." (Derrida, 1978, p 369) For Derrida, interpretation is so necessary because it is all we have in the absence of the centred origin. If you exile the interpretation of play then you enforce a heuristic desire (that dreams of deciphering a truth which escapes play) for a centre and you become "...trapped in a kind of circle" (Derrida, 1978, p 353). Psychology exists through this circular linguistic practice that desires certitude but never achieves it. Vanderwoolfe makes this point as he argued:

The fact that mentalistic terms are a useful part of everyday speech might be suggested as an argument that such terms must refer to some aspect of cerebral function. We all know perfectly well what is meant by such expressions as "pay attention" or "remember this" but we also know what is meant by such terms as "heartless", "broken heart", "soft heart", "hard heart", "taking heart" or "losing heart". The latter terms are linguistic grave markers of long dead ideas; apparent vestiges of Aristotle's theory that the heart is the seat of higher psychic functions. No one imagines now that they have the slightest relevance to cardiology. (Vanderwoolfe, 1998, p 135).

Something other than naming the pre-existent *res* or the thing is at work here in apprehending the mind, and on a linguistic level, this something is that which Derrida signed as the *play of language*. The mind as a concept, as a signified presence and employed on a daily basis in the discourse of pain, attempts to transcend this play.

This play is where language is not so much reflecting pre-existent entities like the diagnosis of somatisation but, that language itself performs or engenders, that is to say plays with our universal experience. As Derrida claimed:

This was the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse... that is to say, a system in which the central signified, the original or transcendental signified, is never absolutely present outside a system of differences. The absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely. (Derrida, 1978, p 354)

The transcendental signified for '*the mind*' fails then, to be 'the totality of the organism' as required by definition two of the MacQuarie Dictionary. *The mind* cannot be reduced to *the conscious and unconscious activities* within its own definition because they are disrupted by their own inability to transcend their absence, their lack of centre and origin. The Cartesian and Freudian dualism of the body-mind binary complete with its *res* or its structure cannot exist outside the play of its own language. As Derrida argues:

The centre is at the centre of the totality, and yet, since the centre does not belong to the totality (is not part of the totality), the totality *has its centre elsewhere*. The centre is not the centre. (Derrida, 1978, p 352)

Here, the mind's nonlocus, its elsewhere-ness to any natural site leaves us apprehending a concept or in actuality, Culler's problem of narrative's sense-making versus the desire for sense. Derrida

argued that this leads to a teleology which destroys the previous sense-making narrative in order to proclaim another (teleological) advance in the never-ending quest for certitude "...with as much lucidity and rigor as bad faith and misconstruction, as the last metaphysician, the last 'Platonist'" (Derrida, 1978, p 353). Thus we can argue that the great hermeneutic or heuristic endeavour for certitude begets only another teleological extrapolation towards what amounts to a desire for its own totality. Thus what seems an advance in the discourse of the mind, stemming from a superior body of evidenced based knowledge, time and time again butts up against the metaphysical wall of Vanderwoolfe's insoluble problems. The whole history of the western continuum concerning the mind has made and makes us desire mastery of its constructed psychoanalytic phenomena. From Descartes to the enlightenment, to Freud and post-Freudian thinking, the mind as *res cogitans* has attempted to organize and understand a set of phenomena (hitherto described as psychodynamic and/or mentalistic) in increasingly sophisticated ways, that nonetheless share the same pitfalls of any interpretation beyond its own desire, that is to say, beyond its own epistemological circular story of itself for itself. Any sophisticated apprehension of the mind leaves us wondering because there is always more to know, if only because the theory upon which *the mind* has been authored assumes and literally creates its own existence. It is reasonable to point out here that to diagnose

persistent unexplained pain as being all in the mind is a construct of 'belief and desire' (Lucire, 2003, p 4).

In this context it is time psychology and the discourse of pain theory contemplated the last fifty to one hundred years of literary and linguistic theory, which has seen literature apprehend a theoretical state that undoes rather than reveals certitude. As Culler describes, "You have not become the master, but neither are you where you were before." (Culler, 1997, p 17) In this sense we apprehend a vantage point from which alterity emerges over certitude, differences over essences, humility over proclamation, subjectivity over objectivity, narrative over teleology or as Culler (Culler, 1997, p 94) puts it: "We stop dancing around and contemplate the secret."

The MacQuarie dictionary's definition twelve defines the *mind* as a "psychic or spiritual being, as opposed to matter." (Delbridge et al Ed., 1999, p 1368). This defines *the mind* through how it is essentially different to the matter of the body. Thus, the body-mind binary persists and the same heuristic problematic is conferred, but at least in this definition the problem of the centre and its essence is also, albeit implicitly, conceded because this definition shies away from defining the processes and highlights the differences between the body and the mind, in-so-far-as we don't know what the mind is, we only know it is different to the body. As Saussure (1915) found, the arbitrary attribution of sense making through

language goes about its business by teasing out how signs are different to the other signs and arbitrarily different again between the different cultures of the world. Language is not the handmaiden to inherent and natural truths but arbitrarily and culturally constructed (Rice and Waugh, 1996, p 3). Vanderwoolfe again points this out in the discourse of psychology:

Mentalistic terms such as attention, cognition, fear, belief or desire are not easily defined since they commonly refer vaguely to several quite distinct things including: (a) a presumed state of consciousness, (b) some sort of behaviour, and (c) an environmental context. Different languages have different verbal conventions. Thus, according to Wilkes (245 *his reference*), ancient Greek, Chinese, and Croatian do not have ready equivalents for the English words 'mind' and 'consciousness'. (Vanderwoolfe, 1998, p 135)

Definition twelve has thus shifted paradigms because this definition has hopped off the circular argument of *for mind see mind, to, for mind, see how it is different to the matter of the body*, with a passive nod to Derrida's universal problematic that its centre is elsewhere. Here at least we begin to 'contemplate the secret' in Culler's terms in-so-far-as how it differs to the atomic structure of matter. This secret is acknowledged yet remains unapologetically dualistic for over four decades. The pre-neuroplastic neuropathologists Penfield and Roberts espoused exactly this point:

Theorists... may be able to give up dualistic terminology. But biologists are not theorists. And there is no place in scientific medicine for the unprovable hypothesis. We must be content to

study man and animal by the scientific method, using the language of “busy common sense”. This is the language of dualism. (Penfield and Roberts, 1959, p 10)

If, as Penfield and Roberts asserted, there was no place in scientific medicine for the unprovable hypothesis, then why has the insoluble problem of the mind so been implacably centred in the above quote’s language of dualism? There is at the least, a tautology inherent in this position, if only because Penfield and Roberts attempted to practice in a provable way, the ways of the body-mind riddle. No practice is exempt from the theories that underpin its practice, especially when any scientific medicine must relate to the riddles of the brain-mind relationship. As Penfield and Roberts themselves articulated:

We have at present no basis for a scientific explanation of the *brain-mind relationship*. We can only continue to study the brain without philosophical prejudice. And if the day should ever dawn when scientific analysis of body and brain solves the “mystery,” all men who have sought the truth in all sincerity will rejoice alike: the professing materialist and the dualist, the scientist and the philosopher, the agnostic and the convinced worshipper. Surely no one need fear the truth. (Penfield and Roberts, 1959, p 10)

The difficulty with this position was that nothing is at work here as much as the *unprovable hypothesis* of the mind. The risk was and still is undeniable that the spectre of a Derridean play haunted, and if such thinking still persists, haunts, Penfield and Roberts’ *scientific medicine* and its extension to a *busy common sense* in the general discourse of medicine and psychiatry (Merskey and Teasell, 2000).



This is not, as Belsey and many other commentators have pointed out, the first time a common sense empiricism has theoretically let us down through the circles it prescribes. [4]

If (non-dualist) theory was already challenging this body-mind dualism in 1959, then by 1993, the same scientific method through the work of one neurophysiologist, Janos Szentagothai, was coming up with scientific findings that would revolutionise our understanding of the brain "...as neither dualist nor monist"... would "pose problems for professional philosophers." (Szentagothai, 1993, p 113). Far from being solved, the "mystery" of how the body and mind interrelate was deeper and wider than ever, and the *neuroplastic* actuality was far less sanguine than either Penfield or Roberts had dreamed. The brain-mind duality was left both scientifically and philosophically insupportable and Wittgenstein's concluding judgment upon (the father of) psychology as "not even amounting to speculation", more potent than ever before.

John Quintner's challenge concerning my pain – "prove it" – was, however, never more open to Derrida's signpost of *an active interpretation* (Derrida, 1978, p 370). If my x-rays, CT and MRI scans were all 'clear'; if no fire, no tissue damage existed to ring Descartes' bell in any instant, and if the problematic of the mind was simply unable to contain the mystery of my pain; then what interpretation might at least apprehend it? When I put this question

to John, there was only the barest of hints of something behind the twinkle in his eyes, as he looked up to a kind smiling portrait that hung from the wall of his rooms.

# Chapter 3

## **Beyond the Bell – from the Variable Link to Neuroplasticity, and Language in self-organising *systems of difference***

### **Introduction**

Theories of pain beyond the Cartesian-informed specificity theory are predicted upon first ideas, and then evidence that the brain and nervous system cannot be hardwired and reflexively predictable (Quintner and Cohen, 1999, p 1098). These ideas and evidence re-interpret Descartes' rope to be more complex than a mechanistic pulley relaying some phenomenal energy in a one-way upwards-traveling signal to ring the bell of pain in the brain.

### **The Variable Link**

The first of these post-specificity theories was generated by Melzack and Wall in 1965 and is generally known as the Gate Control Theory (Melzack and Wall, 1983, p 222). In the late 1970s, Liebeskind and Paul said, "Probably the most important theory in pain was the appearance in 1965 of the gate control theory of pain... This theory has like none before it, proved enormously heuristic." (Liebeskind and Paul, 1977, p 41) Even the noted anaesthesiologist of the day, John J. Bonica, called it 'undoubtedly one of the major revolutions in our concept of pain in the last 100 years.' (Cited Melzack and Wall, 1983, p 233). It was equally

inspired by the sufferings of those with an inexplicable pain that persisted despite there being no obvious injuries and those who had clearly suffered major injuries but for whom there was either little or no pain, or, a marked delay in the experience of pain inconsistent with the injuries sustained within the heuristic of the specificity theory. Melzack and Wall state that:

The link between pain and injury seems so obvious that it is widely believed that pain is always the result of physical damage and that the intensity of pain we feel is proportional to the severity of the injury... However there are many instances in which this relationship fails to hold up. For example, about 65% of soldiers who are severely wounded in battle and 20% of civilians who undergo major surgery report feeling little or no pain for hours or days after the injury or incision (Beecher, 1959). In contrast, no apparent injury can be detected in about 70% of people who suffer from chronic low back pain (Loeser, 1980). Clearly, the link between injury and pain is highly variable: injury may occur without pain, and pain without injury (Melzack and Wall, 1983, p 15).

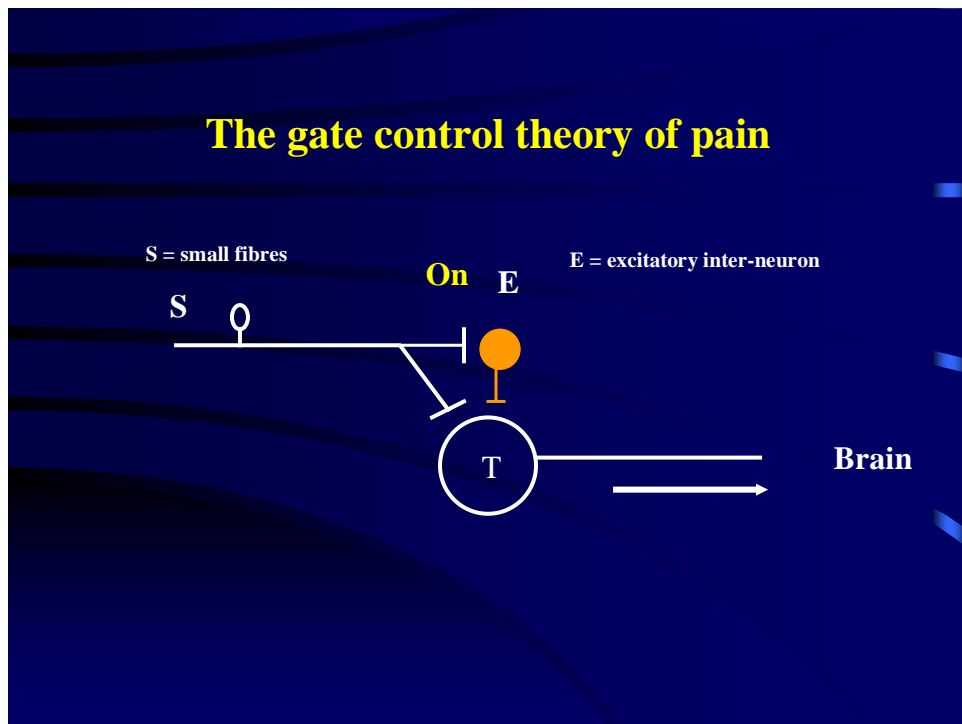
Melzack and Wall went on to describe this variability and the lack of obviousness about the predictability of pain as the “Variable Link”. This variable link disrupts, that is ‘plays’, with the obviousness of the universal foot on the fire ringing Descartes’ Bell. But as Mott had found in the three groups of shell shock victims in World War 1, such variability had long been known to exist. Indeed in civilian western cultures, this variability dated back to at least the condition known as *Railway Spine* in the 1850s (Cohen and Quintner, 1999). What appears less and less plausible, in purely theoretical terms at

least, is the adequacy of the body-mind heuristic to determine the experience of human pain – physical or otherwise.

Much more seems to be at play within this variable experience. The traditional view had been of course to ascribe the experience of persistent unexplained pain to being ‘all in the mind’, but this depends on what the mind might ‘be’. The mind’s being however, is itself fraught with the unprovable hypothesis (which amounts to Wittgenstein’s claim that it is mere speculation) and the Derridean epistemological problematic that it is trapped in the *language of dualism*.

While the gate control theory had its excited proponents it was, like Derrida’s theories concerning linguistic *play*, both irreconcilable and irreducible to the metaphysics and discourse of the structured mind because it ruptured its circular argument. In this sense the Gate Control Theory was like Copernicus’s theories that decentred the earth of the 1500s, forever changed the paradigm and discourse for pain. What was at stake here for the proponents of specificity theory is that the mind and its psychodynamic progeny was not the centre of things that they had believed it to be, because the brain could not be a hardwired reflex driven and predictable organ (Szentagothai, 1993, p101). If we inspect the gate control theory more closely then the following diagrams are very useful for medical laymen coming to terms with its science.

Diagram1 – Gate Control Theory

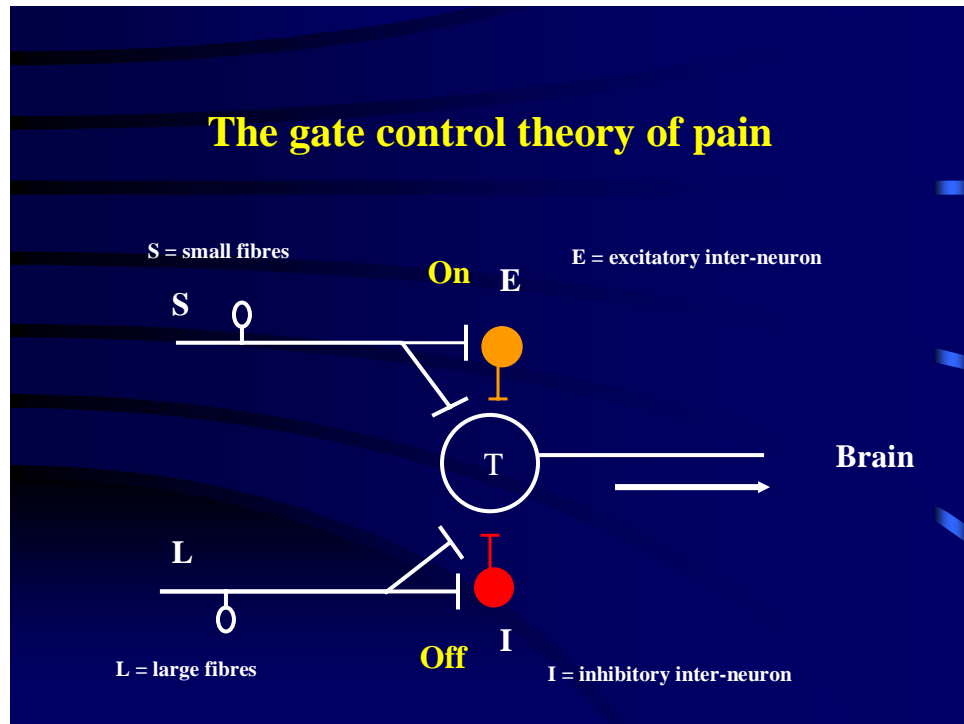


(Melzack and Wall, 1983)

Here this diagram illustrates the first instance of the complication of Descartes' rope. The white line (apropos of 'the rope') traveling from left (the body) to right (up to the brain) is interrupted by the circle "T" before going upwards as arrowed to the brain. 'T' represents the spinal region referred to as the dorsal horn or where the "modulation of spinal signals evoked by injury-detecting afferents [nerves]" (Cervero et al., 1976, Handwerker et al., 1975). The modulation of the signals is the crux of the theory. Melzack and Wall postulated that the dorsal horn of the spine acted like a gate between the signals of two different systems – the peripheral nervous system or the fibres below the dorsal horn and the central nervous system above the dorsal horn, which included the brain. In

diagram 1 the small fibres of the peripheral system signal to the dorsal horn which then through the excitatory inter-neuron 'E' passes through 'T' (the dorsal horn) and through this gate up to the brain to elicit pain.

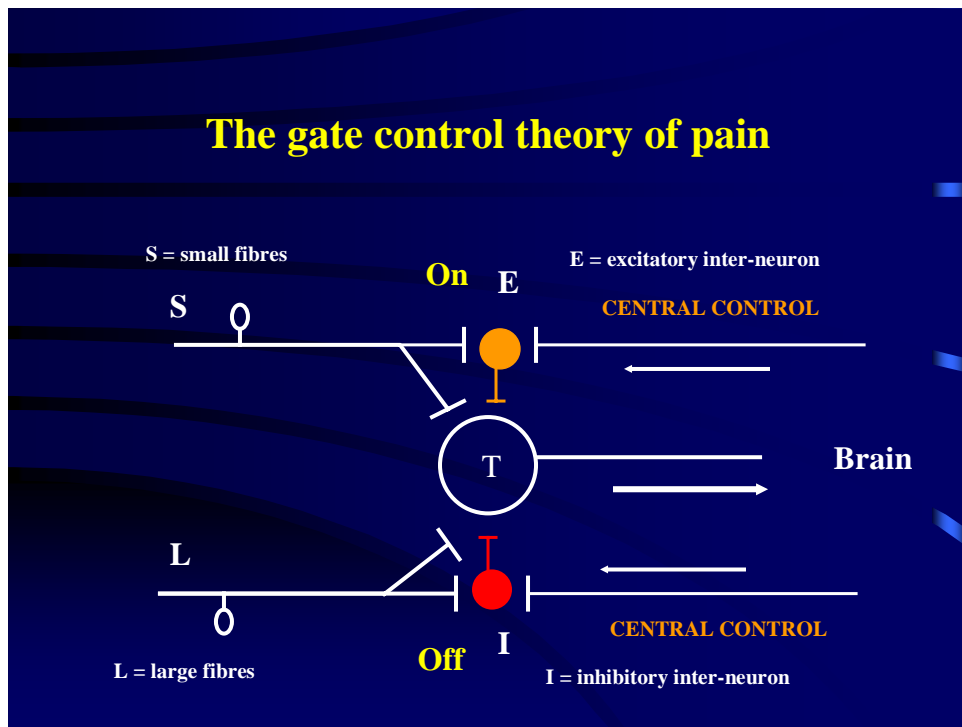
Diagram 2 – Gate Control Theory.



(Melzack and Wall, 1983)

In diagram 2 there is the second level of complication to the hardwired rope of the specificity theory. If small fibres conveyed and excited the excitatory inter-neurons of the dorsal horn (effectively opening the gate) then large fibres of the peripheral nervous system could invoke an inhibitory inter-neuron response at the dorsal horn and effectively shut the gate to delay or inhibit the (pain) signal, and thus invoke the phenomena described in the variable link.

Diagram 3 – Gate Control Theory



(Melzack and Wall, 1983)

In diagram 3 there is a third level of complication to Descartes' rope that was to "evoke controversy among scientists and clinicians in the field of pain." (Melzack and Wall, 1983, p 233). Melzack and Wall postulated that pain was engendered not just by upwards traveling signals that either passed or not through the gate of the dorsal horn but through that which Janos Szentagothai was to call 'downwards causation', which involved the central nervous system sending signals of its own to either open or close the gate(s) (Szentagothai, 1984, p 1). This part of the theory invoked a brain that was anything but hardwired, in-so-far-as pain was not merely reflected by the brain as a reflex response when peripheral system



nociception or injury occurred. Instead the brain could of itself mediate and/or interfere with and even engender the experience of pain.

Quite how the brain was able to do this was a complete mystery but the idea of a downwards central nervous system causation (that is an active brain beyond a passively fixed, reflexive and therefore predictable organ) had been born. This proffers a paradigm shift or at least the birth of a new paradigm both in understanding the way the brain mediates and begets our ontology and in the way our ontology organizes our brain's neurophenomenology. Indeed, this *birth* seems similar to the one Derrida wrote of when he concluded his *Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences* (coincidentally also dated in the mid 1960s) with:

...a kind of question, let us still call it historical, whose *conception, formation, gestation* and *labour* we are only catching a glimpse of today... when faced by the as yet unnamable which is proclaiming itself and which can do so, as is necessary whenever a birth is in the offing, only under the species of the nonspecies, in the formless, mute, infant and terrifying form of monstrosity. (Derrida, 1978, p 370).

The monstrosity of this birth of the gate control theory was - like Derrida's 'birth' of the noncentre and its *play* in linguistic epistemology - its invasion of the universal problematic, that is to say, its decentring of Descartes' bell being a natural site with a

locus – a centre. With the gate control theory, there was something else at play that spoke of an entirely new and complex dimension as Melzack and Wall themselves concluded: “We now suspect that there is a further dimension which could explain the plasticity of connections.” (Melzack and Wall, 1983, p 239). Given this monstrosity, the gate control theory had its strident critics and “provoked outrage in believers of specificity theory” (Melzack and Wall, 1983, p 233). It was attacked with vituperation and, for many years, as being incomplete and lacking veracity. These responses, however were “modified when careful experimenters observed modulation of spinal signals.” (Melzack and Wall, 1983, p 234).

Melzack and Wall had the last word against those critics of the time (early 1980s) when they clarified:

...The gate control theory, by eschewing a straight through pain pathway and a rigid relationship between injury and pain, is able to give serious consideration to prolonged neural activities related to pain. There is little doubt that such mechanisms are necessary to explain several fascinating clinical and experimental observations.

We formulated a hypothesis that seemed to us to bring together all the facts available in 1965. Since that time much has changed. Some of the ‘facts’ were wrong. Much more is known now. (Melzack and Wall, 1983, p 256, 234).

If that last statement that much more is known was true in 1983, then it is even more so in the 2000s, if only because the advances in neurobiological research have grown exponentially in those two decades (Le van Quyen, 2003; Faingold, 2004). If in the mid1960s,

Derrida introduced the historical question of the universal problematic of 'play', then it was also in the mid 1960s that Melzack and Wall introduced a neurophysiological universal problematic of 'play' for body-mind dualism, and not only in terms of the human experience of pain.

The first theoretical glimpses had been glimpsed of a brain that is other than hardwired and despite the latest neurophysiological advances and apprehensions, the brain remains "a miracle" (Chapman, 2004). In his presentation to the 2004 Annual Scientific Meeting of The Australian Pain Society, Professor of Neuropsychology at the University of Utah Richard Chapman, made the point that "pain is all in the brain" (Chapman, 2004, cited in presentation). Melzack and Wall's gate control theory hypothesized that there was central nervous system involvement, that is, the brain was somehow involved in pain variability. Their locus of theoretical concentration however, remained the dorsal horn of spinal modulation as the gate for this nervous system involvement.

In concentrating on the dorsal horn region of the spinal column, Melzack and Wall spotlighted that if the changes at the dorsal horn occurred to incur the variable link of pain, then the brain must be involved in downwards causations that defied our previous brain theories. The variable central nervous system involvement at the

dorsal horn came from the *dark continent* of the brain [5]. In other words, something miraculous was happening. There was always though, going to be the implied questions of the brain's secrets: if the gate barred or facilitated access – then to what or from what was it opening or closing? If much more is now known about the brain, it was through the groundbreaking conceptual and scientific work of one extremely humble, shy and stunningly brilliant Hungarian professor of Neurophysiology, Janos Szentagothai and his colleagues Arbib and Erdi.

### **Neuroplasticity**

The concept of neuroplasticity sees the brain as a complex interpretative mechanism rather than simply as a device to receive and process information like a computer (Coderre et al, 1993, p 259). Hitherto this hardwired concept of the brain has been understood in terms of the classical reflex principle (Szentagothai, 1993, p 101). This classical reflex theory is to neurology what the specificity theory is to pain. Both are undoubtedly informed by Descartes' rope ringing (that is to say a hardwired brain processing upwards travelling reflexed responses) in fixed centres within this hardwired brain that, for pain at least, rings a bell. Here, the brain is a device. In other words input to the system equals the output of the system. This paradigm shifting concept of neuroplasticity, however, views the brain as being a self-organising and interpreting

complexity that led Janos Szentagothai and his colleagues Arbib and Erdi to argue:

...the philosophical tradition of hermeneutics which is a priori neither monist or dualist, can be applied to the brain. Playing with the idea that the “device approach” to the brain and the philosophical approach can be reconciled, we have concluded that the brain is a physical structure which is controlled and also controls, learns and teaches, processes and creates information, recognises and generates patterns, organises its environment and is organised by it. (Arbib et al, 1997, p 234)

Implicit in these binary interactions is the notion that these opposites of learning and teaching, processing and creating, recognising and generating are not operating in opposition but rather, co-operate inseparably from the other. Szentagothai points out that the brain is both pupil and teacher, processor and creator, recogniser and generator, environmental organiser and yet it is something that is organised by the environment. It is not a device of either/or but inseparably engenders both our ontology and neurophenomenology. That is to say there is no way of separating the biophysics of our being from the being of our biophysics (Rudrauf et al, 2003).

Susan Greenfield’s observation is pertinent here concerning the concept of human clones that would have theoretically, identical brains (Greenfield, 2002). She points out that these clones could not *be* identical ontologically because their brain would not *be* the same. This is because their second to second ontology would differ from each other and thus their brains would have different neuronal

organisations and therefore each supposedly identical subject would engender vastly different subjective experiences (Greenfield, 2002, p 20). The brain then is always already involved in the recording and formation of this subjective experience. Our ontology and neurophenomenology is entailed in ways that entail each other, that is to say, our neurophenomenology engenders our ontology, and, our ontology engenders our neurophenomenology. As Szentagothai concludes, the brain:

...is an 'object' of interpretation, but also it is itself an interpreter. The brain not only perceives but also creates new reality: it is a hermeneutic device. Not only are our theories of the brain metaphors, the brain itself represents the world through schemas, which may themselves be viewed as metaphors. (Arbib et al, 1997, p 234).

Szentagothai had ventured into the dark continent of the brain, not through speculation or the teleology of metaphysics but, through scientific experiments involving the cultivation of nervous tissues. What he found as a result of these experiments is still actively challenging thinking not only about the brain but ontology as well. He thought the discovery of self-organisation necessitated the rethinking of all that had been thought self-evident through Cartesian discourse, not only about the brain but about how such a discourse thought it engaged in the phenomenal world. Szentagothai considered this was a problem that went well beyond the science of neurobiology (Szentagothai, 1993, p 100). This seems valid when a theoretical point from the above conclusion

*(that the brain is a hermeneutic device that none-the-less represents the world through schemas that can be viewed themselves as metaphors)*, invites the idea that such metaphoricity sees the brain involved in what I termed 'a creation-ness' in *A Bell in the Storm*. This 'creation-ness' is beyond the heuristic of the hardwired reflexive organ, which Szentagothai described as 'self-organisation and/or autopoiesis' (Szentagothai, 1993, p101). The self-organising or autopoietic brain is beyond mere speculation, that is, such 'creation-ness' can actually be observed. As Szentagothai stated:

The classical reflex principle – as the basis of neural functions – has to yield to new ideas, like autopoiesis and/or self-organisation, as the basic paradigm in the framework of which the essence of the neural activity can be better understood... Under suitable conditions, both in nervous tissue cultures and embryonic tissue recombination experiments, the conditions of such autopoietic activity can be studied. (Szentagothai, 1993, p 101).

This evidence of self-organisation requires the brain's involvement in engendering pain to be above scientific hypothesis and theoretical speculation. In his groundbreaking essay "Self-organisation: the Basic Principle of Neural Functions", Szentagothai used the term 'autopoiesis' to describe the 'self-organising' processes of the brain. He referred to "...the concept of self-organisation as the principle in which I believe neural activity to have its origins." (Szentagothai, 1993, p 112). The theory of the brain working as an interpretative hermeneutic device, which also uses metaphor and metonym to interpret the phenomenal world

through a schemata of creation-ness, beyond the practical limits of a processing device like a computer.

Under clinical experimentation, autopoiesis is there to be seen and not merely speculated. Szentagothai, then, was like Galileo on the back of Copernicus's initial hypothesis actively witnessing the new space – the new universe of our miraculous brain. If Melzack and Wall were the nascent theoreticians in this autopoietic paradigm shift and like Copernicus who hypothesised the Earth was not the centre, then Szentagothai was the Galileo following Copernicus, who actually witnessed that the centre was indeed elsewhere. Szentagothai thus upgraded ideas of our brain as miraculous, from hypothesis to integrated theory. Szentagothai was, to borrow from Ezra Pound, making it new! (Pound, 1914 cited in Rothenburg and Joris, 1995, p 372). Unlike Pound however, Szentagothai was far more cautious about any proclamations or the deliverance of any manifesto of conclusive truth-claim, because, like the universe, the brain was simply too complex and big to proclaim over:

Peter Erdi and myself had originally more ambitious goals in mind when starting our common work, i.e. even in playing with the thought that an explicit 'brain theory' might be the ultimate objective envisaged. Recently we have both become more modest in understanding that it would be more realistic to abide with certain elements that might contribute to a brain-theory in the more distant future. (Szentagothai, 1993, p 102)

In other words, a reliable and predictable theory of the brain would take a more distant future to crack the codes of the self-organising



brain. In theoretical terms Erdi and Szentagothai have stopped dancing around and have begun to contemplate Culler's secret of epistemological humility in the face of a staggering complexity. Erdi and Szentagothai then "warned" theoreticians themselves about:

The remarkable new observations... on 'memory fields'... that legitimate neurobiology may soon be in the position to make direct biological observations about functions of the brain that were hitherto considered as being in the exclusive domain of theory (Szentagothai, 1993, p 113).

This statement declares that the self-organising brain thrusts us into the domain of a self-organising unpredictability and a metaphoricity that had previously been the exclusive domain of linguistic theory.

My argument here then is that this is the same ontological, epistemological, and hitherto, purely theoretical reference, of the poststructuralist enquirers Derrida, Paul de Man, Roland Barthes, Jacques Lacan, Julia Kristeva and others. Could it be that both language and the brain engender rather than reflect our phenomenal world in theoretically similar self-organising ways?

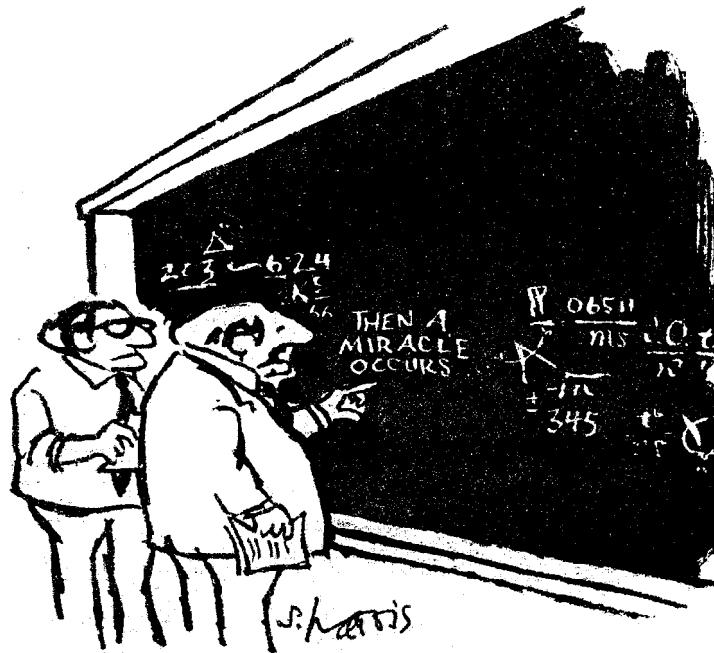
The idea of a theoretical cooperation between post-structuralist linguistics and the corporeal self-organisation of the brain began during a conversation I had with John Quintner in his rooms, about three months after my accident. John was lamenting the lack of a mapped medical theoretical territory beyond the dualistic approach to pain. John concluded: "Pain comes out of complexities in the brain we are only beginning to understand." (Personal correspondence, 2000). Immediately I thought of Derrida's use of

Montaigne's "We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things." Then my thoughts turned to those *complexities in the brain* and I made the association with Derrida's ideas of 'play'; particularly his declaration that "Play is the disruption of presence." (Derrida, 1978, p 367). I discussed with John the idea that dualism was simply a form of interpreting pain that nonetheless had accumulated a dominant and dominating presence. The presence of dualism in this context was however, given to complexities that disrupted and played with this presence and, there was, over fifty years of mapped literary theoretical terrain that perhaps, could guide us. We quickly exchanged articles and books that began a collaboration that has been published internationally and expanded to include Foundation Professor Andrew Taylor (Edith Cowan University), Associate Professor Milton Cohen (University of New South Wales), Mr Owen Williamson (Spinal Surgeon, Monash University), and Associate Professor Jim Katz (Washington State University, USA).

In attendance at the March, 2004 Annual Scientific Meeting of the Australian Pain Society in Canberra, I was particularly struck by Chapman's finding that while we understand so much more now than Szentagothai pioneered (in particular nonlinear theory). Chapman pointed out that he could research the autopoietic and/or self-organising brain to certain vantage points before he had to concede "...then a miracle occurs and you get pain" (Chapman,

2004). I include his actual slide used in the lecture with his kind permission:

## CAS Theory Is Nonlinear



"I THINK YOU SHOULD BE MORE EXPLICIT  
HERE IN STEP TWO." © 1980 COTTON EXPRESSION

It is an alternative to mechanistic reductionism.

This knowledge of the brain's self-organisation does not however, carry with it the great secrets of *how* exactly the brain goes about this self-organisation. A humility that urges caution against the proclamation of truth claims ought to be encouraged, not least because even the best researchers still don't know what pain *is* - as step two's irony in the above slide depicts. They know that pain

exists but not how it exists or what exactly *it* is either in time, space or matter (Chapman, 2004). The closest science has can come to this is to record what we think it might be in blood flow or perfusion studies of functional MRIs, McGill Pain Questionnaires and personal narratives (Williamson et al, 2005). Again a confluence between literary and pain theory occurs: for pain in medicine as for the text in literary theory, there is, as Culler says,

...always more to know, but, more specifically and more painfully, because theory is itself the questioning of presumed results and the assumptions on which they are based. The nature of theory is to undo, through a contesting of premises and postulates, what you thought you knew, so the effects of theory are not predictable. ”  
(Culler, 1997, p 17)

Nor is the brain's self-organisation, predictable.

### **Language and self-organising *systems of difference***

If the brain engenders rather than reflects our experience in much the same way language has been speculated to function since Saussure, then, is there a legitimate confluence between language, consciousness and the autopoietic brain. This confluence has been the theoretical and research terrain of the Argentinean neurobiologists Humberto Maturana and his colleague, Francisco Varela's general 'Biology of Cognition'. (Maturana, 1995) Maturana discusses this biology of cognition on his web site:

The Biology of Cognition is an explanatory proposition that attempts to show how human cognitive processes arise from the operation of human beings as living systems. As much, The Biology of Cognition entails reflexions oriented to understand living systems, their evolutionary history, language as a biological phenomenon, the nature of explanations, and the origin of humanness. As a reflection on how we do what we do as observers it is a study in the epistemology of knowledge. But, and at the same time as a reflection on how we exist in language as languaging beings, it is a study on human relations. (Maturana, 1995)

Both Maturana and Varela have explicitly argued for a self-organising biological co-operation with language that engenders both our ontology and our neurophenomenology. Maturana explicitly argues that our 'humanness' as 'languaging beings' sees language and our beingness, and the brain and our beingness as cooperative process that cannot be teased apart let alone reduced to separate entities or phenomena. This position begs the question though that this bio-linguistic cooperation has always already existed. In Part '6' of his essay titled 'Philosophical Consequences' Szentagothai ventured, "We have no other alternative than to go along with the challenge of an entirely new paradigm." Szentagothai continued that the "...true autopoietic nature of neural functions... (presents) an entirely new challenge for 'brain-mind philosophy'" (Szentagothai, 1993, p 114). He concluded: "We would consider this as a challenge for thinkers with a professional background in philosophy." (Szentagothai, 1993, p 114).

In the *Medical Journal of Australia* editor Martin B Van Der Weyden cited the United States physician and ethicist Howard Brody in linking the theories and endeavours behind both literature and medicine:

Stories are essential as a means of perceiving how scientific knowledge in its generality can be applied to individuals in all their particularity. The exploration of literature is now a growth area in some medical schools. (Van der Weyden, 2002, p 405)

Narrative and medicine are making appearances together in many of the influential medical journals (*New England Journal of Medicine, British Medical Journal, The Lancet, Australian Medical Journal*) but they ought to do so with a caution in first acknowledging the past one hundred years of literary theory discourse that leads us to Derrida, Hart and Culler's vantage points of a chastened alterity and a requirement to *contemplate the secret*. It would seem that a self-organising biology is cooperative with self-organising linguistic theories and, together, may facilitate scientific and medical knowledge by providing an epistemological space for medical science to grow outside the domains dualism and its subsequent reliance on a discourse of mechanistic and reductionistic determinism. For, as Derrida pointed out, this determinism is a quest for certitude that "...dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign and which leaves the necessity of interpretation as an exile" (Derrida, 1978, p 369). Given the evidence of the autopoietic brain, there has perhaps never been more evidence to suggest that a wider

more open and active interpretative practice, beyond the language of dualism, should be included at all levels of interpreting pain in others. Pain Medicine ought to be a stochastic enterprise that in acknowledging the self-organising brain, also acknowledges that it is as dependent upon the art of interpretation as is literature.

Szentagothai's self-organising brain and Maturana's findings and conclusions concerning the Biology of Cognition and language intersect with Saussure's point about language: "...in language there are only differences." (Saussure, 1915, p 121) If we were to interchange *language* with *the brain* in the above apprehension, then the most influentially Copernican comment on linguistics in the last one hundred years has potentially the same ramifications for how our second to second subjective experience is engendered rather than reflected by our miraculous brain (Greenfield, 2002, p 91). For if one was to exchange the sign 'philosophy' with 'literary theory' (for both signifiers apprehend the relevant epistemology at stake here), then Szentagothai's call for help from professional thinkers in theory may reveal the ground for an transdisciplinary theory that sees the subject in pain supported by the positions beyond the dualism of Descartes' bell.

The ground for this transdisciplinary theory may well combine Derrida's noncentred play cooperating with Szentagothai's autopoietic and self-organising brain, and given the irrefutability of

the brain's autopoiesis, are compelling, because of the way both language and the brain co-operate in the invasion of 'the universal problematic' (Derrida, 1978, p 354). For both the brain and language play with the phenomenal world and go about their sense-making business through very complex systems of self-organising contiguity, as the noted contemporary neurologist VS Ramachandran put it: "The brain makes sense of the world through a series of comparisons." (Ramachandran, 1999, p 152).

Ramachandran's 'comparisons' closely resemble Saussure's point, "...in language there are only differences" (Saussure, 1915, p 121). Our 'humanness' in Maturana's terms goes about its sense-making through linguistic and neuronal self-organising networks relating to each other contiguously. As the editors of one literary theory anthology write in what is now a commonplace in their field, "In effect, language functions by identifying the differences between signs rather than revealing pre-existing truths or essences" (Rice and Waugh, 1998, p 4).

There are however, two further qualities the brain cooperates with poststructural notions of language. The first quality is Derrida's notion of the *noncentre* and Szentagothai's observations on the noncentredness of neural activity. The second, is Szentagothai's signpost of *negentropy* (negative entropy) that align with Derrida's ideas concerning supplementarity and linguistic play (Quintner et al, 2003). I will address these in turn now.



## Noncentredness

In discussing the potency of the brain's noncentredness,

Szentagothai remarked:

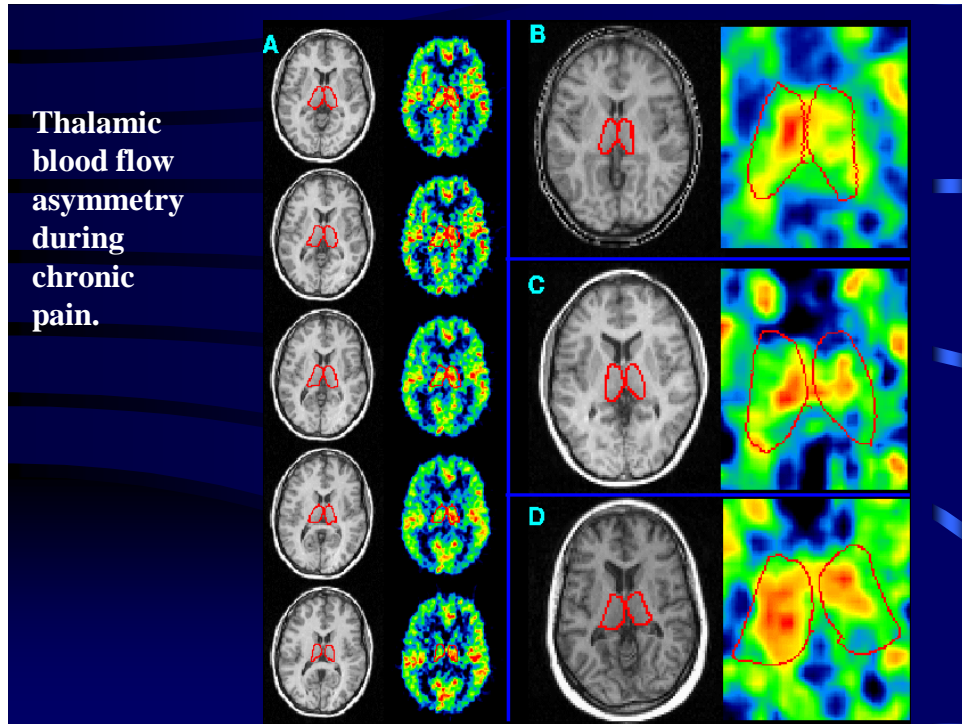
One of the most miraculous features of neural systems is that the same piece of neural tissue can perform a large variety of processing functions, depending on the input... This variety is indeed so large that the beholder is naturally tempted to become sceptic about the idea of a modular architectonics principle of the cortex..." (Szentagothai, 1993, p 112)

It seems the complexity of these neural systems defies the idea that any one locus of the brain is the centre for any one function or subjective experience. This noncentred contiguous complexity is similar to the quantum physicist Fotini Kalamara's notions of how atoms relate within a larger system of matter: "An atom is a piece of the network and its identity is given by its relation to the rest of the network." (Kalamara, 2005, p, 48). This relation to the rest of the network is theoretically congruent with Saussure's anti-essentialist system of differences and contiguity in language and Derrida's *presence of the noncentre* - where the fixed origin or *archè* of signs in a contiguous linguistic system of differences is elsewhere (Derrida, 1978, p 354). Szentagothai's scepticism concerning a modular [lineal] architectonics of the cortex is like Kalamara's atoms in matter and Saussure's signs in language, in as much as neurons have no fixed identity or central intrinsic function, rather, they relate to other neurons in highly noncentred and contiguous ways to the

rest of the network. Any intrinsic and centred identity and meaning is therefore not able to be reduced to the essence of individual parts but through the way these parts relate and contribute to an irreducible and miraculous whole in an infinitely complex system of differences (Rudrauf et al, 2003).

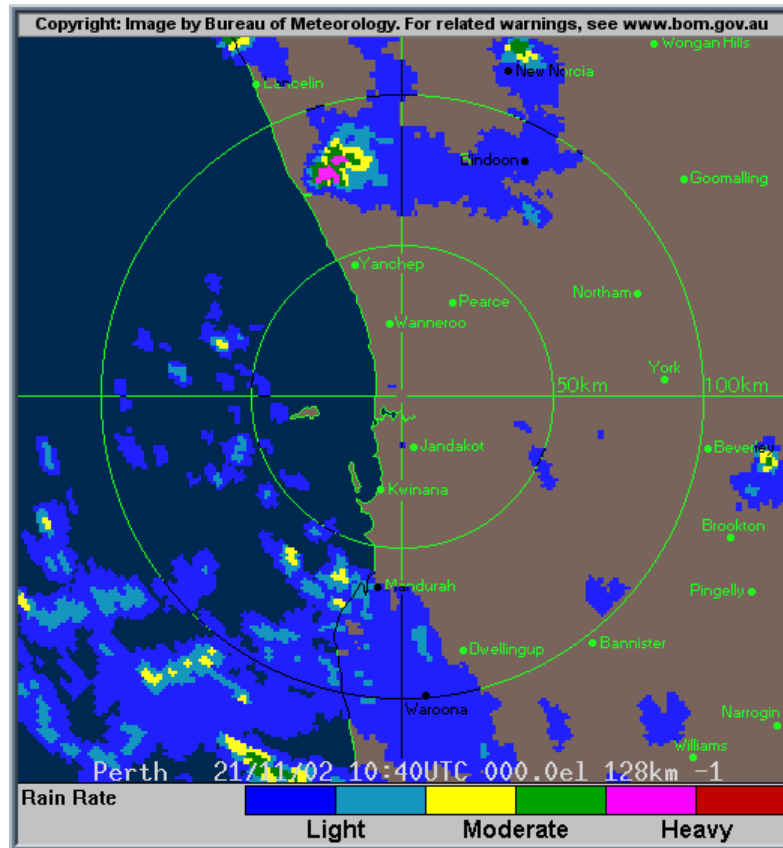
In short, there can be no bell or centred function in the brain that becomes the fixed origin of a sole functionality in the processing of pain. This however begs the question of just what might the noncentre be? If the centre in Derridean terms is elsewhere – then what is the nature of this elsewhere-ness and the brain? At this vantage point I recall my first apprehension of Derrida's noncentre as a concept when I was being taught Derridean theory by Professor Andrew Taylor in an honours class just before my accident in April 2000. He gave a few examples: the world wide web, it has no centre, no one single point of arche or origin and forms an interwoven type of construction more like a tissue is interwoven. Any water mass has no one point of molecular origin rather like Deleuze and Guattari's rhizoid patterns that again interconnect and interweave to form the overall lawn of the rhysomic whole (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Within the lawn, there is no intrinsic origin where rhysomic patterns literally begin, as they extend and expand their complex web of heterogeneity within that which Derrida termed '...the presence of the noncentre' (Derrida, 1978, p 356).

Another highly developed example of the noncentre concerns this MRI (below) depicting perfusion of blood flow in the brain over timed intervals related to the experience of chronic pain.



In effect – we are observing a cartoon of the brain (as one frame is contiguously different to the other in space and time) depicting the intensity of blood perfusion to multiple and various parts of the brain in a patient in persistent pain. Here the doctors involved have concentrated on the thalamic areas ringed in red on the right, but of course there are multiple areas throughout the cortical regions that are ‘lighting up’ from blue, to green to yellow to red, which directly explicate Szentagothai’s *variety of processing functions* observations as “one of the most miraculous features of neural systems.” (Szentagothai, 1993, p 112) In this sense this *functional*

MRI of the perfusion of blood flow is a map as readable as the Bureau of Meteorology's radar scan is for a lay storm-chaser to interpret, regarding areas of rain intensity indicating the likelihood of lightning in thunderstorms.



These weather scans are available to the public on the internet and are in general, easily interpreted. For the MRI scan, the heaviest perfusion of blood flow is in red (just like the heaviest rain is in red on the radar), then descending to yellow, then green then blue. The similarities with a storm-chaser reading a radar continue in-so-far-as the red through to blue areas do not of themselves discover a storm – rather they depict activity that is known to be associated with these phenomena. That is, intense rain may have an association with thunder and lightning, and intense perfusion of blood

flow with pain, but neither can tell us what either a storm or pain *is*. What is clear though, is that there is no Cartesian centre 'F'; no bell in the brain that rings in the human experience of pain; because *the neural activity is going off all over the place* (Buchanan, 2005, p 235). Szentagothai again points out this noncentred presence when he states:

...the processing at the ...cortical level is only the very first step on an infinitely long journey... [that] makes one realise the immense complexity of the total connectivity of the brain... It would lead us far beyond... (any) line of speculation in order to develop a brain theory of our own." (Szentagothai, 1993, p 111 -12)

Szentagothai has found that not only is the brain autopoietic or self-organising but is also in its processing functionality – noncentred. It is my argument however that, any Cartesian centre 'F' is *elsewhere* both in the linguistic and neurobiological sense. This apprehension however *then determines the noncentre otherwise than as loss of centre* (Derrida, 1978, p 370) in the same way Galileo's confirmation of Copernicus's *loss of centre* [of the earth] meant we didn't so much lose the Earth's importance as the centre of the universe as gain the affirmation that the universe is bigger and more complex than we had ever supposed. In this sense, a general and transdisciplinary interpretation cannot be exiled here, since the only conclusive medico-scientific finding to make concerning the presence of this *noncentre* is Montaigne's point, "We need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things." (Cited, Derrida, 1978, p 350).

## **Negentropy**

The second quality of neuronal self-organisation: Szentagothai's final signpost in terms of a philosophical apprehension of the brain: negentropy. Negentropy is the concept of a system which differs to Newton's second Law of Nature: entropy. The Oxford English Dictionary defines negentropy as negative entropy. If entropy is the loss of energy given off by any system for example light and heat from "...the framework of our classical views on the physical world as being closed (laws of thermodynamics etc) (Szentagothai, 1993, p 114), then negentropy is the lack of this entropy occurring in a predictable way. In a negentropic system, more than the thermodynamics of entropy is going on and the negentropy defies our abilities to interpret the system predictably. Szentagothai pointed out that all of his findings concerning the open systems of downwards causation, self-organisation and noncentredness were incompatible, or in Derridean terms irreducible, with the classical Cartesian reflex paradigm:

As long as the original Cartesian reflex paradigm of nervous system was valid, there was simply no way to accept 'downwards causation' (etc)... within the framework of our classical views on the physical world being closed... However, if higher neural functions were visualised ... this obstacle might be overcome in the framework of the relation between information and order (negentropy).  
(Szentagothai, 1993, p 114.)

The parenthesis of the word 'negentropy' above here is a very important signpost, for both literally and figuratively, any definition of negentropy is more, much more, than 'the lineal relation between information and order and cause and effect' (Szentagothai, 1993, p 114). In Derridean terms, certitude is 'elsewhere'. Szentagothai's close colleague, Peter Erdi explored this unpredictable complexity in the brains systems of differences before and after Szentagothai's death (Erdi, 1993). In his paper 'Neurodynamic System Theory: Scope and Limits', Erdi critiqued many different theories and approaches, from the difference between static and dynamic structuralism through to chaos theory in a bid to tease out a way of structurally coping with the complexity of the brain. Erdi found:

Such kinds of concepts as circular and network causality, chaos, unpredictability, information, emergence, complexity, etc., lead to the limits of 'dynamic structuralism'. The hegemony of the Newtonian paradigm, has... been weakened by physics and chemistry motivated neostructuralist theories such as the theory of dissipative structures, and of synergetics. In spite of their ambitious endeavours, and undeniable success, no theory of the brain can be given within a pure structuralist framework. (Erdi, 1993, p 147)

No matter how intricate and complex the structuralist theory, it simply is unable to cope with the self-organising, noncentred, negentropic and therefore unpredictable complexities of the brain. Whether the signifiers *self-organising*, *noncentred* and *negentropy* denote and/or connote the necessary signifieds to cope with the complexities of the neurodynamic system remains to be seen. Erdi, as long ago as 1993, referred to the brain's complexity as *self-*

*referential*. The brain's structurality, like language's structurality in Derrida's terms, escapes its own structurality. Erdi's argument is science's *chaos, unpredictability, traffic information, and/or emergence* are signifiers limited in their ability to reflect the conceptual neurodynamic complexity going on. Such self-referentiality defies any structuralist theory to interpret the brain and Erdi concluded, "Brain theory... ought to be '*poststructuralist*'. (Erdi, 1993, p 147).

Erdi was utterly clear: no structure or structuralist approach, no matter how dynamic can cope with the three factors that are at constant complex play in making sense of the self-referential brain because: 1., it has the ability to self-organise; 2., it goes about this self-organisation in infinitely complex heterogenic noncentred ways; and 3., it is a system that within this autopoietic noncentredness may induce activities that gain rather than lose energy, or, as Faingold succinctly defines it, "[where] the output of a system can exceed the input." (Faingold, 2004, p 57)

Richard Chapman's miracle at *step two* has reappeared: input occurs, then a miracle happens and the output exceeds the input. Such a *system* sees lived experiences like persistent pain emerge in unpredictable ways, which defy our scientific heuristic endeavours but particularly our common sense and especially, the language of dualism.



To illustrate however, how the language of dualism still pervades the scientific hermeneutics of the brain, Owen Williamson, a spinal surgeon of the Medical School at Monash University, asked Richard Chapman after his presentation at the 2004 Pain conference what he thought about *the occurrence of the miracle of the brain and pain*, and this was Richard Chapman's reply:

My view of the miracle is that it is emergence. Emergent properties are always a surprise, given the elements from which the thing emerges. However, I don't mean to imply "merely" emergence, as phenomenal reality is a huge leap from the biological brain. It would seem that brains are machines designed to produce the emergent phenomenon of consciousness. This, I guess, is adaptation to the environment. Clearly, pain is an aspect of consciousness, and I must reason, then that it is an emergent property. Sometimes, it does not emerge when nociception is present. We need to understand why this happens. (Chapman, personal email correspondence to Williamson, 2004)

In any interpretation of Richard Chapman's reply it is necessary to scrutinize what is meant by 'emergence' within the discourse of neurobiological science. Mikulecky (1996) defines *emergence* as 'the sudden and unpredictable appearance of new forms of organization.' (Mikulecky, 1996, p 181) If we return to Melzack and Wall's variable link, sometimes pain does *emerge* when nociception in the instant is either not present or cannot be detected. In fact it is pain without lesion (ergo nociception) that is the bearer of the heaviest investment in a reductionist and circular dualism - certainly in medico-legal discourse as well as the medico-epistemological

problems posed by diagnoses such as Railway Spine, Shell Shock, Repetitive Strain Injury, Fibromyalgia and Trauma Disability (Quinter and Cohen, 1996). There is a far greater concern however, with the position with Richard Chapman's 'and I must reason' of the brain as machine that is essentially *res extensa*, that is the brain as machine concerns a view of the brain that is of a purely separate body from the consciousness that is presumably of the separate *res cogitans* of the mind. Richard Chapman's argument is thus trapped in the familiar circle of dualism because if the brain is not separable from consciousness then the oppositions of *res extensa* and *res cogitans* can only exist in a circular story of themselves.

The signifier *emergence* here may become a transcendental signified for *the miracle* while still accommodating the language of dualism that reflects a machine that is *res extensa* complete with its opposite, consciousness: *res cogitans*. Owen Williamson's conjecture (below) to Richard Chapman's explanation is worth including here not only because of its succinct validity, but because it demands the inclusion of an active interpretation outside the language of dualism:

I'm not sure what he [Richard Chapman] means by emergence, other than consciousness arises from the brain, because we have brains and are conscious. It seems he is relabelling the miracle, without increasing understanding. (Personal email correspondence to author, Williamson, 2004)

This was Erdi and Szentagothai's point over eleven years ago, that in turn echoed Derrida's *invasion of the universal problematic* nearly thirty years before that:

What can a brain theoretician do after realizing the crisis of the notion of universal rationality? He or she can attempt to accept that modern (reductionist) science lacks self-reflexivity and perhaps turn to hermeneutics and emphasise the cyclic nature of perception and learning (Erdi, 1993, p 148).

The 'crisis of the notion of universal rationality' I take to be the equivalent of Derrida's invasion of the universal problematic, as both realize the miracle is too playful or self-reflexive to rationalise or reduce to its component parts. Little wonder Szentagothai left it "as a challenge for thinkers with a professional background in philosophy" (Szentagothai, 1993, p 114). Whether a hermeneutics and/or a poetics would offer more supportable and suitable vantages from which to engage such *active interpretation* was a valid concern to Szentagothai's challenge. Intrinsicly what is still at stake here is nothing less than the (poststructural) self-referential brain's engenderment of human sentience and the ensuing philosophy, theory, science and cultural studies of pain, and this engenderment moves between (as literary/linguistic theory has for the last one hundred years) the important differences between a *Hermeneutics* and a *Poetics*.

Jonathon Culler defines a *Poetics* as '...modeled on linguistics' which 'takes meanings as what must be accounted for and tries to

work out how they are possible.’ (Culler, 1997, p 61). The endeavour of the *A Poetics* then is Montaigne and Derrida’s concerns with the necessity of interpretations: that is, we need to interpret interpretations more than to interpret things. This is especially the case when the thing is both self-referential and aporetic, which is the case for the emergence of pain from the self-referential brain. Culler accounts for the contrast of a *Hermeneutics* as a heuristic endeavour that ‘starts with things and seeks to interpret them, to tell us what they really mean.’ (Culler, 1997, p 61). The hermeneutic approach bids to uncover the secret rather than contemplate it, that is, it attempts to tell us what is really going on, and, in so doing falls into the trap of proclaiming certitude when the aporetic encounter always spawns more questions than answers. Erdi’s point concerning notions of universal rationality lacking self-reflexivity is crucial because any science of the brain and pain is compelled to enter the interpretative realm of a *Poetics* because the heuristic endeavour of a *hermeneutics* is limited by the nature of pain’s aporia. These limitations are compounded when the discourse of medical science can no longer validate its own metaphysics, especially within the language of dualism, under the weight of the self-referential yet very biophysical, miraculous and therefore unpredictable brain.

# Chapter 4

## Language, the Brain and Pain: the problem of reference in the intersubjective befalling of the Uncanny

In the theory of self-referential linguistics and *deconstruction*, a theoretical and historical disquiet has emerged, regarding weighty misgivings of *deconstruction* eschewing a reference that makes sense of the world (Caruth, 1996, p 73). This disquiet alleges that self-referentiality prevents a knowledgeable access to history, language and even cognition. That is, a problem of reference ensues from its very self-referentiality. This disquiet has led to an allegation that self-referential notions spawn a denial of historical access to the world and especially the world of science. Cathy Caruth sums up these concerns:

The constant focus by poststructuralists on the linguistic devices by which meaning is produced, and by “deconstruction” on the difficulties these devices create for our understanding of a text, seems to amount to a claim that language cannot refer adequately to the world and indeed may not truly refer to anything at all, leaving literature and language, and even consciousness in general, cut off from historical reality. (Caruth, 1996, p 73 – 4)

Implicit in Caruth’s concerns is a nexus between language and consciousness. Maturana’s point about us being languaging beings is highly relevant here because of consciousness’s inseparability from a self-organising biology that itself defies a universal and predictable structure:

As much, The Biology of Cognition entails reflexions oriented to understand living systems, ...language as a biological phenomenon, the nature of explanations, and the origin of humanness. As a reflection on how we do what we do as observers it is a study in the epistemology of knowledge. But, and at the same time as a reflection on how we exist in language as languaging beings, it is a study on human relations. (Maturana, 1995)

The Cartesian dualism of *I think therefore I am*, is problematised through a linguistic and neurobiological play, which is mediated through systems of differences of both the brain and language that are not necessarily in opposition. Szentagothai and Erdi's *poststructure* and Maturana's biology of cognition invites us to consider a continuum of complexity. Descartes' *I think therefore I am* therefore looks at the very least more like *I am this miraculous self-organising thing which is inseparable from my second to second ontological engagement with the environment and I operate within a self-organising language system therefore I think; and I think because I am this miraculous self-organising thing which is inseparable from my second to second ontological engagement with the environment...* At this point I suspect Richard Chapman's *step two miracle* makes its reappearance because we are denied access to the secrets of this miracle while knowing full well it is a miracle.

Despite the inaccessibility of the miracle, the problem of reference remains and I would like to discuss briefly the signified(s) of

'deconstruction' in order to tease out the theoretical disquiet. Like any signifier, the signifieds of 'deconstruction' are subject to a play that can leave us in an epistemological metaphysics of presence. The risk is that 'deconstruction' takes on a currency of meaning unintended by the play it intended to apprehend. Derrida himself was well aware of this danger when he sought to clarify what deconstruction is by determining what it was not:

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them *in a certain way*, because one always inhabits. and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work. (Derrida, 1978, p 24).

Deconstruction, Derrida tells us, is not a pulling apart of the text to reveal hidden and underlying universal truths or meanings that go on to necessarily affirm the principles of New Criticism and the *natural principles* of a humanist idealism: complexity, paradox, life affirming, irony, humour, seriousness, for example. [6] Rather, deconstruction is as Barbara Johnson phrased, "a teasing out of warring forces of signification within a text" (Johnson, 1985, p 5). Derrida in the film *Derrida*, describes it *off-the-cuff* as a process whereby any centre, has within it something that is *always already present*, that undoes its

own project, its own centrality, its own teleology. In language it is undoubtedly the always already present qualities of play, self-organisation, noncentredness and the propensity of language to keep supplementing itself (Derrida, 1978, p 369). Supplementarity for Derrida, is the ability of language to keep gaining in not only its sense-making but in the literal number of signifiers and the difference of the eventual signifieds, in the sense that the Complete Oxford English Dictionary is never complete but is in a constant diachronically dynamic state of 'gain', which shares an uncanny likeness to Szentagothai's signpost of negentropy for the brain, in that the output of the language system exceeds its input.

These linguistic features of a self-organising play, noncentredness and supplementarity have a striking resemblance in their *poststructure* to Szentagothai and Erdi's self-referential brain with its own qualities of self-organisation, noncentredness and negentropy. There is a crucial point to be made: both the brain and language in their self-referentiality pose great difficulties for any practice that, as Caruth suggests, seeks to model '...the principles of reference on those of natural law, or, we might say, of making reference like perception.' (Caruth, 1996, p 74). Caruth's point is that when our perception and references become blurred then we can and do mistake our stories of natural law, for natural law. Nowhere is this clearer than in the ideas that were held as dogma, for many centuries, that the earth was the centre of the universe. All our perceptions dictated the centrist reference, as after all the sun rises



in the east and sets in the west, and the sun seems to circle us and not the other way around.

That our perceptions may erroneously reference natural law has led us to establishing empirically based *principles*, such as the classical reflex principle in neurology, and/or the *res cogitans* of Cartesian dualism explicit in the specificity theory of pain, that are more stories of our perceptions than natural law. What is crucial to this insight is that it is not so much what we are perceiving that matters but, who is doing the perceiving.

In my radio play *To Fall Without Landing*, the character Cathy suffers from Vestibular Syndrome where the phenomenal world swirls around her. Her persistent vertigo is caused by the earth literally falling through space when some abnormality in her abilities to stabilise and balance occurs. This syndrome is quite rare and is usually caused by an abnormality of the tiny vestibular bones in the inner ear or, as in Cathy's case, when no abnormality is detected, the cause is often thought to be for psychological reasons. Cathy is referred to a psychiatrist called Searle. Her condition is at its worst when she opens her eyes and attempts to walk to someone. She often walks in tight circles with her head swirling around and around to try and keep the other 'stable' enough to focus. Searle asks her how this feels and she replies:

**Cathy**

I think we all know how I feel... because the bigger reality is we're all just... like... me.

**Searle** How so?  
**Cathy** Falling through space on the third rock from a tiny sun...  
**Searle** You make it sound so nihilistic?  
 (Buchanan, 2005, p 263)

Behind Searle's objection is the American philosopher John R. Searle's position that the existence of an external world is comprised of 'brute facts', like *snow on Mount Everest* (Searle, 1992, p 17). His argument against *deconstruction* is that to deny our access to the brutally factual existence of the snow on Mount Everest is preposterous (Searle, 1992). Cathy's swirling to the psychiatrist Searle, is also preposterous because we seem so empirically fixed by the 'brute facts' of our seeming fixity of place. This is akin to the joke: *Did you hear about the literary theorist who got hit by a truck? He thought it was a cultural construct.* But this is to miss the point about what Horst Ruthrof terms a 'corporeal turn' where the existence of the snow on Mount Everest is never denied, but how we interpret it and what it may mean to us is mediated in quasi-perceptual ways (Ruthrof, 2000, p 9). Phenomenally, the snow is perceived through neurobiological structures that of themselves escape structurality. That is, these neurobiological structures do not reflect the pre-existent snow on the mountain as a simple reflex to an unmediated presence – rather these *poststructures* are deeply constitutive of the perception through their active self-referentiality. Such an active interpretation is further mediated when this perception

is communicated to others through the self-referentiality of language.

Ruthrof cites Helen Keller to apprehend this perceptual complexity:

When I think of hills, I think of the upward strength I tread upon.  
When water is the object of my thought, I feel the cool shock of the  
plunge and the quick yielding of the waves that crisp and curl and  
ripple about my body. (Keller cited in Ruthrof, 2000, p 1).

No-one is denying the external reality of these hills or waves. The idea of a brute fixity that amounts to a fixed mark of external empirical reference, which adheres timelessly as a universal law in terms of the ways we perceive this phenomena, seems more and more problematic. This problem of reference is further compounded when the phenomenal world is always mediated by the self-referentiality of both the brain and language.

### **Subjective, intersubjective, objective**

Donald Davidson's work problematises the traditional philosophical distinction between subjective and objective by examining the interconnectedness and inseparability of the intersubjective from the traditional subjective-objective binary (Davidson, 2001, p 7).

Davidson argues that knowledge of our own perception (subjective) and the shared world (objective – that is Searle's *snow on Mt Everest*) is always deeply influenced by the perceptions of others.

This realm of the other's perceptions he considers to be the intersubjective. He argues that the intersubjective is always at the

fore of our sense-making but that none of the three forms of knowledge could exist without the other:

If I did not know what others think, I would have no thoughts of my own and so would not know what to think. If I did not know what I think, I would lack the ability to gauge the thoughts of others. Gauging the thoughts of others requires that I live in the same world with them, sharing many reactions to its major features, including its values. (Davidson, 2001, p 17).

Here as Derrida would put it, there is always already a language system ‘inhabiting *in a certain way*’ (Derrida’s italics) the structures within those intersubjective values, which is engaged in the arbitrary process of culturally conceived sense-making systems to engender and communicate our gauging thoughts. Paul de Man, in his essay “The Resistance to Theory” attempted to distinguish reference from natural law (de Man, 1982). Necessarily de Man’s argument was tied to his understanding of the relationship between constative and performative language weaving that which we think we are reflecting, when in actuality, we are making up intersubjective stories as we go along (Caruth, 1996, p 73).

De Man’s concentration upon the differences between constative and performative language is crucial because “the constative is language claiming to represent things that are already there, (whereas) the performative is the rhetorical operations, the acts of language, that undermine this claim by imposing linguistic

categories, bringing things into being, organizing the world rather than simply representing what is.” (Culler, 1997, p 102). The danger of constative language is that it reflects the world as we see it rather than the world as it actually might be. Clearly medical science invests its heuristic endeavour far more in a constative language and the representation of things as they seem, which is supported by the external reference of empirical evidence. The *Gold Standard Evidence* of the scientific method in *Random Controlled Trials* [7] typifies this constative objective from the description of diseases, for example, but it is also implicit in most nosological endeavour, including the more contentious pain syndromes such as *Fibromyalgia* [8] (Quintner et al, 2003). At this point the constative language of diagnosis becomes a verdict, which can, far from reflecting what is actually going on in people with pain, eschews interpretations outside the confines of its pronouncement and judgment that would necessarily entail emergent phenomena from the self-referential brain.

In contrast, performative language engenders rather than reflects the world and, as its title suggests, its language brings a world into being and not the other way around. The language of literature *sings the world into existence*, and, creatively *does*. This is exemplified in J.L. Austin’s claim that performative language takes part in a world without either right or wrong in the same way

someone getting married says “I do”. (Austin, 1975, p 153).

Constative language in this context seems hamstrung by its own endeavour as its nearest equivalent “I am getting married now.” is incapable of performing the action necessary to constate it, as in “I do”. When one cannot describe something, one must do in the instant, as one *is* doing or living the experience (Austin, 1975, p 5).

Like all binary positions explored in this thesis, however, the inseparability of constative and performative language is what is at stake. Can they even be separated? Are these ‘opposites’ necessarily in opposition? Here we reach an aporia, that space to which we are denied access around which an oscillation develops. As Culler points out:

The only way to claim that language functions performatively to shape the world is through a constative utterance, such as ‘Language shapes the world’; but contrariwise, there is no way the constative transparency of language can be performed except by a speech act. The propositions which perform the act of stating necessarily claim to do nothing but merely display things as they are; yet if you want to show the contrary – that claims to represent things as they are in fact impose their categories on the world – you have no way to do this except through claims about what is or is not the case. The argument that the act of stating or describing is in fact performative must take the form of constative statements. (Culler, 1997, p 102)

In other words, this oscillation between the two determines both as inseparable from, and embedded in, the other. We are back at Caruth's problem of reference and why de Man is so interested in the stakes between those discourses that invest in one and shun the other, or in short, engage in *the resistance to* (self-referential) *theory*. While both arenas of language undoubtedly exist, it is the performative aspects to any constative utterance, statement (written or spoken) or diagnosis which requires our attention and, in any claim to be purely constative, our suspicion. For here the stakes are high as to what constitutes a sense of history and the invasion of the universal problematic: does a constative view of history deny us access to the history of pain? In other words is the allegation made against self-referentiality by the classical tradition equally applicable against classical theory?

The answer to that has its traces within the performative language of dualism and the degree to which the classical specificity theory owed its seeming constative qualities to a 'story' that passed itself off as purely constative natural law. The same can of course be said for the equally Cartesian classical reflex principle of neurology. Here, constative language that portends to describe natural law in a kind of objective scientific reflection is in fact, deeply performative in its desire for a universal rationality with a referenced certitude. Is classical theory even more prone to the abstraction of history than

self-referential theory because as Caruth argues, “far from denying access to history, (self-referential theory) is a way... of precisely keeping history from being swallowed up by the power of abstraction.” (Caruth, 1996, p 74). For ‘abstraction’ in this context, read the abstraction of desire for certitude that, as de Man was to argue in his essay *The Resistance to Theory*, takes on the graceful movements of the puppets of the Marionette theatre in the ways classical theory can seem so real but is in fact highly manipulated (Caruth, 1996, p 79).

De Man considers Kleist’s story *On the Marionette Theatre* in the light of Kant’s “philosophical attempt to distinguish language from empirical law by making theory into a self-reflexive system” (Caruth, 1996, p 77). This distinction between language and empirical law anticipated theory’s concern that language engenders rather than reflects and therefore mediates experience and our perception of experience. De Man’s interest lies in the text that is woven between the structures of both the puppets and the puppeteer “...that lifelessly transforms the laws of force and motion into superhuman grace” (Caruth, 1996, p 80). Caruth’s interest in De Man’s argument is in the moments the puppets of the *Marionette* seem to take on their “perfect curving motions of a dance, without the clumsiness of the human dancer, because in the puppets, the limbs are what they should be: dead, mere pendula, governed only by the law of



gravity” that this text begins to weave between the structures of the puppets and the puppeteers involved and the puppets begin to perform something that does more than it knows (Caruth, 1996, p 80).

Classical theory depends upon third party removed objectivity: we observe, we learn, we know, and then, we practice from such reference. At stake here though, is what if the reference can not be referenced objectively because the perception of a manipulated dance is mistaken for objective reference?

Of intrinsic importance to the question of reference is the literal and figurative use of Newton’s first natural law of motion: gravity.

Gravity as both a literal and figurative event confounds the references of our world of apparent empirical fixity and transforms the problem of reference into a problem of falling. As Caruth points out:

Newton, in the story of his discovery of gravitation, sees an apple fall, and understands in a flash that the objects of the universe are all falling toward each other by the same force that pulls this apple, invisibly, toward the ground. (Caruth, 1996, p 81).

That is, if every object is falling, which despite the empirical evidence of fixity to the contrary, means we are all doing more than we know.

That is, we are always already falling towards some aspect of the

other and otherness in general. It follows from this general state of falling that the other may also fall towards us as we fall, in what Derrida calls 'the coming of the other' within the context of *l'avenir* (Derrida, 2002). In the French there are two kinds of future: *futur* and *l'avenir*. *Futur* concerns the predictable future we would wish to secure and entails securing a job, having superannuation and insurance policies. *L'avenir* in contrast, concerns the unforeseen events of the other coming into our lives in completely unpredictable ways and having unpredictable effects that really effect and change our lives. *A Bell in the Storm* apprehends *l'avenir* through Andrew's character when he and Sally are meeting in *Café L'avenir* and she asks whether the café's name means *café of the future*:

**Andrew**        Sort of... It's more the unpredictable future... In French there are two kinds of futures – the one we secure against – you plan for – it's why we have jobs, bank accounts, superannuation, insurance policies etc and then there's *l'avenir*... **(Pause)** Those totally unpredictable things that truly shape our lives... (Buchanan, 2005, p 200).

In the discourse of persistent pain, Descartes' bell represents the kind of future we would wish to secure. That is, pain will only persist if there is tissue damage or lesion in the instant and it cannot persist unless this lesion is ongoing. Pain here becomes a confined prediction and so too, is its ability to continue into the future. The *l'avenir* of persistent pain is its uncanny unpredictability of severity and chronicity especially in the absence of obvious lesion *in the*

*instant*. Quoting from Schelling, Freud says of the uncanny in his essay 'Das Unheimliche': 'The uncanny is what should have remained a secret and hidden but has come to light.' (Freud, cited Payne and Schad, 2004, p 33). Under the Cartesian based specificity theory, the secret of persistent pain without lesion should have remained confined to that of phenomena of the mind (*phantom, psychoneurosis, somatisation*) and in this sense, it should have remained hidden within the structures of Descartes' *res cogitans* and Freud's structure of the unconscious.

The meaning of 'uncanny' stems from the German *das Unheimliche* meaning 'two opposite things' (Payne and Schad, 2004, p 34). In the self-referential brain and the emergence of pain, the two opposite things of body and mind in the classical theory, have not been able to contain or hide the secret of pain's uncanniness, because, the necessity of the body and the mind to be separate was unable to keep them in opposition. That is, as for constative and performative language, both the body and the mind are inseparable from, and embedded in, each other. In this sense the process of decentring in science: from Copernicus to Newton, from Newton to Szentagothai, Erdi and Maturana, has always involved the revelation of the uncanny. What these individuals found was a succession of complexities that decentred the stories upon which our perceptions mistook for reference.

Thus, Copernicus found the earth is not the centre of the universe; Newton found the whole universe is falling; and, Szentagothai, Erdi and Maturana found the brain is self-referential. What we thought were opposites in natural law: earth and universe, fixed and falling, and reflexive and unpredictable, were never actually in the opposition we imposed upon them and, their inseparability and embeddedness is revealed through the emergent phenomena of the uncanny. Uncanniness then, is the revelation of that which should have stayed a secret but is revealed when the binary opposition of our heuristic theories collapse under their own metaphysical weight.

So too though has been the uncanny history of philosophy from Kant to Nietzsche, Nietzsche to Husserl and Heidegger, and Husserl and Heidegger to Derrida. As Caruth suggests:

...the history of philosophy after Newton could be thought of as a series of confrontations with the question of how to talk about falling. And similarly, the problem of reference... is: *how to refer to falling*. (Caruth, 1996, p 76).

Caruth's 'how to refer to falling' is the problem of reference. The world is not as we have thought it to be, that is the centre of a stable universe. In *To Fall Without Landing*, Cathy refers to this problem:

**Cathy**            How is it that I'm the one seeing a  
                              psychiatrist when it's the whole universe  
                              that's crazy...?

(Buchanan, 2005, p 263)

Now with the confirmation of the self-referential neurophenomenal world, we are not as we have thought ourselves *to be*, that is predictable organs of reflexivity to a stable and pre-existent phenomenal world with a separate and enigmatic mind. The text of western epistemology, what Derrida termed the *episteme*, has always been a Marionette text between the puppet dancing its *knowledge* in exhilarating and graceful ways that appear most human, and, most as it were, empirically referenced by natural law. But it is when this dance seems most natural, that it is actually at its most mechanical, and, most manipulated, by the text between the puppet, which for example may be the bell of pain and the puppeteer of Descartes' *L'Homme*.

Neither de Man nor Caruth argue that there is not an external reference, but rather that this external reference is the universal fall against which the resistance to theory has sought to rise. In de Man's reading of the Marionette theatre, theory itself recognises that the fall is both a literal and figurative falling. The oppositions of 'literal' versus 'figurative' have collapsed as the uncanny again emerges in this universal falling. De Man points out this uncanniness when he refers to the fall as being, "...in all senses of the term, including the theological Fall" (de Man, 1982, p 285). This

does not mean the “empirical” reference is irrelevant. Replicate Descartes’ L’Homme and put your toe too close to a fire and a bell of pain does indeed seem to ring in the instant, just as we do seem to be ever fixed in our chairs as we read these words, rather than the global reality of hurtling through space on the third rock from a small sun. The problem is if this perception is mistaken for a fixed universal reference, against which all phenomenology is measured and fixed into a classical doctrine, and, this same mistaken perception becomes inculcated into the discourse of common sense, and, in the case of pain, the discourse of medical practice. Derrida repeatedly pointed out that within the perceptions of classical doctrine some secret, some spectre or ghost haunts its ideas of fixity and certitude. The spectre deconstructing the classical doctrine is the uncanny, revealing secrets that could no longer be confined, hidden, or remains a secret. In this sense for Derrida, ‘...everything refers to this uncanniness.’ (Derrida cited in Payne and Schad, 2004, p 34).

What we have thought to be fixity is befallen, but, had always already been. The overall problem of reference is how to come to terms with this falling, pulling as it does any seeming fixity and/or reflex with it, whether this falling be signified by Kant’s defiance of empirical perception as reference, or Derridean play in the “Nietzschean *affirmation*”, or Erdi’s *poststructural brain*, or by Chapman’s *step two miracle*.

The other point here, which is by no means minor, is that this vantage necessarily views the aporia that exists between constative and performative language, especially in terms of the textual knowledge that is spun between any attempt we make to determine reference within the overall falling. If everything is falling then surely the only reference we have is the fall itself? Caruth argues:

In de Man's text, as in Kant's, the impact of reference is felt in falling: in the resistance of the *example of falling* to a phenomenal or perceptual analogy that would turn it into the mere figure of an abstract principle. In naming a befalling, de Man's text no longer simply knows what it says, but indeed does more than it knows, and it is in this that we can read the referential significance of his own theory... What theory does, de Man tells us repeatedly, is fall; and in falling, it refers. (Caruth, 1996, p 89 – 90).

In other words, the constative desire for objective observation has had to give way to the instance of a deeper and literal involvement in the vantage of Merleau-Ponty's *lived experience* that always does more than we know and defies dualisms' requirement for oppositions (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p 87). Merleau-Ponty insisted it is fundamental to our identity as beings that we are physical objects and "not a psyche joined to an organism, but the movement to and fro of existence, which at one time allows itself to take corporeal form and at others moves towards personal acts" (Merleau-Ponty, 1962, p 88). This is the same sense of J. L. Austin's iterable process of being married because the ceremony can not be completed by the constative utterance "I am getting married" or the

verdictive “I am married” but demands an “I do” to actually *get* married. (Austin, 1975, p 5)

Here lies a space for a co-operation between this performative knowledge that does more than it knows and Szentagothai’s *downwards causation, autopoiesis, negentropy*; that is to say the miraculous falling of the complexity preserving, self referential brain (Erdi, 1993, p 146). In pain the historically recent neurophenomenal understandings have exposed us to a phenomenal world that is bigger and more complex than we thought. This revelation has necessarily spawned new signifiers to cope with the play of the self-referential brain’s significance. Of particular interest here are the terms *wind-up, long-term-potential, and recruitment* and the new diagnoses these terms have created from pain medicine taxonomy committees: *allodynia, hyperalgesia (primary and secondary) and hyperpathia*. These diagnoses in turn, seek to deal with the autopoiesis, the miracle of what is growingly referred to as neurosensitisation (Miller, 1996). We ought to pay close attention to the new language that is used to cope with this expansion of our neurophenomenal world, but also, the lack of language that is currently available to cope with this new phenomenal context. The French neurobiologist, Le Van Quyen highlights this concern:

Despite a growing body of evidence... our understanding of these large scale brain processes remains hampered by the lack of theoretical language for expressing these complex behaviours in dynamical terms. (Le Van Quyen, 2004, p 67)



Just because the miracle cannot remain hidden, doesn't mean we understand the nature of its space, since like any aporia, we are denied access to its *mechanisms* even if we did have the language outside of dualism to contemplate them. As Faingold points out:

The complexity of the brain has placed a seemingly insurmountable constraint on our ability to understand with any degree of precision how the functional mechanisms of the brain are organized to perform even the simplest tasks. (Faingold, 2004, p 57)

Wind-up refers to when a non-noxious stimulus (a gentle tapping on the neck for example) is constantly repeated on a subject for a period time until the instances of the stimuli – although of themselves non-noxious – eventually elicit pain and if continued for a prolonged period, unbearable pain:

**Andrew** Do you remember when I first examined you, how I tapped you on the shoulder? Well, if I were to tap someone who doesn't have your pain state, initially it wouldn't bother them. But after ten minutes it would start to feel dull and heavy. After thirty minutes it would begin to ache. After an hour they would hurt. And after two hours they would be begging me to stop. **(Slight Pause)** It's called "wind-up" and it's the brain's response to a stimulus that builds up over time...

**Simon** So why did the tapping hurt me straight away?

**Andrew** Because your brain's already built up the pain... like a ...memory

**Simon** Let me get this straight... You're saying I received the equivalent of...like a fortnight's tapping in the moment the truck hit me? (Buchanan, 2005, p 218)

There remains the moot point that this term, *wind up*, is an attempt by medicine to deal with pain phenomena that emerge uncannily from the unpredictable self-referentiality of the brain. This attempt therefore, takes place from a vantage beyond the predictable common sense of the hardwired brain and its specificity theory driven medico-legal discourse. In so doing though, this same attempt invites more questions than it answers: principally concerning the nature of the miracle.

Implicit in any interpretative practice here is the oscillation of the aporia, this space to which we are denied access, and, a space that is always open to an active interpretation, if only because, its nature is, and always has been, self-organising, noncentred and given to negentropy: that is to say, a self-referential play within de Man's fall. Pain is inseparable from self-referentiality and is irreducible to any objective assessment predicated on a predictable reflex from a recognizable and detectable stimulus. Pain is therefore necessarily always subjective, and, is always communicated and observed intersubjectively, because it is given to, and emerges from, this aporia.

The International Association for the Study of Pain recognized this subjectivity as early as 1994 with the following definition of pain:

Pain is an unpleasant sensory and emotional *experience* associated with actual or potential tissue damage, or described in terms of such damage. (IASP, 1994).

This definition has generally been interpreted as meaning that pain is always subjective (Chapman, 2004). The importance of this subjectivity is that pain can no longer be objectively extricated from the epistemological and ontological bio-medical complexity of what is really going on in its experience. It is in the intersubjective realm however, that pain and its subjectivity takes on three peculiarly unique characteristics, which Elaine Scarry found in her groundbreaking book *The Body in Pain – The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Scarry, 1985, p 3). Scarry divides physical pain into three different subjects:

*first*, the difficulty of expressing physical pain; *second*, the political and perceptual complications that arise as a result of that difficulty; and *third*, the nature of both material and verbal expressibility or, more simply, the nature of human creation. When at last pain does find a voice it begins to tell a story... (Scarry, 1985, p 3).

My reading of Scarry's contention is that there is no "pure" constative language for the experience of pain. It is therefore always performative, inherently engaged in metaphor, metonym and musicality (pre-linguistic grunts and groans) and in de Man's

performance of doing more than we know (Kristeva, 1986, p 82). In short, pain *tells* a story because language is unable to cope with the experience, just as language is (currently) unable to cope with the self-referential brain. Whether this is causally linked to the self-referentiality of both the brain and language is a moot point, one that I relayed to both Dr John Quintner and Associate Professor Milton Cohen in an email of August, 2003, sent during the completion of a paper we had all co-written that had just been accepted in the Journal for Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics (Quintner et al, 2003),

Dear John/Milton,

We have stumbled upon something – both language and the brain are plastic/playful and, our common reference for the lived experience of this plasticity, is pain.

Milton emailed me back almost immediately highlighting the above and added, “Nice point. Perhaps this could be expanded?” (Personal correspondence, 2003). With the completion of this sentence, perhaps a ground has been prepared where at the very least, it could and should be expanded within the exciting confluence of the literal and figurative *miracle*, for as the French poet Rene Char noted,

*In the explosion of the universe we are witnessing, a miracle happens: the fragments falling down are alive!* (Char, cited Rothenburg and Joris, 1995, p 706)

## Chapter 5

### ***Imaginary creations* - language, neurophenomenology and the unstable self...**

Scarry's implications for language and the inexpressibility of pain are that when physical pain at last finds a voice, it begins to tell a story. The story that pain tells is about the inseparability of first, the difficulty of expressing physical pain; second, the political and perceptual complications that arise as a result of that difficulty; and third, the nature of both material and verbal expressibility or, more simply, the nature of human creation, and their embeddedness in one another (Scarry, 1985, p 3). While undoubtedly Scarry's insights into the suffering and ontology of pain, were, and are to an extent, still groundbreaking, Scarry seems not to apprehend an inherent tautology or pleonasm in the nomenclature of "physical pain".

At first glance Scarry's use of the signifier *physical* passes as a simple adjective: *physical* pain. For on one level it *is* adjectival, as it seems empirically, that physical pain is a type of pain. If we ponder physical pain as a tautology though, then we expose its adjectival quality as being a captive to the somatic-psychogenic or body-mind binary. That is, the postulated existence of physical pain implies

that there is also a wholly non-physical pain and that the two are quite distinct things, apropos of the binary of Descartes' *res extensa-res cogitans*.

In French the nearest equivalent signifier for pain is 'douleur', and its signifieds cut up the phenomenal world of not only that which English terms *physical pain* but *sorrow* as well, and 'douleur' does so without distinction between physical pain and sorrow. While on one level this signified merely reiterates the differences and arbitrary nature of the signified on the conceptual level across different cultures, it may also co-operate with the ontology and inherent subjectivity of the self-referential brain and its pain (Carr, 2001, p 47). That is, what is the extent to the experience of pain? Does it entail merely physical symptoms, and inherit with that questions the self-referential problems of the body-mind oppositions, or, does it always entail inseparable emotions as 'douleur' would suggest? If one were to consider the results of the McGill Pain Questionnaire in a French Clinic, what would be at stake is not so much what the results of the questionnaire would be in France but, just what the McGill Pain Questionnaire *is* in French, since the extent of what pain is thought to be differs under each language?

Pain is like de Man's falling, and does more than we know. Scarry points out that precious little language exists to phenomenally cope with pain, but in English at least, the language that does exist, is almost entirely negative in connotation. Professor Rory Sussex's University of Queensland's (linguistic) study of pain found that 99% of the English language available to cope with pain had negative connotations (Sussex, 2001). He concluded, "The English language view of pain is almost wholly negative and the sufferer finds themselves trapped within the available negative language system." (Sussex, 2001, p 55) Scarry had already concluded, "Pain actively destroys language" and effectively reduces the sufferer to a pre-linguistic state of grunts and groans (Scarry, 1984, p 14). Clearly, the ontology and neurophenomenology of pain predisposes people in pain, but particularly persistent pain (because it so defies simple explanation), into a peculiarly vulnerable lived experience between public and private life. The philosopher Hannah Arendt discusses this lack of language for pain and its sequelae:

Indeed, the most intense feeling we know of, intense to the point of blotting out all other experiences, namely, the experience of great pain, is at the same time the most private and least communicable of all. Not only is it perhaps the only experience which we are unable to transform into a shape fit for public appearance, it actually deprives us of our feeling for reality to such an extent that we can forget it more quickly and easily than anything else. There seems to be no bridge from the most radical subjectivity, in which I am no longer "recognizable" to the outer world of life. Pain, in other words, truly a borderline experience between life as "being among men" (*inter homines esse*) and death, is so subjective and removed from

the world of things and men that it cannot assume an appearance at all. (Arendt, 1998, p 50 – 51).

The American Rheumatologist James Katz sums up Arendt's position in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*,

This is a lack that is attached to pain. Specifically, it is a lack of language... A deeper analysis of this concept is accessible through the writings of Jacques Lacan... (wherein) not only is the unconscious structured like language but in truth the unconscious resides in language. (Katz, 2004, p 60, p 62).

Katz's signpost to the 'writings of Jacques Lacan', relates to the ongoing importance of Lacan's *the other* in an understanding of radical subjectivity and language's role in this *otherness* (Payne and Schad, 2003, p12 - 23). The concept of *the other* emerged from Lacan's mirror phase when the infant, aged between six to eighteen months, experiences *manqué* (a lack of or loss) at apprehending its own image in the mirror (Lacan, 1977). The infant sees and recognises the self in the mirror but also recognises in a flash, like Newton with his apple, that the image it sees is not only the self, because the self is doing the seeing, but, it is also the other. The ideal concept of the self has been split (Lacan, 1977).

Lacan thought the Ideal I had, upto this mirror phase, experienced itself as indissociable from its mother (*le Désire de la Mère*) (Lacan, 1977). At this mirror phase, the images and fantasies what Lacan called the Imaginary order, are irrevocably split and the child



experiences the two main features of Symbolic Order: *manqué* (lack of or loss) and *besoin* (need) (Lacan, 1977). The emergence of the Symbolic Order from this *otherness* led to the formation of the unconscious, together with *le Nom-du-Père*, which was similar to Freud's Oedipal complex (Lacan, 1977). The emergence of the Symbolic Order fed an unending cycle of loss and desire (*desir*) to bridge the gap between this desire to reclaim the imaginary order's ideal and the Symbolic order's main tool with which to reclaim it: language (Lacan, 1977).

For Lacan, language only served to further compound this lack (*manqué*), because language's inherent self-referentiality and lack of fixity, problematises the very nature of this *besoin* (need) and its ensuing desire. In short, language is unable to bridge this gap of that which causes the cycle of desire and loss. The subject's desire for reclamation of the Ideal I, is constantly re-negotiated through a language system of differences it cannot master, secure, or fix (Culler, 1997, p 158).

Lacan anticipated both de Man and Caruth's concerns with the problem of reference, because the linguistic system amounts to the problem of reference in the universal fall, of self referentiality. It is little wonder Lacan's importance in this intrinsic sense of otherness has endured and grown. The French *douleur* then has added importance in this context, as it pertains to pain as the

indistinguishable symptom that cuts up the phenomenal world in terms of being unable to distinguish between bodily pain and sorrow. This is because language's role in engendering pain is more a symptom of Lacan's *manqué*, as any language to cope with pain will cycle between pain's lack or loss and the desire to reclaim the pain-free state we have lost. This engenderment of the symptom through language was pointed out by Lacan in *Écrit*:

the symptom resolves itself entirely in the analysis of language, because the symptom is itself structured like language. (Lacan, 1977, p 59).

At this point, Jim Katz, like so many in the medical discourse, voices a familiar concern about what amounts to classical theory's problem with self-referentiality:

This becomes philosophically problematic because if the deconstructionist premise is true that language is unstable, then the unconscious, let alone the self, may be fundamentally unstable as well. (Katz, 2004, p 62).

Lacan's radical interrogation of subject formation concerns language's metaphoricity, metonymy, and musicality, because if language could indeed bridge the gap of our *manqué* and reclaim our Ideal I, then there would be little need for metaphors, metonyms or the musicality in language, to translate what amounts to an inability to claim fixed meanings and essential truths. Language is unable to claim fixed meanings and essential truths because it inherently unstable as we have seen in J.L. Austin's performative language, and Derrida's universal problematic. The instability or

self-referentiality of language is fundamental to the creation and engenderment of the self.

*The other* of Lacan's discourse is not only the literal other of Arendt's *inter homines esse*, but, the other of and intrinsic to the self-referential self: *intra homines esse*. Here, Katz's clause 'the self may be fundamentally unstable', is worthy of iteration because whatever the adjective, the fundament of the self is other than stable, because the self-referential language that engenders our ontology is also engendered by it in autopoietic ways. Could it be that Lacan's argument that 'the symptom is itself structured like language' can be now augmented to be, 'the symptom is itself structured not only like language, but also like the brain'? (Lacan, 1977, p 59). That is to say, like Szentagothai's 'schemas that themselves act like metaphors' (Szentagothai, 1993, p 101). The confluence between the self-referentiality of language and neurophenomenology, and, *the other* of a radical subjectivity, is now compelling. This instability (in Katz's language) is not so much existentialist but ontological, linguistic and also intrinsically neurophenomenal.

This co-operative interplay between language, neurobiology and the self, could also cooperate with Scarry's creative frame and Julia Kristeva's 'imaginary creations' to augment Lacan's unstable subject, because both Scarry's 'creative frame' and Kristeva's 'imaginary

creations' may offer a powerful affirmation, not despite but because of, the lack ascribed to pain and otherness in general. In short, the creativity that is spawned by the loss of pain may constitute a gain.

Kristeva's re-interpretation of Lacan's Imaginary order is of most pressing interest here in terms of this creative gain. She is heavily influenced by Lacan's theories. Just as Lacan re-read Freud, so has Kristeva re-read Lacan. For Kristeva, language is again vital in the development of the subject but it's a language that not only attempts to interpret the world through the symbolic, but a language that examines states at the limits of language itself:

...where language breaks up in psychosis...or the moments where language doesn't yet exist." (Kristeva, 1986, p 19).

This breakdown of language is redolent of Scarry's pre-linguistic grunts for the subject in pain (Scarry, 1985, p 12). Kristeva investigates language's role in subject formation more as a process, which she termed the 'subject-in-process':

*Process* in the sense of process but also in the sense of a legal proceeding where the subject is committed to trial, because our identities in life are constantly called into question, brought to trial, over-ruled. (Kristeva, 1986, p 19)

For Kristeva, Lacan's mirror phase is vital to this process, because its metaphorical chaotic interpretation of the unstable self is formed in terms of difference and otherness (Abraham, 1996, p 123). She re-reads the mirror phase's role through her investigation of the process

of subject formation: from the non-differentiated infant to speaking subject, by postulating a distinction between *the semiotic* and *the symbolic*. What she terms 'the semiotic':

...takes us back to the pre-linguistic states of childhood where the child babbles the sounds s/he hears, or where s/he articulates rhythms, alliterations, or stresses, trying to imitate her/his surroundings. In this state the child doesn't yet possess the necessary linguistic signs and thus there is no meaning in the strict sense of the term. (Kristeva, 1986, p 20).

Kristeva points out that the semiotic does not represent the unity of presence of the imaginary. Rather, the semiotic is a modality "constantly called into question...a state of disintegration in which patterns appear but which do not have any stable identity." (Kristeva, 1986, p 20).

More closely aligned with Lacan's 'Idea I' in the imaginary order is what Kristeva terms the 'Chora'. She states:

The word 'chora' means receptacle in Greek, which refers us to Winnicott's idea of 'holding': mother and child are in permanent stricture in which one holds the other, there's a double entrance, the child is held but so is the mother. (Kristeva, 1986, p 21)

The Chora then, is a more archaic semiotic modality again, wherein the infant gains the most archaic memories of the maternal body. Such memories may even go back as far as the infant in uterine. The Chora embodies those moments when archaic libidinal pleasures are indistinguishable from the mother, and, before the maternal body

becomes understood as the (m)other. During the mirror phase, when identification and the development of language casts the child into the symbolic realm and into the Oedipal complex, the experiences of the chora, are repressed. For Kristeva, the repression of such beautiful and libidinous memories may have dramatic consequences for creativity. She argues:

At that point we witness the possibility of creation, of sublimation. I think every type of creation... is due to this possibility of opening the norms, towards pleasure, which refers to an archaic experience with a maternal pre-object. ... What is obvious is that this experience of the semiotic chora in language produces poetry. (Kristeva, 1986, p 20).

Paradoxically, Kristeva focuses her interest on depression or melancholia and the loss it represents for the subject's experience. She argues that when this loss is acknowledged, it creates a powerful interplay with creativity and the experience of the semiotic chora. In depression and melancholia we experience the loss of, yet paradoxically, the desire for, the experience for the semiotic chora. Kristeva argues that imaginary creations are sublimations of this loss by the self for the other, wherein, momentarily, the subject-in-process can both hold and be held within the imaginary creation. For Kristeva this experience 'produces poetry' which amounts, to a creation-ness, which amounts to a gain. From this gain, Kristeva argued that: 'Imaginary creations are a powerful antidepressant. Provided we are able to create them...' (Kristeva, 1986, p 21).

It is however, Kristeva's anticipation in the mid 1980s of the neurophenomenal operation that seems uncanny, almost as if she had already read Szentagothai's writings on the self-referential brain of 1993 and the impact this self-referentiality may have on our understanding of subject formation and psychoanalysis. In 1986 she spoke of such anticipation:

...it's a problem situated at the cross-over point between biological and psychological research. A few years ago psychoanalysis was confronted by the science of language, now there is a new challenge: neuro-biology. (Kristeva, 1986, p 22)

What seems even more uncanny is that there is now so much more known about a neurophenomenal association between pain and depression. Kristeva's focus on depression could have ramifications and relevance for pain as well, because there appears to be a neurophenomenal association between depression and pain (Greenfield, 2002, p 92). Could it be that if pain and depression are closely associated, then Kristeva's imaginary creations may not only alleviate depression but soothe pain as well? This association between depression and pain concerns Susan Greenfield's research into the plasticity of the brain forming assemblies of neurones that actually reflect subjective experience:

It is interesting, that in depression, pain is perceived more acutely (Affleck et al, 1987) whereas in schizophrenia (a small assembly mode) the thresholds are higher (Guieu et al, 1994). It may be the case, therefore, that the erstwhile mysterious subjective element to

pain perception... may be attributable to fluctuating size in a transient neuronal assembly. (Greenfield, 2002, p 92).

Miller also observes this close neurophenomenal association between pain and depression:

A common diagnostic association occurs between depression and chronic pain (Benjamin et al, 1998; Fishbain et al, 1986; Kramlinger et al, 1983; Krishnan et al, 1985; Miller, 1993a). Coderre, Katz, Vaccarino, and Melzack (1993) have proposed a *central neuroplasticity model* of chronic pain that appears to meet the present criteria for a neurosensitisation syndrome. (Miller, 1996, p 13)

Miller defined neurosensitisation as the 'development of progressively enhanced sensitivity or reactivity of central nervous system (CNS) mechanisms at the neurophysiological, biochemical and intracellular levels.' (Miller, 1996, p 12). He further observed that pain and depression 'often appears excessive in duration and severity with respect to the identified initiating injury or event.' (Miller, 1996, p 12) Of relevance here is the way antidepressant medication is proposed to affect these same neuronal assemblies that Greenfield refers to, as she restates the actions of antidepressants on these neuronal assemblies:

in particular the actions of 'certain very well known transmitters... serotonin, histamine, dopamine and noradrenaline' (Greenfield, 2002, p 92)

While this is the accepted logic of antidepressant medication intervention, the secrets of just how they may alter these neuronal



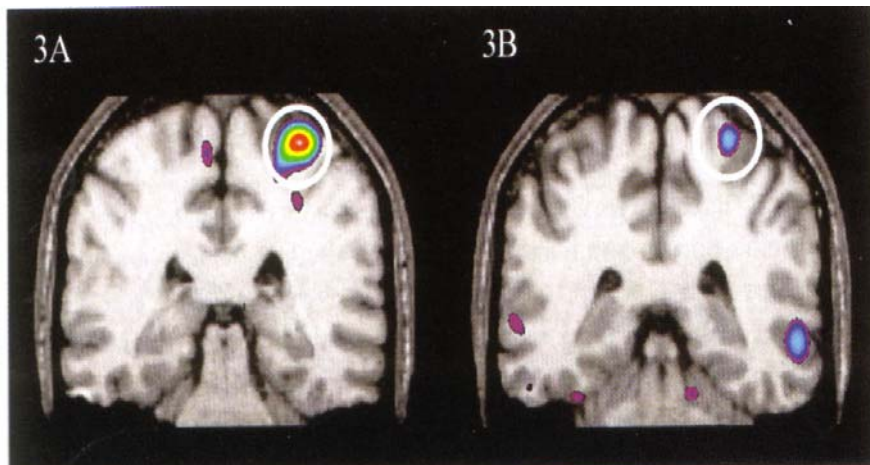
assemblies and go about their antidepressant ways is still unknown.

As Greenfield states:

Just how the water is turned into wine – how the bump and grind of the neurons and the shrinking and expanding of assemblies actually translate into subjective experience – is, of course, another story completely. (Greenfield, 2002, p 92).

Enter here, yet again, Chapman's *step two, then a miracle occurs*.

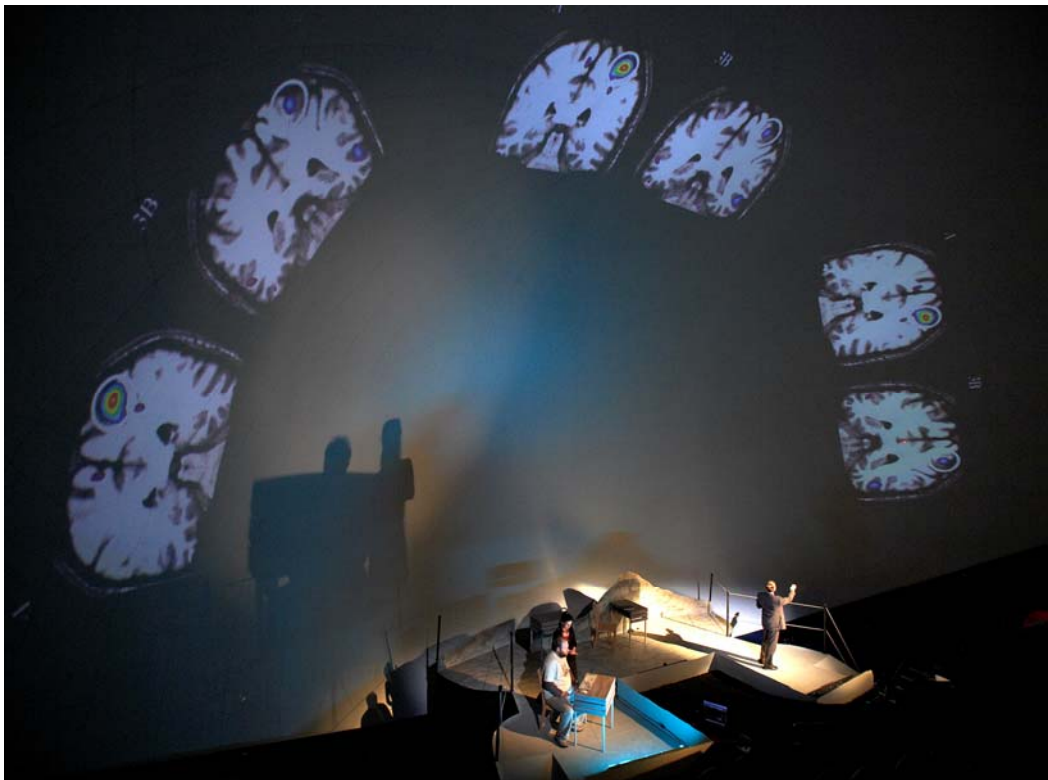
Although Kristeva's postulation that 'Imaginary creations are a powerful antidepressant...', was based on her work as a psychoanalyst, and, perhaps, her deeply refined theoretical intuition, it is highly poignant to look at the *functional* MRI scans of Catherine Bushnell's (2000 and 2002) study of the nexus between pain and creativity:



(Bushnell, 2000)

Scan 3A (left) is a functional MRI of a patient in severe pain. The area on the right forebrain circled, represents blood perfusion relating to pain on a varying scale of intensity. Red is the most intense, then yellow, then green, then blue in lessening intensity. Scan 3B (right) shows the same patient with the same pain but they have been given

music of their choice to listen to. The perfusion in the forebrain circled has diminished or been modulated to a blue, as indeed an area of blue in the auditory cortex (right temporal) also activates the same intensity of blood flow, presumably associated with listening to music. The character of Andrew in the play, describes it to the court that presides over the authenticity of Simon's case, thus:



**Andrew** The first scan on the left is of a subject in severe pain... The red to yellow and green areas circled are areas of perfusion that signal pain... See how the second one, taken after the *person* has heard soothing music of their choice has come up as blue in the auditory cortex here... but has modulated – yeah ok - turned down the pain on the forebrain - circled here... As a traumatic experience may precipitate pain – a creative one may soothe it. (Buchanan, 2005, p 230).

The subjective experience of Bushnell's patient reported a reduction in pain, congruent with the perfusion in the scans. Greenfield's caution persists however, because just how the water is turned into wine is still not clear. It is possible to suggest though, that perfusion relates to the brain activity, that, in turn, relates to Greenfield's neuronal assemblies, which shrink and expand into subjective experience of pain. Kristeva's assertion that imaginary creations are a powerful antidepressant may well translate to a powerful analgesic as well, only we know there now exists firmer neurological evidence to back it up.

If imaginary creations can be powerfully anti-depressant and it would seem analgesic too, then Kristeva pointed out that a paradox ensues for this efficacy to be engendered. That is, the subject needs to acknowledge such "loss – of ties, of meaning – in order to write [create]." (Kristeva, 1986, p 21). Depression and pain represents the acknowledgement of loss and facilitates access to the chora, and such access may facilitate the experience of the chora from which ensues the stuff of art. If Lacan reinterpreted Freud to incorporate the self-referentiality of language, then Julia Kristeva has reinterpreted Lacan, and it is her reflection upon the role of creativity in this reinterpretation, that is potentially of profound importance for the subject in persistent pain. The self-referentiality of the brain, language and the self is crucial in the light of imaginary creations

which are always engaged in a process that is doing more than it knows. This role of imaginary creations as an efficacious gain for the subject in pain may go some way to understanding the role of the photographic creations, in the life of Nick Djordjevic. A life without whom, the play *A Bell in the Storm*, could never have been written.

# Chapter 6

*I am alive!!*

**The other and the storm in the photography of Nick Djordjevic**



In the noted neuro-pharmacologist Carl Faingold's paper 'Emergent properties of CNS neuronal networks as targets for pharmacology: application to anticonvulsant drug action', Faingold contemplates the secrets of 'complexity theory, when the multitude of elements in a complex system interact, [then] new and unexpected properties can emerge due, in part, to self-organisation.' (Faingold, 2004, p 57). Of great interest for Faingold here was this complexity theory's origin in meteorology. He states:

The complexity approach was originally applied in meteorology to explain how small sporadic changes in wind currents in one part of the global weather system via a cascading series of interactions could trigger the development of a highly organised and powerful storm thousands of miles away... Ideas that originated in the study of weather systems may be of use in understanding how drugs act on the brain. (Faingold, 2004, p 57).

This complexity theory seems redolent of the notion in chaos theory that an insect's wing, beating on one side of the world, can cause a catastrophe, on the other side of the world through self-organising complexities that are in no way predictable or measurable.

So the story goes, in March 1988, Nick Djordjevic stood on Trigg Beach to photograph a sunset. Since 1983, his life had changed irrevocably due to a persistent pain state, secondary to a non-specific viral infection that was thought to be an insect bite.

Whatever the initial cause, Nick's pain became persistent and three and a half years later, he was diagnosed with psoriatic arthritis. In deference to chaos theory, rather than an insect's wing beating on one side of the world causing catastrophe on the other side, in Nick's case it seemed that a miniscule insect's bite may have set off a complex self-organising state that precipitated his world into catastrophe.

Nick's pain was not only persistent but grew in severity. It also defied all predictions made about its course and duration, and, after a few years, Nick had to resign from his professional career as a public servant. He remained home, within a state of alienation all too familiar to severe persistent pain sufferers across the world (Merskey and Teassel, 2000). His condition deteriorated and he became depressed. In 1987, he took an unsuccessful overdose to end a life that he felt had become unliveable. He survived. He was,

though, referred to see a psychiatrist. The psychiatrist would only see Nick if it was conjointly with his wife, Anne. Nick was disturbed by the 'treatment' he received from the psychiatrist. Nick told me:

This guy believed I was behaving like an infant and my wife like the parent. All he wanted to do was draw Parent/Adult/Child diagrams and suggested that my wife and I date in and date out. He didn't acknowledge my pain. It was so humiliating. My pain was ignored. For him, it didn't exist. (Personal Correspondence, Djordjevic, 2005)

Not surprisingly Nick declined to see this psychiatrist again. After the despair of suffering both the pain and the disparagement of his pain, Nick began participating in workshops offered by the Arthritis Foundation in *pain management and distraction techniques*. Anne saw an advertisement for Arthritis Self Help Workshops: *Learn how to manage your arthritis*. The course lasted for six weeks. Nick told me:

I never gave it a chance to work cos I'm a cynical prick by nature but the seed of guided imagery and creative distraction techniques had been sown, because I saw some of the others in that course relieved and uplifted, and, I wondered what that was about. (Personal correspondence, Djordjevic, 2005)

Through a chance meeting with another pain sufferer, Glen, Nick began an inquiry into photography. Glen was a member of the Wanneroo Photographic Society and he suggested that he join the club as he knew that I was interested in photography. Nick was immediately taken and excited by the prospect of what a

photograph could do in capturing a creative moment. This quickly led to his own creative attempts, as he told me:

What I saw there blew me away. I couldn't believe photographs that good could be taken. I wanted to do this – to take shots that good. My friend Glen was interested in photographing all manner of landscapes especially lightning but all my efforts were rank amateur crap. Then the club hosted the 1998 Western Australian Photographic Federation Annual Convention at the Hillarys Boat Harbour over the labour day long weekend in March. One of the tasks was to photograph a sunset. On the Saturday evening I went off by myself to Shag Rock at Trigg. I rigged up my tripod and camera and there it was - this storm... on the horizon. (Personal correspondence, Djordjevic, 2005)

The 'pics' Nick 'took' that dusk became his first serious storm photographs. When the photographs were developed, he named them *Genesis*. Something, very deeply felt, had indeed begun for Nick. The photographs created a sense of well being and wonder in the creation of them that has driven not only the passion and love for his professional career, but, the creativity he credits with saving his life. He told one journalist during the season of the play *A Bell in the Storm*:

If I didn't have my photography, I wouldn't be alive today.  
(Djordjevic, cited McNeill, 2005, p 53).

Nick attests to a deeply intuitive connection between the storm's dynamic being, and his own being. He has confided to me, that this connection with the storms he photographs can not be described in too much detail, because it feels like a secret between him and the



storm. He told me: "I let the photographs speak for me." (Personal correspondence, Djordjevic, 2005.). Each time he developed a new storm photograph, it was like glimpsing the pain he had been told was not there by the psychiatrist. In this sense, Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, describes the photograph as a wound. Barthes states:

I wanted to explore [the photograph] not as a question (a theme) but as a wound: I see, I feel, hence I notice, I observe, and I think.

(Barthes, cited in Padfield, 2003, p 20)

Deborah Padfield cites Barthes in just this context, in her groundbreaking book *perceptions of pain* (Padfield, 2003). The book explores the creative utility of the photograph for a number of people living with persistent unexplained pain. She picks up on Barthes' notion that:

...attributes similar qualities to photography as to medicine. At times (...as with fibre optics and X-rays etc) both practices attempt to make visible what has hitherto been invisible – to peel back the skin revealing what is usually concealed, and often painful. (Padfield, 2003, p 20).

In other words Nick's photography was involved, like Padfield's photography, in not only contemplating the secret of his wound, but, in revealing the wound that was hidden and a secret, as for Freud and Derrida's interest in *das unheimliche* or the uncanny. What was uncanny for Nick at the time and remains so to this day, is that every time he photographs storms, his pain is relieved. With the

benefit of the self-referential perspective, the uncanniness of his pain relief in storms is apparent when considered in the light of Bushnell's MRI scans and Kristeva's imaginary creations combine in the creative moment becoming a powerful (neurophenomenal) antidepressant and/or analgesic. The idea of Nick experiencing pain relief in the storm is even more uncanny, when it is intersected with Faingold's meteorological parable to account for how both literally and figuratively the storm and the brain maybe self-organising.

Of these complex neurophenomenal and ontological intersections however, Nick was entirely unaware. What he knew, having seen many different doctors for his pain, was that to openly discuss his pain relief in the storm was very difficult. In part, this difficulty was due to the paucity of language available to cope with his pain, but also, because doctors' doubts about the physicality of his pain left him feeling peculiarly vulnerable. This doubt and vulnerability is explored between Simon and Andrew in the play, *A Bell in the Storm*:

**Andrew**        You felt your pain go into the storm?

**Simon**        I hope yr not mocking me? **(Pause)** Let's just say that what was outside of me was inside me and what was inside me was outside of me **(Slight pause)** but they always had been and it all just...

**Andrew**        Went away... The pain?

(Buchanan, 2005, p 219).

After his initial photographs of *Genesis*, nearly every storm that developed off the coast between Trigg Beach and Ocean reef Nick went to photograph. By 1990 he had photographed many of his most widely known and best selling photographs, including *Ten Billion Volts*:



It was however, the creative uncanniness of the process in photographing the storms, that Nick became more and more interested in. His experiences of this process seemed to reinvigorate his life and reduce his pain, or at least, increase his ability to live with it. His best photographs were taken after dark, on long exposures, without any clue what was really out there to be photographed. He found the contents of his photographs came to him and not the other way around, as the play explores:

**Simon** ...your CT Scans and MRIs and X-rays and whatnot. They just go 'click' and in a fraction of a second, expect to capture what's going on. **(Pause)** But to photograph a storm you gotta be open to the world... patient... and only when yr in the dark the most, leave yr shutter open with the lens set to infinity... Then, what's really out there comes to you – not the other way around. (Buchanan, 2005, p 218)

Sometimes for Nick, what 'comes to you', was much more than he ever dreamt would be out there. His award winning photograph *Atlantis* attests to this uncanniness:



On first seeing this photograph, I assumed as most do, that Nick had used *photoshop* to digitally enhance the colours and dynamics of this shot. I was however, quite wrong, as the play points out in the following direct address:

**Simon**            **(Direct address)** This one was taken an hour after dark. You're thinking I used photoshop, right? To get all these greens and sunset colours – especially as it was so dark I couldn't see a thing. But you'd be wrong. It was a forty-five minute exposure, that's all. (Buchanan, 2005, p 192)

Nick had also grown to understand the way the subjects and objects of the photograph played within the photograph, contingent as they were, upon the length of exposure over which the photograph was taken. The longer the exposure, the greater the play on the lens, and the more likely that uncanny things hidden to the normal eye, may *emerge* through it. It was also the feelings he developed that seemed more and more vital to this creative process, as Simon's character explains to Sally in the play:

**Simon**            As it grew dark the storm seemed to come for me... So I just stood back and something said leave the shutter open and see what it sees out there. Just leave it open... it's a feeling... a *creation-ness* - that's all... It's not something you can see – it's something you *feel*... (Buchanan, 2005, p 213 -14)

Indeed *Atlantis* was taken an hour after dark on an evening when no storms were forecast, but when Nick sensed there just might be one about. It seemed to the naked eye that there were no colours of the sunset left to shoot, the rocks were dark, and, there was but one tiny flash of lightning during the whole shoot. Indeed the night's exploration had seemed a photographic failure to Nick, even if the

process of being and doing all this had again modulated his pain. He packed up his gear, like a fisherman goes home having enjoyed the outing, but caught nothing.

Instead, when he developed the photograph, he found all those colours playing in the hidden, but very present, afterglow of the sunset, mixing with the mercury vapour's green (that is produced from the local street lights) splashing all over the rocks, and, in the most interesting part of the frame, a single lightning strike elucidating the whole of the picture's complexity through its very playfulness. The lost city of his pain, and his joy, was there, in the dark all along. What had seemed initially to me a banal title to accompany an obviously *photoshopped* photograph, suddenly struck me with its sheer ingeniousness. I was, and remain deeply moved, every time I see this shot. Andrew in the play tries to explain to Sally his feelings about these photographs more generally:

- Andrew** Merde. Jesus these people just don't realise this is something that can help tell the brain's story. DNA has the double helix – the solar system has the atom... but pain – it only has Descartes' bell...
- Sally** It's late Andrew...
- Andrew** This guy stuck away in Perth so burdened with his own pain has found the metaphor: Complex systems theory, self-organisation, neuroplasticity and lightning - it all fits! Eureka!!! And all two minutes from his house on his local beach. And what really gets me is he had to lose nearly everything to find it. And he

finds it in his only reason left to live... (Buchanan, 2005, p 223)

Nick became, as many storm-chasers do, highly engaged with the tracking and prediction of these storms, and found the following maxim to be useful: *many are forecast but few come, but it is the ones not forecast that come best and most fiercely*. Perth is not known for its high frequency of electrical storms, and during summer, there is a protracted period of meteorological quiescence. In winter, the thunderstorms are often too difficult to photograph as they are associated with fast moving low level cold fronts. Nick's most preferred storms remain the slow-moving, mid-level disturbances that occur sporadically and unpredictably, in the Perth spring, summer and autumn.

The mystery associated with the storm's forecast however, is even more apparent, when it comes to understanding just what lightning actually is, in order to forecast it. Like pain, we know lightning exists, but we have little idea what it *is* or how it is produced (Gosline, 2005, p 30). This was first discussed in the prestigious scientific journal *Nature* in November 2003, which was the same month we began to workshop the play that would become *A Bell in the Storm*. Then in May 2005, which was the same month *A Bell in the Storm* was produced, the journal *New Scientist's* cover article ran with '*Thunderbolts from Space – What triggers lightning.*' by Anna Gosline (Gosline, 2005.)

The article discussed the latest research on the impasse concerning what lightning *is*:

Nobody understands what's going on here. You have a lot of people guessing but we are really clueless. After a couple of hundred years, it's actually embarrassing. (Dwyer, cited in Gosline, 2005, p 30).

Gosline first discusses the classical theory concerning lightning, involves ice crystals rubbing together in the storm's up drafts, creating a negative ionisation and electrical charge that leaves a positive charge building in the earth that in turn, eventually leads to the discharge of this polarity as lightning (Gosline, 2005, p 31 - 34).

Gosline then points out though that this theory is theoretically insupportable as she states:

But there is a flaw in this explanation. Air only ionises spontaneously in electrical fields of around 2500 kilovolts per metre. Centuries of often dangerous measurement with kites, balloons and aircraft have produced many measurements of fields in thunderstorms. But no-one has ever found an electrical field in a storm cloud that is anywhere near strong enough to ionise air molecules. The fields found are typically between 100 and 400 kilovolts per metre, less than a tenth of what is needed [to produce lightning]. (Gosline, 2005, p 30 – 31).

The long held and widely accepted theory for the causation of lightning, was suddenly, inadequate. The elements available within the earth's atmosphere simply could not generate enough volts for lightning to occur. If this is the case, then what might be going on?



The new evidence concerns an involvement of other elements in the creation of lightning, namely 'cosmic rays in a process termed runaway breakdown', as Gosline suggests:

These are highly energetic particles that zip through space at close to the speed of light. When a cosmic ray strikes Earth's atmosphere, it could hit an air molecule, ionising it and producing an extremely energetic electron. In the electrical field near a storm cloud, such an electron could be accelerated to near the speed of light, then hit and ionise other air molecules, producing more and more electrons in a chain reaction. The ensuing avalanche of electrons would ionise the air, allowing charge to flow. (Gosline, 2005, p 32).

Lightning, that was once held to be phenomena produced through a simple cause and effect closed system of earth-only atmospheric givens, has been found to lack reference to scientific actuality. The growing evidence confirms a greater mystery and complexity, in contrast to the Ockham's razor approach of the most obvious and simple answer is usually true. At stake here is that Ockham's razor may too often mistake our perception for reference that often serves only to reinforce Zeno's paradox in a quest for knowledge of such mysteries. That is Ockham's razor, like Descartes' bell *may halve the distance without ever bridging the gap*. The greater mystery and complexity of lightning has a correlative with pain and the medical model as the James Katz points out:

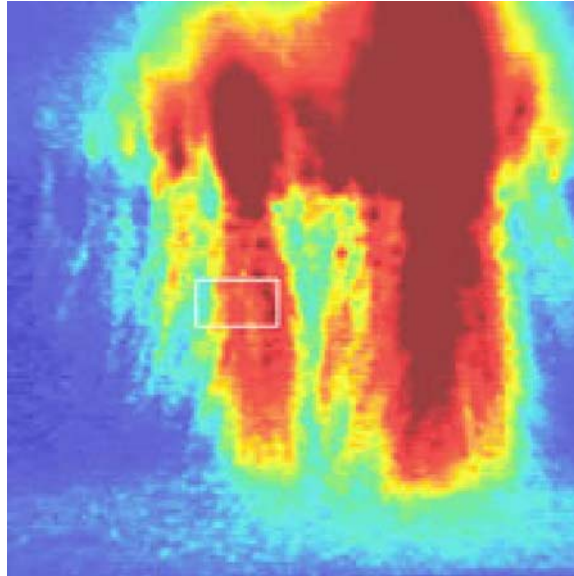
This medical model is not unlike the Western belief in hermeneutics as a path to certainty... Unfortunately (or fortunately), the flaw with this belief is that successive iterations of a medical model may just as likely adhere to Zeno' paradox. (Katz, 2004, p 61).

This is at the heart of the director Angela Chaplin's favourite line in the play (Chaplin, 2005, p 5) when Sally asks Andrew:

**Sally**            **(A silence – lightning and thunder)** Tell me... By pointing out where they're wrong – does it make you right?  
(Buchanan, 2005, p 240)

There seems an irrefutable theoretical parallel at play between the neurobiological mystery of pain and the meteorological mystery of storms and lightning. There is even a commonality between the metaphors used to cope with this complexity: the *cascade* of pain in the brain's downwards causation of neuronal assemblies and the *avalanche* of lightning in the storm's runaway breakdown of electrons. The very metaphoricity of this language parallels both the sciences of neurobiology and meteorology's inability to bridge Zeno's paradox. The mystery endures as entities we thought to be predictable and stable defy both states not only through their very complexity but through the phenomena that emerge uncannily from their falling.

This mystery is highlighted by the study of recent meteorological evidence concerning phenomena called sprites. Sprites are "...faint flashes of light [that] dance above the clouds at an altitude of between 40 – 90 kilometres (storm clouds are 10 – 16 kilometres above the ground)" (Gosline, 2005, p 34).



It is now thought that gamma rays from space are involved somehow in their dance, perhaps in similar ways to the emergence of lightning but it is simply not known how or why or in what way Gamma rays may contribute to either the avalanche of the lightning strike and/or the dance of a sprite. The mystery of their origin still endures as Joe Dwyer points out, “We know that runaway breakdown is occurring, and we know that lightning is occurring.” (Dwyer, cited Gosline, 2005, p 34). The mysteries of lightning and sprites in storms parallels neurobiology’s discoveries that the self-referential brain is involved in the creative act and that these imaginary creations may modulate pain, but just how they do this remains unknown.

Simon points out the aporia of this mystery to Andrew in the play:

**Andrew**            When you’re photographing your lightning does your pain diminish? **(Pause)** I think I know why!

- Simon**        *The Saviour!* They don't even know *what* lightning is! They used to think it was an electrical discharge caused by ice crystals being rubbed together in updrafts... But now they only know it can't be that! And that's just the lightning – you ever heard of sprites?
- Andrew**        Sprites?
- Simon**        There are things in storms we can't even imagine – as for what causes them - they don't have a clue?  
(Buchanan, 2005, p 137)

Simon's point here perhaps, is that there are also things in our brains that defy if not our imagination then certainly our common sense that are at the heart of Chapman's *step two miracle* and manifest in the uncanny emergence of both pain and the creative act as we catch up with the self-referentiality of our onto-neurophenomenal fall.

The parallels between meteorology and neurobiology here are indeed uncanny. What has been considered to be opposite and separate in terms of the self and the world, the world and the cosmos (separated by their compartmentalized arenas of study) now seem so highly related and interconnected as to be inseparable. What seems compelling is that one lone and discreet pain sufferer has stumbled upon this connection within a photographic practice that traverses such a territory beyond the aleatory artistic epiphany. Just as Newton in seeing the apple fall on his head knew the universe was falling, so too does Nick

Djordjevic's photography, in the act of its own creation, know that what is happening onto-neurophenomenally within him is related to the world he glimpses through his lens in ways that always do more than they know. *Atlantis* is but one striking example of this process. Both literally and figuratively, as Nick's pain and creations fall, he refers.

What is also compelling here is Nick's gradual refocus from photographing lightning to *things of joy and play*. Taken by the process of his photography from planning, to shooting, to developing his creations, Nick wondered if subjects other than the storm would be as efficacious. He remembered Little Island three kilometers off the Hillarys Boat Harbour in the Marmion Marine Park that offers reefs for surfing but also a gathering place for Australian Sea Lions. Nick wondered if an area he surfed before his pain became persistent would have anything to offer this creative and efficacious process.

He purchased some underwater camera housing and off he set in a dinghy and a wet suit. He found that both he and the seals could dance with in a neutral buoyancy environment of the sea. His pain was again modulated but he also felt a sense of well-being with and for the seals as *sprites of the ocean*. If the storms offered an affirmation of his pain-of-the-cosmos as a kind of *weltsmertz*, then

photographing the seals offered a buoyant affirmation of joy and dance as Nick explains:

It's like flying! It's an affirmation of reinventing the self beyond pain and moving onwards. I was still bedeviled by pain but I could cry out *I am alive!* The seals play with you, blow bubbles when you blow bubbles, dance when you dance – they play like kids in the surf!  
(Personal correspondence, Djordjevic, 2005)



The photographs, he noticed, were gentler in composition and effect. He was delighted and again surprised. There was a photographic world beyond the storm like there was a life beyond his pain. This was not to excise joy from the pain or the pain from the joy but to know both as inseparable and deeply involved in the other or as he explained, “You get lightning and you get sprites. You don’t get one without the other. Joy and pain: it’s impossible to tease them apart.”

If in Barthes' sense of the photograph was like a wound then Nick's seals were Kristeva's *jouissance*: powerful, healing, and restorative as for Paul Celan's,

it knows you  
*come the Sabbath.*

(Celan, 2001, p 377)

As for Celan, this is the anticipation of rest, refreshment, redemption. (Felstiner, cited in Celan, 2001, p xxxvi).



Nick's core photographic passion remains with the storms but he has broadened his palate from the off-shore Little Island break to include one of his favourite and perennial of locations near the small town of Cervantes on the central west coast of Western Australia: The Pinnacles. Twice a year in April and August, he takes other professionals and/or enthusiasts up to photograph the full moon rising in the dusk and setting into the sea at dawn at 'this most spiritual and mystical place'.



Photographer Dale Neil photographing Nick Djordjevic in the dawn at the The Pinnacles , Late August Full (Blue) Moon, 2004. Photo by the Author.



He finds these limestone formations set in their own confined desert overlooking the Indian Ocean, to be somehow deeply connected with a spirit of play and cosmological dance. I have accompanied him three times on these trips and each time found to my surprise and joy his delight in something which is undoubtedly mystical. "All you get



up here are questions – and once I got the mother of all storms. It was just fantastic!!” So was the photograph:



I recall a phone call from John Quintner suggesting he take me up to meet *this photographer who uses photography to deal with his pain*. It was July, 2001. My pain was awful, persistent and very debilitating. By then I had joined the academic pain-medicine collaboration John had with Associate Professor Milton Cohen at the University of New South Wales. We had already completed the first few drafts of the paper that would be later published in the *Journal of Theoretical Medicine*.

On the journey up to Nick’s place that day in 2001, John spoke to me about a paper he had just read by the eminent psychiatrist Milton Freeman. The self-referential brain lacked a metaphor to help tell its story: DNA has the double helix, the solar system has the atom but what did the brain have, especially given its uncanny and unpredictable self-organisation in the subjective experience of pain?

It seemed quite unlikely anything would ever be found, but, I offered, there's always hope of an apple dropping on someone's head. We got out of the car at an average house in an average suburb about half a kilometre from the coast. After greeting this six foot five mountain of a man, Nick took us to a studio he called his bunker, to show us his lightning photography. In a flash, I saw the self-referential apple falling onto Nick's head.

# Chapter 7

## Monochords, *feeler words* and Celan's 'Never'

That Saturday afternoon in July 2001, I sat quietly as John drove back from Nick's bunker. Two ideas echoed again and again in my thoughts. The first idea concerned the photograph as a glimpse of something far greater than it can ever capture and the second idea, was a possible solution for Freeman's requirement for something that could be the-hoped-for translator of the brain's story. Could there be something already out there that speaks for our onto-neurophenomenal fallings in their self-referential, unpredictable, and uncanny ways?

The first idea concerned the metonymic nature of photography, where photography's object d'art is a part indicating a far more complex and interesting whole. The metonym of photography works like the Maori word *iwi*, which literally means bone, but *iwi* is also the term used to indicate the complexity of a whole people, a whole tribe, a whole Maori nation (Reed, 1965, p 25). The second idea concerns the metaphoric project, which is already problematised within its own quest for complete translation within a system of linguistic differences over any fixity of meaning or sense-making, as in my monochord:

-the metaphor in the poem – I never quite make up the difference—

(Buchanan, 2005, p 289)

It seems metaphors exist because language cannot essentially express the phenomenal and metaphysical world and so seeks to translate through figurative substitutions. That is, in the case of the complexity of our brain and pain, can lightning and its mystery ever really help to translate such self-referential complexity?

After seeing for the first time the uncanny moments of self-referential possibility in Nick's photography, there came fast on its heels this anticlimax of the bathetic impasse. That oscillation that ensues between the general revelation of a secret but not the intrinsic nature of its secrets. Nick's photos are highly contingent in their apprehension on the above two ideas and, as such, the bathos of the aporia and its impasse seems inevitable. In this context of this bathetic impasse I recalled J.D. Caputo's point that,

...like Derrida, who is so much taken with aporias and impasses, who thinks you are really getting somewhere only when you are paralysed and it is impossible to advance... the apophatic, the unnameable, unknowable secret is a subject Derrida does not know how to avoid. (Caputo, 1997, p xxvii)

Pain's very aporia means no train of knowledge goes to the territory of its secrets, at least, not yet. Given the onto-neurophenomenal self-referential complexity of its being, it is more likely that a totality for the explanation of pain will remain impossible and this alone accounts for the bathos after the uncanny revelation. This bathos seems redolent of Lacan's *desir* and *manqué* and Kristeva's

jouissance: after the glimpse of union with the chora and or the imaginary order's *Ideal I*, comes the loss of that very glimpse and the perpetual impasse to access it more permanently. I then recalled Derrida's own epithet "Only write what is impossible, that ought to be the impossible rule." (Derrida, 1993, p 27). One impossible poem of Paul Celan's from *Lightduress* apprehends this impossible context of revelation and bathos

I CAN STILL HEAR YOU: an echo,  
palpable with feeler-  
words, at farewell-  
ridge.

Your face shies quietly,  
when suddenly  
light brightens lamplike  
inside me, at that place  
where most painfully one says Never. (Celan, 2005, p 99, Tr. Jorris).

I have often recited the last two lines to myself as if they were only one line. Sitting in that car on that day, my pain was still there, as was by then, the crisis in my marriage, but the pain was something other than I had felt it to be. Pain no longer blocked out my sun. I went home and wrote my first one line poem:

--white lines of the highway, her face in the sky –

(Buchanan, 2005, p 289).

I have, ever since I began to read poetry as a boy, been especially taken by the last line of any poem. Perhaps that is why in my youth, I

preferred the confessional lyric poets like Robert Lowell whose very powerful last lines seemed to have more power in them than the rest of the poem combined. Or rather, the preceding confessional lyric of his poetry had been there mostly as a runway from which the last lines took off and made the poetry soar. Poems like Lowell's *For Sale, Man and Wife*, and *For the Union Dead*, are particular favourites but the final lines of *Soft Wood* convey for mine, both the inability of language to cope with, and the affirmation of the onto-neurophenomenal reference [9] of, pain:

each drug that numbs alerts another nerve to pain.

(Lowell, 1981, p 62)

The above last line, as well as completing the lyrical quotient of the poem's narrative, about his friend Harriet Winslow who was dying of cancer in *far off* Washington, also stands and works alone. Not only that but it takes on the form of the photographic metonym and begins to, like any part indicating a much bigger whole, possess the yearning of a *gestalt*. Any photograph yearns for the diachronic movement, that is the *movie* it cannot be, but, it always invites the viewer, like the reader of literature, to interpret this movement, to imagine the movie it is not. In short, the photograph never has what it is but always yearns for what it is not, and that is their attraction and their power. As for the Maori 'iwi', the bone becomes a whole nation of people, and a flash of lightning becomes a testament to a universal *mysterium tremendum*. I the viewer, I the interpreter, I make up the difference.

The object of the photograph's frame is always searching for its subjecthood that only we as the interpreter, the viewer, can give it. In this sense it is very much like Roland Barthes' reader taking pleasure in the text (Barthes, 1977, p 3) and, like Prospero in his epilogue, the photographer asks for our indulgence to set the captured object free. (Shakespeare, 1979, p 1345)

Given the combination of pain's neurophenomenal aporia and the linguistic paucity which amounts to an ontological impasse (that generates Scarry's notion that when pain finally does find a voice is it through the creative frame), then the case for the monochord poem to be both a powerful antidepressant/analgesic and a legitimate imaginary creation seems as compelling as it is for Nick's photography to both reveal and modulate the wound. (Padfield, 2004). I began to both research the monochord's poetics and practice their form.

I was then unaware of the Greek poet Yannis Ritsos's *Monochords* (Ritsos, 2005). My own term for the monochord poem was twofold in its meaning for my writing practice. Firstly, like the photograph, it gave me a single chordal phrase, as for the post bop jazz I also play and which seems redolent of Joni Mitchell's simile *like a warm chord* (Mitchell, 1981). Secondly it was also literally metonymic as the lowest twelve notes on a piano are produced through single bound

strings that are actually called monochords. Thereafter the strings become bichordal until in the highest range they become polychordal.

These literal and figurative elements mimicked my experience of pain in-so-far-as there was very limited language (as for Scarry's prelinguistic grunts not unlike the tones of the lowest twelve notes on the piano) and, so, when I did find something to say about my pain, especially to doctors, it was by definition, both through this creative frame and laconic. A good example of this laconic creative frame was when a doctor asked me 'How was my pain today?' I replied, "I have five bags of wheat hanging from my neck."

The McGill Pain Questionnaires I answered for several of my doctors and one psychologist, were another example of this linguistic impasse, as I had to tick the category that best described my pain – *stabbing, burning, pulsating, etc.* Each of these participles were not only masquerading as adjectives but were hopelessly inadequate in conveying the state of my pain. Yet all these words were used to measure the type and the extent of my pain, as if such a thing could be done through language. Since such an exercise was doomed, the ceding of this endeavour (at least in myself) opened up the same possibility of Nick's photography: one line, one glimpse. The hope in this monochordal exercise is that maybe, just maybe, the pain which is hidden and a secret can be revealed, in uncanny creative ways.



As more monochords were written I also noticed the way they lay on the page. Each monochord stood alone yet each touched the other, not in any lyrical narrative sense but through a linguistic contiguity deeply involved in Derrida's linguistic 'system of differences' (Derrida, 1978, p 352). The way the monochords touched were redolent of Celan's *feeler words* in that each monochord touched and thereby felt the other, just as every chord in music feels the next chord and indeed needs the next chord, to make an overall musical presence felt. On the page, the monochords' presence expanded to be elsewhere to standing and being a lone singular entity.

In this sense I asked Nick Djordjevic if I might write some monochords to accompany his photographs. This request was not made out of any wish to caption any essence to his photographs but that the two different works may simply touch within the aporia of pain and depression, but also within the joy of the imaginary creation. He generously agreed and I proceeded cautiously so as to avoid the destruction of both in the forced marriage of the other.



--the earth is lichen, the sky a skeleton dancing with black hair—



--what knowledge our locks keep out, enters without knocking—

When we saw the first few I asked him how he would feel if I wrote a play about all this. I reassured him that I would take care not to use his photography in a way that biographed him. His eyes squinted in caution but he agreed so long as it was made plain that the play was not about him and then he added, “But we will *never* capture the secret.” There was something about the way he said *never* that was again redolent of Celan’s *lightduress*:

Your face shies quietly,  
when suddenly  
light brightens lamplike  
inside me, at that place

where most painfully one says Never.

(Celan, 2005, p 99)



*-the ogre will come in any case – more god-like than they thought*

---

Recently, I read how Yannis Ritsos wrote many of his monochords in secret, often while imprisoned on a remote island by one of the right wing dictatorships that suppressed his work in Greece (Ritsos, 2005). He would scrawl his monochords on torn off pieces of paper, roll them up, slide them into a bottle and bury them. What was too radical to be said could stay buried, like a hidden secret, until the play and complexity of things political and ontological; the affirmation of wonderment over disparagement; and, in the fullness of time, the inability of dualistic constructs to stay in the opposition they enforce; was revealed through the *das unheimliche*. Ritsos' art, so long

thought to be the ogre, emerged from its hidden secret in the earth,  
more god-like than they thought.

In Derrida's sense of the impossible, Ritsos had written the  
impossible, Nick had photographed it and, I now had a vantage point  
from which to begin a poetic course chartered by Derrida's  
impossible rule:

Only write the impossible. That ought to be the impossible rule.

(Derrida, 1993, p 27).

## Endnotes

1. A letter entitled, *Pain beyond monism and dualism* by the collaboration of Williamson, Buchanan (myself), Quintner and Cohen was published in *Pain* 5754 05, 04, 2005 19:22. The letter's tenet was essentially that as pain was an aporia that also had a lack of language available to express it, then: 'absence of evidence for pain was no longer evidence for absence of pain.' The letter pointed out that: 'That the recognition that pain is an aporia and is beyond language should not engender a sense of clinical nihilism, but remind us that the use of language to denote and analyse the pain experience is imprecise and uncertain.'
2. Curatolo et al 2001, point out that despite the neurobiological evidence to the contrary, the syllogism of the specificity theory that fires cause pain and without fire there can be no physical pain, remains the dominant theoretical and practical apprehension of medical practice in the treatment of pain.
3. Lucire argues persistent unexplained pain states are explainable through the belief and desire of the both the patient to have them and the doctors, who believe these patients, to treat them. This is despite the growing neurobiological evidence for this persistent pain and a continuing lack of such evidence for the actuality of somatisation. In other words, Lucire's accusation of belief and desire for pain in the patient and, for the clinician to believe in the

patient's pain, seems a tautological projection of her own belief and desire.

4. Belsey (1982, p 7) argued:
 

common sense urges that 'man' is the origin and source of meaning, of action and of history (*humanism*). Our concepts and our knowledge are held to be the product of experience (*empiricism*), and this experience is preceded and interrupted by the mind, reason or thought, the property of a transcendent human nature whose essence is the attribute of each individual (*idealism*).
5. I have taken the term *dark continent* from Freud in this instance, which he originally employed to describe the psyche of women. The irony of this is unintended other than to connote that the acceptance of a mystery can invite the undoing of entrenched positions – in this case – that the brain was merely a reflex driven hardwired mechanism. The undoing of this long held classical theory continues to cause fear and uncertainty in the holders of such theories to be valid. The disparagement of sufferers of persistent unexplainable pain is, in this context, not dissimilar to the disparagement of women by the patriarchy.
6. The essentialist difficulty New Critical discourse had was to assert that one true and correct reading of a text was achievable, when the means by which this position could be proved could only ever be subjectively asserted through an imposed pseudo-objectivism.
7. *Gold Standard Evidence* is the term used by science to both denote and connote the very highest level of evidence has been achieved through the use of double blind random control trials (RCTs). This methodology attempts to obviate any possible bias by the conductors of the experiments. The metaphor of Gold Standard insists on a pure translation or reflection of the world as the way it is. This endeavour seems redolent of the attributes and pitfalls of the New Critical heuristic endeavours.

8. The diagnoses of Fibromyalgia was critiqued in the paper *Signification and Pain: A Semiotic Reading of Fibromyalgia* by Qunintner et al, as a nosological and linguistic construct that lacked medical utility and any reference to the neurodynamics of pain syndromes it claimed to present.
9. Recent evidence has shown that opiates when used over a long period time may actually be *interpreted* by the brain to enhance pain rather than to reduce it. In this sense Lowell's line is quite uncanny in its wisdom.

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## **Part 2**

### **The Plays**

***A Bell in the Storm***

**and**

***To Fall Without Landing***



## Introduction

***A Bell in the Storm***  
**and**  
***To Fall without Landing...***

At the time of *A Bell in the Storm*'s production in May 2005, there had been fifteen drafts of the play completed since the commencement of these studies in 2002. The play was initially titled "Like Snow on Mt Everest" after John R Searle's reference to brute facts and speculative philosophy.

The first few drafts involved three different motifs in place and time. The first motif was set in Perth in the contemporary and involved three characters: Simon, a persistent pain sufferer as a result of a serious car accident, who was in his 40s fighting a compensation claim; Sally, his psychologist who was in her late thirties; and Andrew, a pain medicine physician who was also in his late thirties. Andrew had recently returned from living in France where he had lived with his wife Jacqui for the last sixteen years but, from whom, he had recently separated. The second motif was set in Arcachon, France, during World War One and involved Andrew's grandfather Bob, as a twenty-one year old, who was there to fight with the AIF. Sheell shocked but coping Bob meets Gabrielle on his *R & R* in Arcachon. Gabrielle is a local widower in her late twenties who became Bob's lover during his leave in Arcachon. The third motif was

set again in Arcachon but in the early 1980s and involved Andrew as a twenty-one year old retracing the steps of his recently deceased grandfather (Bob), who, as a result of his action in the Great War had sustained a shell-shock injury that caused a life-long pain that had been diagnosed as *psychoneurotic*. Andrew, in this motif would faint outside a café only to be cared for by Jacqui, a local divorcee, and they would, despite the language difficulties, fall in love.

Andrew Ross, the then Artistic Director of Black Swan Theatre Company expressed interest in the piece and an initial reading was conducted in September 2002. He suggested major rewrites to streamline the three different motifs into a single cotemporary motif with either flashbacks and/or the narratives of the French motifs spliced into that action. The action would therefore be confined to Simon, Sally and Andrew – with Old Bob, Gabrielle and Jacqui (who was renamed Cecile in later drafts) confined to memories and telephone conversations within the single motif.

Within the next month however, it was clear that Andrew would be leaving Black Swan Theatre and more than likely would be going to Brisbane to continue his career. With Andrew's departure by Christmas of 2002, the local theatre scene became quite turbulent and after seeking advice from theatre colleagues I decided to proceed with the play in the independent sector. Ingle Knight professed interest to direct and help dramaturge the play to a

workshop level and Bill McCluskey agreed to play the part of Simon. A fourth draft was read in November, 2002. While Ingle was happy to proceed with the piece and help apply for funding from the Department of Culture and the Arts, there was much criticism of the overly-complex nature of the piece and I was left in a very despondent frame. Between Christmas and the late February (in part in order to meet the next funding application deadline), I re-wrote the play twice more under the title "The Lightning and the Bell" and added the character of *Counsel for the Commission*. I then applied successfully for funding to workshop the play independently.

A total of \$7,700 was granted to me by the Arts Development Panel of the Department of Culture and the Arts to workshop the piece in November, 2003. Between June and October, 2003, another three drafts were completed and by November, 2003 I had the interest of two theatre companies. The piece was workshopped at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts from December 1 until December 14, 2003 and a moved reading performed at Victoria Hall (the base of deckchair theatre) on Saturday December 14 between 2.00pm and 4.30pm before an invited audience. It was directed by Ingle Knight and the actors involved were:

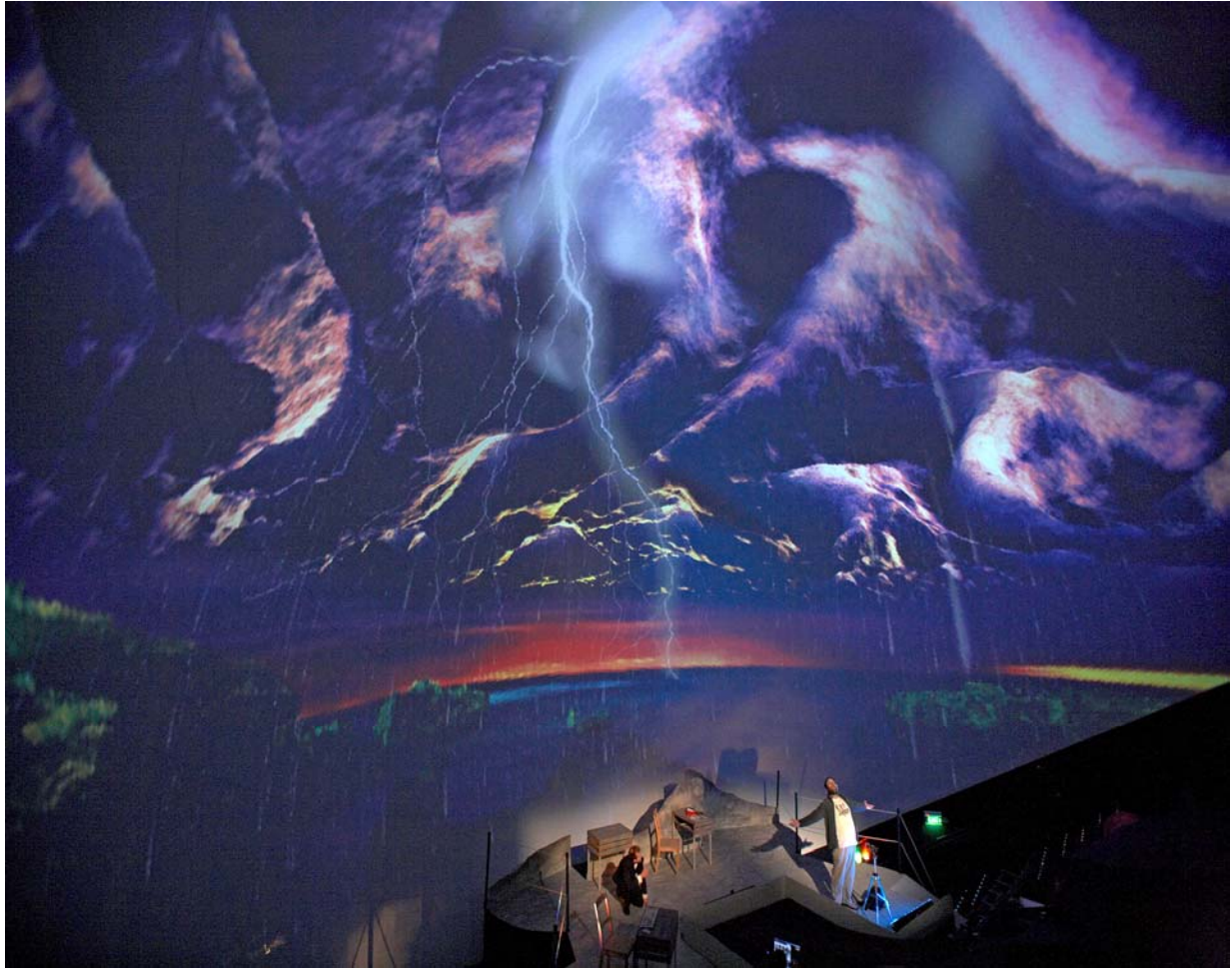
- Bill McCluskey played Simon
- Jacqueline Low played Sally
- Peter Web played Andrew
- Michael Loney played *Counsel for the Commission*

After the moved reading, both the Artistic Director and General Manager of **deckchair theatre** expressed their formal wish to produce the piece professionally in their 2004 season, to which I agreed.

I submitted another completed workshop draft still under the title of “The Lightning and The Bell” to deckchair theatre in January, 2004. This draft deleted the *Counsel for the Commission* as the accent of the play concentrated more on the creative affirmation of the *creative brain* and less on the court-room drama. Due to unforeseen circumstances and the vicissitudes of professional theatre practice the play was delayed until deckchair’s 2005 season and even then it proceeded only with the unprecedented financial backing of Alcoa Australia. Four more drafts were completed in the interim period up until the production commenced formal rehearsals in April 2005 under the revised title of *A Bell in the Storm*.

Scitech had also graciously allowed the production be staged in its planetarium dome in the *City West Complex* in West Perth. Although Scitech had already agreed to the staging of the production in the dome the real *coup de theatre* (Banks, *The West Australian*, May 16, 2005) of the dome had come about after I met with the Professor of Neurobiology Stuart Bunt in November 2004. We had initially met to discuss the neurobiology behind the play and its nexus with creativity,

language and the narrative. We then discussed how the brain's three newly discovered qualities of self-organisation, noncentredness and negentropy were irreducible to Descartes' Bell. It was though the storm/lightning photography of Nick Djordjevic that proved to be the most fruitful topic of the meeting. Professor Bunt listened quietly as I put the case that Nick's photography wasn't just an amazing personal narrative of someone coping with their pain but that the storms themselves shared uncannily complex characteristics of how both lightning and pain emerge unpredictably from self-referential systems. We discussed how the creative act can modulate pain through inhibitory neuronal activity and how the main character of the play felt his pain go into the storm whenever he photographed lightning. Professor Bunt pondered what I had said and then told me he knew of some members of SIGGRAPH (a computer specialists organisation and forum) who could three-dimensionally render a storm sequence for the dome to engender this context for the play. I went home and rang Nick excitedly. After only a few emails and meetings between us with Martin Sawtell, Simon Rudland and Brendan Ragan and the director of deckchair theatre, Angela Chaplin, the idea of having a three dimensional storm was born and included into the play. No-one – not even the three young programmers knew what was going to be achieved, but, achieved it was and with stunning effect for the penultimate scene of the play, which Angela Chaplin christened *the Jesus moment*:



Meanwhile another play had been gestating in my thoughts. It broadly concerned Caruth's self-referential *fall*. I was asked to attend an Australian Playwrights' Conference in December 2004, conducted at Yanchep, north of Perth. Many playwrights and theatre practitioners across the country, including Tim Daly, attended and led workshops. I was asked to contribute a new six page play and a synopsis. It was read at the conference under the working title of *To Fall without Landing* and Gillian Berry of the Australian Broadcasting Commission's Radio National Drama Unit approached me to expand it into a full length radio play. The initial full length draft was offered to Gillian Berry in March, 2005 and accepted for production in April,

2005 with further drafts submitted in May, 2005 and July 2005.

Production and recording occurred from 22<sup>nd</sup> to the 24th August and the radio play *To Fall Without Landing* went to air on Radio National, on the Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> and Friday 7<sup>th</sup> October, 2005.

# ***A Bell in the Storm***

a multi-media play by

**David Buchanan**

*with photography*

**by Nick Djordjevic**

***Produced by deckchair theatre***

***May 14 – 30, 2005***

***In the Planetarium, Scitech***

***Perth, Western Australia***

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David Buchanan





*In the explosion of the universe we are witnessing, a miracle happens:  
the fragments falling down are **a l i v e !***

Rene Char

I CAN STILL HEAR YOU: an echo,  
palpable with feeler-  
words, at farewell-  
ridge.

Your face shies quietly,  
when suddenly  
light brightens lamplike  
inside me, at that place  
where most painfully one says Never.

Paul Celan 'Lightduress'

*Like ghosts amid your palaces  
Thoughts of poor men force their way*

*Ernest Jones, 'We are Silent', 1851.*

## Setting

Contemporary Perth, Western Australia. The stage should be open yet able to represent an office, the *Café L'avenir*, a bedroom, and the District Court – as well as the beach or land's edge.

## Characters

### Simon Sharrin

40 something... He is a car accident victim suffering from persistent and severe pain.

### Dr Andrew McLeod

Mid to late 30s. He is a Pain Medicine specialist, recently separated from his French wife and children of sixteen years and only just returned to Perth.

### Sally

Mid 30s. She is a clinical psychologist. Andrew and Sally were first loves before he left for France 17 years ago. Sally is also doubles as Stephanie, *Sprite* and the voice of Cecile.

### Musician(s)...

## Scene 1

**Dark stage – then a red light comes up.**

**Music “The Beauty in the Breakage” up... Enter Simon.**

**Simon**        **(Direct Address)** Hi... I’m Simon Sharrin... or at least I have been. We get so used to a name that we think we’re beyond the game. Like I was this guy, Simon Sharrin: happily married to Stephanie Dodds (she didn’t take my name) – two gorgeous kids Jemima and Ann, a house in Solomon Street on the hill with sea views, two cars - Saab and *MemSaab* - dependable job teaching English... yearly holidays O.S. ...everything rang like a bell... you get the picture of *Simon Sharrin*... But you know what’s coming next, right? What’s in a name, right? That’s why I reckon we all have mobile phones – not just cos we can - but because we know deep down - that without warning, everything in our name could change in a big bang and **(Simon straps himself in his car)** instead of strapping on a seatbelt to protect us from an explosive universe, we might get to say our name one last time to the person we loved the most... like that guy on Mt Everest rang his wife and kids to say goodbye... or those poor fucks on the 9/11 planes... their last words hurtled invisible and thin as gas through space to reach that ear to echo in...

**He looks up at the red light and dialling his mobile phone...**

**Simon** (To himself) *Come the Sabbath???* **(Long Pause... then into the mobile)** Steph? It's me... **(Pause)** Yes I'm driving, but it's Ok... I'm stationary at a red light... **(Pause)** Yes... **(Pause)** About a minute and half away... Tell her I'm sorry I'm late...I'll watch the movie with her just as soon as I get home... **(Pause)** How was the reading? **(Truck headlights are incoming like munitions. Music up to effect this)** The poetry was Ok but she's got this big name now and...

**The lights explode into Simon... Stage effects to effect *The thinning...* (Horizontal lighting, and mist/smoke effects, with a turbulence to effect a storm building. Subdued and putative lightning effects begin. Simon is picked up (via his 'seat belt') and *thinned...***

**Screen; The *Big Bang* (birth of the universe), The Earth from Space, thunderstorm from space, then brain MRIs, before World War 1 scenes from Passchendaele...**

**Screen randomly the words in no particular order: 'the sky'... 'skeleton'... 'dancing'... 'black hair'... 'behind their eyes'... 'lichen' ... 'the earth'...**

**'C'est le Guerre'... 'Am Sabbath'... 'is a'... 'Carry the stone'... 'open ones'**

**Enter Andrew reading papers.**

**Enter Sally who moves between Simon and Andrew.**

**Screen deliberately bad portraits of ‘wife and kids’ in the backdrop of ‘the family home’. Then the same ‘family home’ – *empty...* Screen *Genesis* series of photographs – Simon stands in pain - mid-stage and picks up a postcard which he studies. He sits in great pain, mid-stage staring up at the photo. He reads the postcard to himself again, then slowly, painfully gets up and walks towards the screen... as he nears the screen the photograph whites out.**

**Sally**            Simon Sharrin?  
**Simon**            I used to be...  
**Sally**            Tell me about your pain  
**Simon**            It was a four wheel drive...  
**Sally**            He was drunk.  
**Simon**            I got so... thinned... like I was becoming a gas  
**Sally**            Tell me about your pain.  
**Simon**            It's the price I pay  
**Sally**            For not dying? What is *it* – your pain?  
**Simon**            There aren't the words  
**Sally**            Never?  
**Simon**            There are no words  
**Sally**            There's always hope...

**Sally moves through to Scene 2 as Simon addresses the audience before moving among them...**

**Simon**            Look I hope you don't mind this but... Hands up those, who are right now, right here, in pain?  
**(Silence)** Any kind of pain from a twinge to

arrgh! It's Ok I'm not going to bite... I'm in agony myself. Thank you... Most likely, everyone else here wants to help you.... Right? Reach for the Panadol, soothe the brow...To relieve pain is divine, right? **(Pause)** Keep your hands up if this pain has lasted longer than 3 months...? **(Pause)** Six months...? **(Pause)** Years...??? Thank you... you can pop yr hands down now... Do we still wanna reach for the Panadol and soothe the brow though...? No point, right? Its Ok...relax... relax... you're here to have a good time, right? Oh... just one more thing – hands up please those among us here who are in love? Keep your hands up if this love has lasted longer than 3 months? Six months? Years...? **(Pause)** Tell me, if you had to – could you prove this love? Oh and just one more thing... (Yeah I know... but this time it's the last time, I swear) Hands up all of you here who are alive!? **(Silence)** Well then – it's like Sal said – there's always hope...

### **Segue into Scene 2...**

### **Scene 2**

**Music fades...**

**Lights up – Andrew's office. He reads referral documents at his office desk. There is a large framed photo of his Grandfather as a World War 1 soldier hanging on the wall next to his Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery, and Faculty of Pain Medicine awards. A Large print of *Narcissus and Echo* also adorns the wall.**

**Andrew stares at the letter he holds before he looks up and throws it on to the desktop. He gets up and walks to the doorway just as Sally enters...**

**Sally** Andrew... are you the Dr McLeod?

**Andrew** **(Pulls back)** Sally?! **(Peels off back behind his desk)** Hi...

**Sally** **(Pause)** I have... a meeting with...

**Andrew** Yes... I'm the pain specialist... for my sins...  
**(Pause)** It's been a while...

**Sally** Yes... How long have you been back?

**Andrew** Ah... a few months... maybe six. I've been busy getting this practice up and running...

**Sally** You were recommended, by the University.

**Andrew** Please, take a seat. **(She sits)**

**Sally** I'd like to talk with you about a patient of mine...

**Andrew** A patient?

**Sally** Simon Sharrin...

**Andrew** Are you a doctor?

**Sally** Yes... a PhD in clinical psychology...

**Andrew** Oh... A Clinical Psychologist... You gave up law?

**Sally** I did...just after you left... for France... as fast as your feet would carry you...

**Andrew** Right... How can I help you, Sal?

**Sally** **(Pause)** It's to do with *Neuropathic pain*.

**Andrew** I'm amazed you're even interested.

**Sally** Sorry...

**Andrew** Well, as a clin psych you would consider the pain was all in his mind, surely? That's your province isn't it? The mind!

**Sally** My province... is helping people cope with their pain... **(Pause)** Would you see him for me?

Review him – and the reports that have been done by the Commission.

**Andrew** The Commission? Car accident? **(Sally nods)**  
Is it going to court?

**Sally** I hope not... I don't think he could cope and they know it. He was smashed up.

**Andrew** How long ago?

**Sally** Three years – a bit more. Trouble is, there aren't any broken bones or anything on his scans to evidence injury...

**Andrew** Ah yes... *Evidence*...

**Sally** He's fallen apart. Lost his job, his wife walked out on him with the kids. It's a mess. I've been seeing him for nearly two years...

**Andrew** Have you found any *evidence* – in his mind?

**Sally** **(Ignores him)** Now, it's time to settle with the Commission.

**Andrew** Or he could just get on with his life... All the evidence says people do better outside compensation claims.

**Sally** That's easy for you to say on a doctor's income. What makes you think he has a choice? They've filmed him for hours...you know what the Commission's like? They lean on you – have him followed and spied on –

**Andrew** In France we don't... I've been away for such a long... time.

**Sally** I noticed... **(Tense pause)** Will you ummm, please just see him for me?

**Andrew** Sure...

**Sally** Oh about those films taken by the Commission, some of them are of him taking photographs...

**Andrew** So?



**Sally** In the middle of lightning storms... In the middle of the night... for hours on end... carting tripods and stuff...

**Andrew** Oh...

**Sally** It's his only passion... it's what he does...

**Andrew** Lightning?

**A silence...**

**Sally** When could you see him?

**Andrew** Actually, I have a cancellation... Tomorrow... morning... ten? I could see him then?

**Sally** Thanks... He'll be here...

**Sally stands... and is taken by the photo of the soldier...**

**Sally** Ol' Bob eh? **(Turns as if to consider the resemblance)** He had pain, didn't he?

**Andrew** **(Steels himself)** Yes...

**Sally** I remember he used to sleep in his chair at the kitchen table with his head in his hands...

**Andrew** From the first night he got back to the day he died. It wouldn't let him lie down... Had to keep on the move... like in the trenches... some things just won't let go...

**Sally** Simon can't sleep any other way either. Thanks for seeing him.

**Sally moves to exit...but stops... She pulls out a photo...  
Screen photo of a teenaged boy smiling...**

**Segue into Scene 3...**

### Scene 3

**Screen *Blood Red Sky*... Enter Simon into 'The bunker'.  
His pain has increased and he is pacing in despair...  
Then slowly he looks up at the screen.**

**Simon**      **(Direct address)** This one was taken an hour after dark. You're thinking I used photoshop right? To get all these greens and sunset colours- especially as it was so dark I couldn't see a thing. But you'd be wrong. It was a forty five minute exposure, that's all. You'd be amazed at what's out there if you just let things come to you... Anyhow... Welcome to my bunker... Where I close the door on the world's commissions and develop my storms that find me on Trigg beach... Trigg beach... where I surfed everyday as a kid... Its my church and its waves my faith. You know, those childhood places that fill your head as you drift into sleep, like that old pepper tree in the backyard – familiar and recognisable as a school bell or a ring on a finger. Specific as a key but they open the universe. In here and out there... My bunker and Trigg... that's where you'll find me... To me, they're the same place really... But occasionally I have to go to doctor's rooms – and Sal's of course... Sally, my clin psych... I try to tell her –She wants to understand - the sun drowns every night in the sea... its blood spills across the sky... the planets laugh out loud bright as stars... But, its like I say – there really aren't the words... Try saying this?

He looks back at the photo... *Blood Red Sky* time-lapse dissolves (10 frames).

The briefest glimpse (like lightning itself) of *Ten Billion Volts* is seen, followed by the three second footage of a *sprite* phenomenon from a thunderstorm...

Change lighting... Simon stands and literally walks into Scene 4...

#### Scene 4

Lights up – Andrew sits in his office looking at scans and x-rays. Enter Simon.

**Andrew** Please, take a seat. (Simon turns around awkwardly – in pain)

Simon sits with great care. Andrew walks to his desk and sits.

**Andrew** I understand from Sally...

Simon stands from his pain and moves (as if it were his excuse to stand) up to the awards on the wall.

**Simon** *Faculty of Pain Medicine.*

**Andrew** Yes... Simon, your claim...

**Simon** Can't be good... playing a game where ya can't kick any goals? (Simon turns, hands Andrew his reports and sits awkwardly back in his chair)

**Andrew** I'm sorry...?

**Simon** Pain... there's no goal posts...

**Andrew** Quite. It's tough **(He opens the reports and begins reading)** I'll just see what your scans tell me.

**Simon** Nuthen... Nothing will come of nuthin!

**Andrew** **(Slight pause)** Sometimes something does come of nothing... Or what we think is nothing... On TV once, I saw this racing car pull out too early from its refuelling stop... The pit crew were suddenly covered in methanol fuel... One spark and they were all rolling around in agony. But no one around them helped... because methanol's flame can't be seen by the naked eye. No one helped – because no one believed they were in pain because they couldn't see any flames.

**A silence...**

**Simon** Invisible flames?

**Andrew** Lets have a look at you. Sit up on the bed, please. **(Andrew ushers Simon gently on to the examination bed)**

**Simon** Yeah, right... **(Pain)** Arrh shit.

**Andrew** **(Moves quickly to Simon's neck and back)**  
Tell me about your pain?

**Simon** **(Gestures from his neck down his arms, then to his back, lower back and legs and finally all around his head)** All over...

**Andrew** And the pins and needles you get – down both arms?

**Simon** And legs...

**Andrew** Any pain over the top of your legs?  
**Simon** This one.  
**Andrew** **(Presses a spot on Simon's lower back)**  
 Does it get worse if I...  
**Simon** **(Winces in pain)** Fuck y...!  
**Andrew** Sorry... Sorry... **(Starts tapping on Simon's shoulder)** What if I do this?

**Simon, after five seconds, closes his eyes and arches his shoulders back. Screen Ten Billion Volts...)**

**Simon** **(Opens his eyes – fade Ten Billion Volts)**  
 Piss off!  
**Andrew** **(Pulls his hand away)** Sorry, sorry. **(Simon is wriggling his fingers and staring at them)** Is the tingling worse in your fingers after my tapping? **(Simon nods)** Mmmm. Are you getting any sleep? **(Simon shakes his head)** Headaches? **(Simon nods)** Any trouble with your vision? **(Simon nods)** How much?  
**Simon** Enough...  
**Andrew** I'm sorry I have to ask these...  
**Fade Stephanie and the children from a family photo leaving him alone.**

**Simon** I don't know *why* I'm like this!

**He turns back to find himself pacing Andrew's office with Andrew looking on, concerned...**

**Andrew** I know what this must be like for you...  
**Simon** You have no idea what it must be like for me – pain medicine man!!

**Tense pause.**

- Andrew** What about your photography?
- Simon** What about it!
- Andrew** Some Commission detectives have filmed you while you were out all night in storms. **(Tense pause)** With nothing showing up on your scans, the Commission's doctors have written reports to the effect that you're malingering.
- Simon** Those scans... But when I'm photographing lightning... I...

**Lighting change/storm FX up – music up... Simon stands drawn to the stage edge. As he walks his pain diminishes beautifully... Cease FX/music...**

- Simon** Never mind.
- Andrew** **(Intrigued)** Are your hands still tingling?  
**(Simon nods)** How soon after the accident did the pain start up?
- Simon** I woke up with it and it hasn't left me...
- Andrew** You were knocked out? **(Simon nods)** Was the car a write-off?
- Simon** Again with the 'write-off' thing! Every doctor I see wants to know how bad the car was?  
**(Pause)** Yes! *It* was a write-off... and so am I!  
Fucken whiplash!
- Andrew** Simon, I don't think you suffer from whiplash...
- Simon** Gee! Thanks Sal for referring me to this one!
- Andrew** No you don't understand! What I mean is *Whiplash* is just a name like *shell-shock* in World War 1. I don't think whiplash does justice to what you have...
- Simon** Justice, eh?

- Andrew** I think what you have is because of the way your brain and nervous system, has responded to the accident.
- Simon** Waddya mean?
- Andrew** It's hard to **(Pause)** I think **(Pause)** your accident provoked a response by your brain that has created your pain... similar to the way the *big-bang* created the universe.
- Simon** Yeah, right!
- Andrew** **(Pause)** The big bang took only a few seconds but it's still unfolding. We now know that you can also have pain long after an accident like yours.

**Simon stares at him silently thinking this through.**

- Simon** A big bang pain(?**Slight pause**) From the madness of the stars we are born.
- Simon** **(Pause)** What's it called?
- Andrew** What do you mean?
- Simon** **(Picks up a pen and paper from the desk)**  
Well there must be some fancy word you doctors all use to name this universal brain of ours?
- Andrew** Not a lot of doctors are aware of it yet...  
**(Smiles)** Neuroplasticity... Why?
- Simon** As in plastic bag?
- Andrew** Yes – but as in plastic: to change, be creative...
- Simon** Yeah yeah... Brain creativity...
- Andrew** Why?
- Simon** Internet... **(Pause, reads from his writing)**  
*Neuroplasticity...* Pain's your game medicine

man, but it's a game played out on the field of my body.

**Andrew** **(Pause)** I'd like you to try some medication to calm yours down a bit.

**Simon** *My neuroplasticity?* **(Andrew nods)** What medication?

**Andrew** Opiates...

**Simon** Like heroin? Oh yeah right!

**Andrew** They will ease your pain... There's some new and very sophisticated anticonvulsant ones that can also stop the pain building up.

**Simon** **(Writing)** Anti-convulsants, eh...

**Andrew** And some antidepressants we could try... amitriptyline.

**Simon** **(Writing)** Ami-trip-tyl-ine... And these opiates...

**Andrew** There's quite a few...

**Simon stands and walks up to and studies the *Narcissus and Echo* print, as if to distract the situation.**

**Andrew** It's Narcissus and Echo... **(Simon examines him)** I don't think Narcissus was the selfish monster he's been made out to be. He was a dreamer... that's all... who didn't realise...

**Simon** Realise what?

**Andrew** That what we think is real can be no more than a phantom of our own making... When what *is* real, has been right before us all along...

**Simon** Like Echo here?

**Andrew** I'd like to see you often until your case goes to court ... or the Commission will have a field day with you.

**Simon** So long as I got my bunker – I don't care...



- Andrew** Simon – they will allege that your injuries are nothing more than phantom... Sal would have told you that you're up against the most efficient insurance company in Australia. It's a war, Simon!
- Simon** And what's in it for you?
- Andrew** The good fight! **(Looks at the portrait of his Grandfather)**
- Simon** **(Moves over to the portrait)** A war, eh? Your grandfather? **(Andrew nods)**
- Andrew** He won the Military Medal and the Military Medal with Bar and survived the whole stunt... **(Andrew hands Simon a script)** Take two of these at night. Please no alcohol...
- Simon** I don't drink...
- Andrew** Don't drive either.
- Simon** You reckon this's all in my mind?
- Andrew** Just because something's invisible doesn't mean it's not real.
- Simon** Like God!
- Andrew** I'm not sure I'd go that far?
- Simon** Runs in the blood then... the *good fight*? **(Reluctantly takes the script)** Can I go?
- Andrew** I'd like to see you the day after tomorrow?
- Simon** We'll see...
- Andrew** Do you listen to music?
- Simon** So?
- Andrew** See if it soothes your pain?

**Exit Simon. Haunting music up... Segue into Scene 5...**

## Scene 5

**Café L'avenir – a café by the beach... Sunset photograph is screened... Sally sits at a table drinking from a nearly finished bottle of wine. Enter Andrew...**

- Andrew**      **(Seats herself)** Hi... Sorry I'm so late...I ran over a patient...I mean I ran over with a patient...
- Sally**            Have you been drinking?
- Simon**            No, Ah, I'd forgotten how beautiful these sunsets are. I used to come here every Friday night when I was kid... It was called *The Steak Cave* then...
- Sally**              *Café L'avenir* now...
- Andrew**          *L'avenir?*
- Sally**              Café of the future! Isn't that right?
- Andrew**          Sort of... It's more the unpredictable future... In French there are two kinds of futures – the one we secure against – you plan for – it's why we have jobs, bank accounts, superannuation, insurance policies etc and then there's *l'avenir*... **(Pause)** Those totally unpredictable things that truly shape our lives...
- Sally**              Simon's accident?
- Andrew**          Sure... but I was thinking more along the lines of falling in love... **(Pause)** How have *you* been?
- Sally**              **(She stiffens)** Would you come here with your grandparents? When you were a kid?
- Andrew**          Na. With mum... Tell me about you?
- Sally**              Really...Your Mum?
- Andrew**          I'd see her every Friday night...
- Sally**              What was that like for you?
- Andrew**          Do you still *feel anything* for me?

**Sally** How much have you had to drink?

**Andrew** **(Sighs)** Do you think Simon has any chance – if it goes to court?

**Sally** It won't go to court... Why – how did it go?

**Andrew** Prick-ly...

**Sally** He wasn't always like this. I've spoken to Stephanie - his ex-wife. She said he was... gentle, smart... lovely... A respected English teacher... Had his moments of course, like the rest of us...

**Enter Simon grinning... he runs up to an imaginary child and wraps her in his arms, picks her up and swings her around and plays with her – jumping over her as she 'runs' under his jumps. Then as suddenly he grimaces and opens his arms up to the air to reveal nothingness... loss/pain.**

**Andrew** How long were they together?

**Sally** Sixteen years.

**Andrew** That's a long time... to just disappear...

**Sally** **(Conceals her hurt)** How long were you married?

**Andrew** **(French accent)** To Cecile?

**Sally** Why, have you been married more than once?

**Andrew** Six-teen years...

**Sally** How did it happen?

**Andrew** **(Distant – as if talking about a patient. Lights up on Simon and they speak together...)** She... told me last October, in bed one morning... she started to cry... said that she thought she didn't love me enough to stay...

**Sally** No, no... How did you meet her?

- Andrew** Oh – I fainted...
- Sally** You fainted?
- Andrew** I had been riding a motorbike for too long. I forgot to eat enough... I guess...
- Sally** Jesus Drew...
- Andrew** I rode all the way from the Somme to Arcachon in a day... through a Biscay storm... I got off my bike at a café... and fainted. **(A moment between them Angela...)** I woke wet with her hair raining on my face. Ummm... she took me home... Or to what I thought was... my home... Arcachon.
- Sally** **(Pause)** Were you ever going to contact me?
- Andrew** I... I arrh... thought... about it. Why does he take photos of lightning?
- Sally** What? I don't think he'd be alive without them... **(Pause)** He once told me when he's photographing lightning – he's photographing his own pain.
- Andrew** Really! **(To himself)** Lightning and Pain...?
- Sally** Did you finish your training in France?
- Andrew** Ah, no... In London. Cecile came with me. Then we moved back to France... where the children were born and I began to specialise in pain.
- Sally** Children...The Commission has expedited Simon's mediated conference...
- Andrew** Are you worried?
- Sally** Oh maybe it's nothing... every now and then the Commission makes an example of someone... A test case.
- Andrew** That doesn't sound good.
- Sally** I'm worried about what he might do.
- Andrew** **(Slight pause)** Really?

- Sally** And the Commission justifies everything on the grounds that society can't afford these claims... But it's the Simon's of this world that get caught in that no-mans-land...
- Andrew** *Le terrain vagues...* They do it because it's the only way they understand pain - Descartes' bell tolling loudly through the body.
- Sally** You've lost me...
- Andrew** Come on! Descartes' bell...
- Sally** **(Sings)** What Rene Descartes was a drunken fart *I drink therefore I am.*
- Andrew** Oh very droll. Rene Descartes! The philosopher who said the mind was *a thing*? He's the great granddaddy of psychology – not Freud! **(Pause)**
- Sally** What?
- Andrew** I still can't believe they don't teach this! **(Pause)** In 1644, he drew a little bloke with his toe getting burnt by fire... which pulled on a bloody rope that was attached to a bell in the brain! Fire, pulls the rope, rings the bell – pain! **(He goes through the routine)** Descartes' bell. And the moral of Simon's story is... if there's no fire – there can be no pain. But if he complains of pain – then **(he taps his head)** it must be a 'phantom' pain and he's referred to someone like you who deals with *the mind* and he won't get a brass razoo cos his pain's not real!
- Sally** *Someone like me...* **(Pause)** So what does someone like you say?
- Andrew** That pain is all in the brain... and the brain is as complex as... the whole universe. It's

amazing ... each one of us carries inside us,  
our own universe! I'm doing it aren't I?

**Sally** Oh yeah!

**Simon** What if he doesn't come to his next  
appointment...?

**Sally** He will...

**Andrew** When can I see his photos? I thought you  
might have some at your place, after dinner  
over a coffee?

**Sally** Wanker... **(She takes her mobile phone out  
of her bag)** I'll ring him – we're working on  
something together so he lets me come up to  
his bunker... **(Dials)** Studio...

**They get up to leave...**

**Andrew** Just how involved are you with your patient,  
*Doctor...*

**Sally** *Of philosophy...*

**Andrew** Touchè...

**They exit. Fade lighting and segue into Scene 6...**

## **Scene 6**

**Simon's studio in semi darkness... Music (subtle) up.  
Simon is already *present...* sitting at his computer *on a  
chat line.* His computer chimes on an incoming  
message...**

**Simon** Mary from California! Yes...

**Screen** *Hi Simon... I have some news...*

**Simon**        **(Types)** Man, have I got some news for you too! Maybe they've found why we're in so much pain! It's our brains, Mary!!! They're playful...

**Enter Sally and Andrew. Sally goes to knock on the front door but hesitates.**

**Sally**        So, not two weeks after you'd left me behind in Australia, without so much as a *goodbye Sal, it's been good to know ya... Oh and lets not mention that drunken proposal of marriage at your grandfather's wake!* You fainted in France and woke to find **(Mock French accent)** *Cecile* reigning over you?

**Andrew**      **(Authentic French accent)** Pardon...

**Sally**        **(Mocks his accent)** *Pardon* **(Pause)** So... you're back in Perth seventeen years later – licking the same wounds I had. And don't you dare say *oui...*

**Andrew**      **(pause)** Yes.

**Sally**        Mphh... I hope for Simon's sake you're not going to run away again!

**Andrew**      Where have I to go?

**Sally**        Come on...

**They enter... Screen the photograph *Cataclysm*.**

**Immediately Andrew is captivated by and drawn to it.**

**He walks *into it...***

**Screen**        **Billy has gone to his seals...**

**Simon**        Oh fuck... **(Types)** When?

**Screen**        **Yesterday... He'd organised everything... pre-paid the funeral, paid his rent in advance, even Christmas presents for his kids... Organised for the police to come to**

**his apartment – enclosed a key... He left a long letter... You're in it... He wants me to send you a copy...**

**Simon** (types) I...

**Sally** Do you still want that coffee?

**Andrew** Where...Your place?

**Sally** No yours

**Andrew** Oui...

**Sally** Are... you... crying?

**Andrew** No...

**Sally moves to Andrew. He tilts his head and they touch very gently... Lights up and Simon gets up. Sally moves away from Andrew and walks towards Simon.**

**Sally** Simon!

**Andrew** Your photography...

**Simon** **(To Andrew)** So, how do you know Sal?

**Andrew** Sal? We ah, went out for quite a while when we were younger...

**Sally** First *real* love...

**Andrew** Yes, I'm afraid... **(pause)**

**Sally** Your *afraid!*

**Andrew** Sal was telling me that when you photograph lightning... That, *it's like you're photographing your pain ...*

**Simon** Did she just!!

**Andrew** Simon... I'm on your side.

**Simon** And what side is that?

**Andrew** I think there may be something to your photography!

**Simon** That's nice...



- Andrew** No... I think you may have stumbled on to something really important! **(Simon mock snores)** I have found some evidence - neurobiological evidence – about pain...
- Simon** I'll let you discuss it with Sal shall I – and on the way *out!* - she can tell you how she already thinks that!!!
- Andrew** What?
- Sally** A programme Simon and I are working on together...
- Andrew** Hang on...
- Sally** Not now
- Andrew** When you're photographing your lightning does your pain diminish? **(Pause)** I think I know why!
- Simon** *The Saviour!* They don't even know *what* lightning is! They used to think it was an electrical discharge caused by ice crystals being rubbed together in updrafts... But now they only know it can't be that! And that's just the lightning – you ever heard of sprites?
- Andrew** Sprites?
- Simon** There are things in storms we can't even imagine – as for what causes them - they don't have a clue?
- Andrew** Yes – but we're finding out so much more!
- Simon** Just tell me when it's all going to end for me?  
For me!! Me!!!
- Sally** Si – what is it?
- Simon** **(Holds his head in his hands then looks at her...)** Good night...

**Simon exits.**

**Sally**            **(Calls to Si as he exits)** I'll see you in the morning, yeah? I'll pick you up about nine.

**Andrew**        Pick him up?

**Sally**            His pre-trial conference... tomorrow morning...

**Andrew**        About this programme?

**Sally**            Not now, look, maybe it's a bit late for that coffee, after all...

**Exit Andrew and Sally.**

**Change (darken) lighting – intense yearning music up...**

**Fade up Cataclysm. Very gradually fade *cataclysm* from the screen... then screen over the photograph in a scrawled very fast writing...**

***the earth is lichen, the sky is a skeleton dancing with black hair***

**Fade monochord. Continue music...**

**Segue into Scene 7...**

**Scene 7**

**Sally's office... Enter Simon, agitated... Sally enters behind him...**

**Simon**            **(Quotes)** *No less than three medical specialist opinions regarding three hours of film taken of the plaintiff that demonstrates activities inconsistent with the injuries alleged. Alleged!!! Those fucks!*

- Sally** You have to divorce yourself from this ...
- Simon** So long as I don't have to divorce myself from my bunker?
- Sally** You are still you... they can't take that...
- Simon** Look at me...
- Sally** You know the power of your photographs Especially for people in pain! They see *it* – they see and just know! You *know this*... Simon. When we set up the programme...
- Simon** My photographs are just a glimpse...
- Sally** Glimpses are all any of us get, Si... In the history of language, they've found one word to directly voice pain – Ancient Greek – roughly translated its *arrrrrgh!*
- Simon** Arrrrrrggh!! This order 24A is a bit more than a glimpse... What twisted fuck thought up that?
- Sally** I don't know... It's meant to make people think twice before they take the commission to court...
- Simon** Yeah but this time it's the Commission that wants to take me to court?! **(Pause)** So was my lawyer right? Have people lost their houses over this?
- Sally** Well... I have known people who have had to sell their houses to keep their heads above water but...
- Simon** But in the end they lost their house? **(Tense pause – Sal doesn't answer)** See, I just don't get that... A drunk driver wrecks my life and I end up at the pointy end of a war I'm conscripted into just to keep my house – my bunker – from the very body responsible for compensating me?

- Sally** Only if their offer is higher than the amount of money the judge ends up awarding to you... You'll still get some compensation...
- Simon** Whatever that means. How much'll be left over after I'm up for all the court costs – theirs and my lawyers... That's how this thing works, right?
- Sally** Yeah...and the difference between their offer and the amount the judge awards?
- Simon** **(Incredulous)** Fuck...You know the worst thing about being in a fight like this? Knowing you can't be anywhere else, doing anything else, just to preserve what you took for granted.

**Screen *Pinnacles Dawn*.**

- Simon** And blood seeps into the world and the world into blood!
- Sally** Simon...
- Simon** Bla bla bla!!! You don't know what to say – do you? Cos there is nothing to say.
- Sally** I know enough to know that I'm really worried about you.

**Screen the footage of Simon taking photos on the beach at night...**

- Simon** The straw man is a scarecrow... **(Long pause)** You're thinking I might top myself! **(Pause)** I am not mad. Stop trying to help me.
- Sally** Why...
- Simon** Cos ya can't. And all this just makes me worse! You can't stop the storms I have in me... even if you did believe them, Sal...
- Sally** I do believe you...

**Simon** (He holds his head) Storms...

**Sally** If... I can't... help you... then at least help me ...?

**Simon pulls out a postcard...**

**Simon** You know when I first developed my photographs, right...? But I've never been able to describe the beauty of my photographs anymore than I can my breakage! **(Slight pause)** I've tried to find a way to tell you this so many times... I don't see a storm anymore Sal, I *feel it!*

**Screen *Atlantis* -**

**Simon** It was all an accident. I knew Steph was leaving before she left... Nearly every door in the house had fist holes in 'em... **(Silence)** Even then I was conscripted to a foreign land... I was still in the same house but in *no-man's-land*.

**Sally** Le terrain vagues...

**Simon** In the end, she was scared... so were the kids... I knew it couldn't go on... So I did something dumb and bought the Nikon...

**Sally** Dumb?

**Simon** I'd lost my job – didn't have any money... But I thought I'd photograph them before they left me.

**Sally** You were sure they would?

**Simon** You know those moments only a family shares? And I'm not talking about the Friday night movie... You know... Those smiles... just a

finger running down a shoulder as you wait for them to get the milk out of the fridge? I wasn't able to share them... So I thought I'd photograph them... To capture them

**Sally**

And did you?

**Simon**

**(Nods)** Sham amateur crap...

**Sally**

Can I see them?

**Screen *bad* portraits... then the *empty house*... then fade.**

**Simon**

Nar... I destroyed them. When they left... **(He pulls out the postcard)** You remember me talking about my old mad uni mate, Tim McPherson?

**Sally**

Yeah?

**Simon**

Every time he'd get manic you knew the crash had to come... I saw him the night before he died... He said to me *everything ever created in the universe was inside him*. I thought it was just manic bullshit.

All I could think was thank Christ I'm not like him! Then two days after he'd hurled himself under that truck... **(Points to the postcard)** I got that in the mail... It was like getting a postcard from *the other side*...

**Sally**

*No one saw a thing as the Seine swept Celan under its wheels like a truck...*

**Simon**

It's one of his one line poems: Monochords ... Read the other one.

**Sally**

*Come the Sabbath - Mr Celan - he dead...*

**Simon**

I got hold of Paul Celan's *Selected Poems*. So beautiful... stark as lightning yet broken...

**(Pause)** Beauty and pain woven in every word. Four weeks later, I'm sitting on the dunny, and I read the last lines Celan ever wrote before he threw himself in the river Seine: *come the Sabbath...* Sabbath – rest, refreshment, redemption.

**Simon** That was the very night I was hit by my drunk driver. At the time I was talking to Steph on my mobile but I was thinking about what Tim meant, fuck, what Celan meant by *come the Sabbath* - when bang!! My own *big bang* happened and my new universe started to unfold.

**Sally** And...

**Simon** The beauty in the breakage, Sal. We're all broken. Even God is broken... Especially God...

**Sally** And that's why you chose to photograph lightning.

**Simon** What is it with you psychologists and choice?

**Screen photograph and monochord:**

***It found me – it has never been about what I find...***

**(Pause)** After I destroyed all those mug shots of Steph and the kids, I was about to throw the camera away...But I kept getting this strange calling from the sea...you know, my beach I surfed as a kid... I thought I'd go down and try to photograph the sunset... The sea's Sabbath... instead there was this storm on the horizon... As it grew dark the storm seemed to come for me... So I just stood back and something said leave the shutter open and see what it sees out there. Just leave it open... it's

a feeling... a *creation-ness* - that's all... It's not something you can see – it's something you *feel*..

**Simon looks puzzled...**

**Sally** You're seeing Andrew again tomorrow, aren't you?  
**(Pause)** Simon... we will get through this...  
 Promise me... promise me, Simon ... you will keep this appointment tomorrow? **(Pause... exiting)** I'll talk to Andrew tonight, OK? OK?  
 What Tim did – what Celan did – was suicide  
 Simon! It wasn't beautiful. But your photography is.

**Simon** And I can't do it without my bunker... **(Slight pause)** It's my world... it's my country...

**Segue into Scene 8...**

**Scene 8**

**Andrew is at his office desk studying from a journal and writing notes furiously. He suddenly stops writing – deep in thought. He sighs... then begins to reach for the phone. He stops himself and looks at his watch. Then he picks up the phone regardless and dials...**

**Andrew** Bonjour... C'est moi... **(Slight pause)** Oui... moi...  
**(Looks perturbed)** Oh! C'est toi Luc? **(Slight pause)** Oui, c'est papa, en Australie... Oui... Sa va!?  
**(Slight pause)** In English? Ok... Is your Mum



there? **(Slight pause – he nods)** She's gone out?  
 Who with? Oh... Oui. Oui. Yes, I miss you too...  
**(Slight pause)** Is that a storm, I can hear? Oh...  
**(Slight pause)** Je t'aime aussi... I love you too...  
 and Gabby – how is she? Give her a big hug from  
 me... and a kiss, aussi... **(Slight pause)** I better  
 get off the phone then... Oui... I love you, Luc.  
**(Slight pause.)** Ok... Oui... Oui... A'voir...

**He hangs up...**

**The phone rings. He answers.**

**Andrew** **(In French)** Cecile, Salut... **(Slight pause – he's confused)** I'm sorry, you must have the wrong number. **(Becomes angry)** Who is this? **(Slight pause)** Who are you? **(Slight pause)** Simon Sharrin... **(Slight pause)** Yeah, well... **(Slight pause)** You... are... not... on my side!

**Andrew looks at the receiver and hangs it up. The phone starts to ring again. He appears anxious and checks his watch. He stands and turns the answering service on...**

**Phone** **(Answering Service)** Hello, you have reached Doctor Andrew Mcleod, please leave a message... Thankyou...

**He stands as if paralysed...**

**Cecile** **(Through the answering service speaker)**  
 Hello... Andrew... Hello! Andrew, est – tu là?  
 C'est moi, Cecile... *Et l'echo répondis, mèrde!* **(In English)** Ok, I will say this for you in English! What I have done is not a crime! I am sorry if I have hurt you... Ma douleur... *Celui qui vous aime, parle de*

*mon coeur...* Remember Gabrielle's letter...  
remember what she said: *Celui qui vous aime,*  
*parle de mon coeur: Celui qui vous aime, parle de*  
*mon coeur.*

**Andrew moves towards the phone... Lighting change...  
Segue into Scene 9...**

### **Scene 9**

**Andrew's office... Andrew is deep in thought... Screen  
World War 1 photos of Passchendaele etc...  
Explosions/thunderclaps are heard emerging out of the  
music. Enter Simon moving awkwardly through a *no-  
man's-land* ... *Fragments and Lightning* is falling all  
about him... Fade music and change lighting back to  
*office*. Simon picks himself up and moves in pain to  
Andrew's office... knocks...**

**Andrew** Simon... please come in... take a seat...  
**Simon** Sitting hurts...  
**Andrew** Sure...

**Simon sits down but is in too much discomfort and  
stands again...**

**Andrew** Sally phoned me yesterday and told me things  
didn't go well at the pre-trial conference.  
**Simon** They didn't wanna conference.  
**Andrew** I agree...  
**Simon** What?  
**Andrew** I agree. They want a test case Simon.

**Simon** A test case?

**Andrew** How's your pain?

**Simon** Nuthin's changed...

**Andrew** Did you take those pills?

**Simon** Opiates? Oh yeah...

**Andrew** And?

**Simon** Do you like the heat here? In summer?

**Andrew** No – I hate it... Much prefer France's weather...

**Simon** You know those heatwaves we get in February? Being in constant pain is sorta like a February that never ends... and there's no air conditioning... and...

**Andrew** And the opiates gave you air conditioning...?

**Simon** You're the sorta bloke who interrupts a lot aren't ya? **(Pause)** And the sun never sets into a blood red sky – there's no colours or cool at the end of the day... It's always high noon. No Sabbath... Those opiates were like the best sunset I've ever known in my life...

**Andrew** Your not taking too many, are you? Opiates can enable you to get on with your life or they can take it over - but they're not *the* magic bullet. They're just another bullet **(Slight Pause)**... but very useful when you're in the trenches... **(Pause)** That sunset story of yours is interesting...

**Simon** It's not my favourite...

**Andrew** Story?

**Simon** I think that's all we really have?

**Andrew** No! We have evidence – real evidence...

**Simon** Yeah, well I looked up what you call evidence and it sounds like a story to me.

**Andrew** Do you remember when I first examined you, how I tapped you on the shoulder? Well, if I were to tap someone who doesn't have your pain state, initially it wouldn't bother them. But after ten minutes it would start to feel dull and heavy. After thirty minutes it would begin to ache. After an hour they would hurt. And after two hours they would be begging me to stop. **(Slight Pause)** It's called "wind-up" and it's the brain's response to a stimulus that builds up over time...

**Simon** So why did the tapping hurt me straight away?

**Andrew** Because your brain's already built up the pain... like a ...memory

**Simon** Let me get this straight... You're saying I received the equivalent of...like a fortnight's tapping in the moment the truck hit me?

**Andrew** Very probably, and it's still building up in incredibly complex ways that intensify and flux unpredictably.

**Simon** **(Pause)** So the story goes, right.

**Andrew** Do you have favourite story then? **(Pause)**

**Simon** Storms...

**Andrew** Storms?

**Simon** There's a storm raging inside me. Like all storms it gets a life of its own and it's difficult to predict how strong it will grow and for how long it'll last but inside me there is thunder and lightning going off everywhere. And they're looking for strained fucking muscles in my neck and back with the equivalent of polaroid snapshots.

**A silence...**

**Simon** That's what I call your CT Scans and MRIs and X-rays and whatnot. They just go 'click' and in a fraction of a second, expect to capture what's going on. **(Pause)** But to photograph a storm you gotta be open to the world... patient... and only when yr in the dark the most, leave yr shutter open with the lens set to infinity... Then, what's really out there comes to you – not the other way around. Trouble with all your evidence – it's gotta be the hunter... But what yr searching for gets frightened off by 'the hunt'. You should wonder more than you hunt... then, it'll come to you.

**Andrew** How the accident came to you?

**Simon** No! The storm! God for a bright guy...

**Andrew** So when your portraits of your family failed you thought you'd conjure up a storm?

**Simon** Sal *has* been telling you some stuff hasn't she...?

**Andrew** Like I said – we're all on the same side.

**Simon** Yr having trouble with this story, aren't you?

**Andrew** So the storm came to you?

**Simon** Mmm.

**Andrew** And?

**Simon** And what?

**Andrew** You felt your pain go into the storm?

**Simon** I hope yr not mocking me? **(Pause)** Lets just say that what was outside of me was inside me and what was inside me was outside of me **(Slight pause)** but they always had been and it all just...

**Andrew** Went away... The pain?

**Simon** Pain's just a word... But what happened to me in that storm... I dunno... Lets just say it was

better than the sunset those pills gave me.

Then the storm passed overhead and...

**Andrew** And what...? What!

**Simon** I took some photos...

**Andrew** Is that all... **(Pause)** I mean, how long before the pain came back...

**Simon** I don't think it went away exactly... Even when yr not in pain it's still there – lurking in all of us... **(Pause)**. Yr looking for the neurochemical that causes pain aren't you? So you can find the nut to put on the bolt that kills pain once and for all? **(Pause)** Now that would be the war to end all wars. **(He stands and moves to the portrait)** Let me know what God looks like when you find him. But pain and God are alike like that – you don't find them – they find you, eh.

**Andrew** Do you think it's that simple?

**Simon** Do you think *that is* simple...?

**There's a distant rumble of thunder...**

**Exit Simon... Andrew, perplexed, stands and moves to the portrait... Turns and replays Cecile's message:**

**Message** Ok, I will say this for you in English! What I have done is not a crime! I am sorry if I have hurt you... Ma douleur... *Celui qui vous aime, parle de mon coeur...* Remember Gabrielle's letter... remember what she said: *Celui qui vous aime, parle de mon coeur: Celui qui vous aime, parle de mon coeur.*

**Andrew**      Whoever loves you speaks from my heart...  
 Whoever loves you... speaks... from my  
 heart...

**Music up... Segue into Scene 10...**

## **Scene 10**

**Screen** Weather radar with an intense storm  
 approaching. Continue music...

**Simon** moves through to his computer... **Andrew** reads  
 through papers then gathers some up while **Sally** tosses  
 and turns in her bed...

**Simon's** computer chimes with an incoming message...

**Screen**      **Hi Simon... Sorry I've been offline...**

**Simon**      **(Types)** How ya doin', Mary...

**Screen**      **Billy's funeral was beautiful... The pastor  
 read out his letter... Billy'd been out with  
 his seals again last week... The last time he  
 dived with them for hours and hours. He  
 said they had been calling to him for  
 months and he could no longer ignore the  
 things in our lives that call to us so strongly  
 from that other world that is in this one...**

**Andrew** is calling at **Sally's** door. He carries some  
 papers and his **Grandfather's** war letters... Fade music...

**Andrew**      Sally! Sal! It's me – Andrew! Sally!

**Sally** Oh God I remember this...Are you drunk??  
Hang on... **(Goes back inside –)** It's Ok...Its  
only a colleague, ... OK... OK... **(Back out to  
Andrew)** What is it?

**Andrew** Oh **(Pause)** Am I interrupting something

**Sally** **(Blocks his entrance)** Sorry... What is it?  
Actually I'm glad your here

**Andrew** Look, I got this phone call...spooky... **(She  
cocks her head)** He seemed to have  
information about Simon's trial. He said the  
Commission will be going for the jugular...

**Sally** Slow down...

**Andrew** He said that I would never be taken seriously  
because I wasn't a member of the circle...

**Sally** Andrew...

**Andrew** What circle?

**Sally** Andrew!

**Andrew** He said that I should watch my back!

**Andrew** He also said he was on my side... Prick.

**Sally** He said he was on your side?

**Andrew** Yes... But naturally, I didn't believe him.

**Sally** Oh... I think you can, actually. Just how good is  
this evidence of yours?

**Andrew** It's huge... In every reputable journal across  
the world. It will rewrite what we know about  
the brain, and not just pain, but memories,  
music, everything – maybe even love!

**Sally** You're sure?

**Andrew** I'd stake my life on it.

**Sally** **(With a worried smile)** You may have to...

**Lightning and thunder is seen and heard.**



**Sally** Is it true you've been referred to the Medical Board for administering inappropriate opiates to your patients?

**A louder and closer strike and thunderclap...**

**Andrew** It's bullshit... It'll never stick... This storm's getting closer?

**Sally** Is it true?

**Andrew** Yes, it's true...

**Sally** And you know Simon is one of the cases that has been referred to them?

**Andrew** What?!!

**Sally** Didn't you know! I too got a phone call - this morning... The Commission's refusing to pay for any further consults Si has to see either of us.

**Andrew** Oh fuck! I'll either get struck off or driven out.

**Sally** Thanks for your concern... We could all lose our bunkers in this.

**Andrew** Well the commission knows we have to win this or we're fucked... Jesus. Merde. These people just don't realise this is something that can help tell the brain's story. DNA has the double helix – the solar system has the atom... but pain – it only has Descartes' bell...

**Sally** It's late Andrew...

**Andrew** Until this guy stuck away in Perth, so burdened with his own pain has found the metaphor: Complex systems theory, self-organisation, neuroplasticity and lightning - it all fits! Eureka!!! And all two minutes from his house on his local beach. And what really gets me is

he had to lose nearly everything to find it. And he finds it in his only reason left to live!

**Sally** Well I just hope it keeps him alive...

**Andrew** Do you really think he would...? I'm doing it again aren't I?

**Sally** Yeah

**Andrew** And you're doing it too. I remember your eyes – getting to the heart of a thing – not just the idea, holding on to a thought warm until it was hatched...Thinking about who it was for and giving it to them, newborn...A warm beating heart

**Andrew moves to her.**

**Sally** You know when you asked me if I still had any feelings for you... Well... I've thought about... how to... tell you...for the longest time... It's been like walking a beach that backs onto a desert... And any rain that came always fell out-to-sea? But now this strange freshness fills the air... again...

**Music** *I miss you like the deserts miss the rain*

**They kiss...**

**Introduce an intense blue lighting.**

**Simon** (Types) Mary...

**Screen** **Billy said he'd had a dream about my bad arm... I was on his beach looking at the seals playing in the waves... He was standing behind me and playing my arm as**

a violin. The seals danced in the waves...  
 Afterwards, he wrote, he gently lowered my  
 arm and then walked into the sea and sank  
 into his beloved music...

Wave wash up... Enter Simon who walks into Scene 11...

## Scene 11

Music up...

The beach... Enter Simon, transfixed by the storm that  
 has built up off the coast. Thunder is plainly heard.  
 Video footage of him in real time is screened... He stares  
 up out over the audience... He is in great pain. He takes  
 some pills... Simon shakes his head and smiles  
 ironically...

**Simon** So this is it, eh! Mmph... No last words...? Oh  
 well... **(He takes some more pills and stares  
 at his image on the screen... he waves to  
 the camera)** I wonder... who it was... they've  
 been filming... all this time...? **(He takes a few  
 drugged steps towards his screened  
 image... He squints and studies his own  
 image on the screen... He waves to his  
 other...)** The Phantom... Phuck the Phantom!  
**(Direct address)** What – just cos I talk to you  
 guys like this you think I can't walk into the  
 sea? Take a look at the person next to you –  
 go on! You think for one tiny moment just cos  
 you can talk with them, touch them, they can't

disappear! **(Takes out his mobile)** If ya love 'em - keep 'em close... That's why we carry these things, right? **(Throws his mobile into the sea/audience)**

**The storm answers with Lightning and thunder...**

**Simon** Yeah yeah... **(He turns and walks to the stage edge...)** I'm coming...

**The video footage stills, which captures Simon on the screen like a photograph. Simon stands centre stage he takes some more pills and walks towards the stage edge... Introduce horizontal blue lighting to connote Simon walking into water, which rises as he goes. As it gets to his chest he dives into it ... Music up. End Act 1.**

**Act 2**

**Scene 12**

**Music up ...**

**Screen Sprite phenomenon (real footage from a storm, with commentary from a *scientist* about such phenomena which is played during the Sprite's emergence)**

**Commentary** Sprites are things we had no idea existed in storms. We have still very little idea about how or why they happen...

other than they seem to be emergent phenomena... Storms are unpredictable... their complexity builds very quickly from what seem very simple systems... from which emergent properties like lightning and these sprites *emerge*... We need to understand why this is so...

**Enter a surreal sea/storm Sprite...**

**Screen Sprite circling him in a dance... Then slowly as her dance nears him the music intensifies and light flickers from above. She ushers him back to shore... Reduce lighting as she does. Fade music... Simon is on the shore.... He tries to get up but can't and he sits holding his head in his hands...**

**Intense dark blue lighting up... Music up (*Come on baby light my fire*)... Cease Video footage... Screen *Sorrento* series...**

**Screen the photograph *Seal in freefall* for three seconds only. Simon struggles to get to his hands and knees. Then another photograph of the same series (of an individual seal) is screened for six seconds. Simon looks up at it and gets to his feet. He takes a step, staggers, but doesn't fall. He takes another step, staggers even more but resists the fall.**

**The first light of the dawn appears on the screen behind him... *Dawn at Sugarloaf Rock*.**

**Simon turns and surveys the sea/audience. He staggers but steadies himself again... Simon walks to**

**the stage edge and starts playing 'Arm as Violin'...Music up...**

**Simon** (Recitative) Argh Billy... Billy boy... Why did the seals take you... and send me back...? Dancers in the waves... that beloved music saves... Billy... they took you but sent me in... Billy... Play that arm as violin....

**Segue into Scene 13...**

**Scene 13**

**Multivalent scene...Sally is in her office... Enter Simon... dishevelled...**

**Sally** Simon what is it? What's happened?  
**Simon** Nothing... everything...  
**Sally** What do you mean?  
**Simon** I wanted to walk into the sea... Wanted to swim in to the storm... Wilder than Celan's Seine but gentler than Tim's truck... I did walk into the sea... Like Billy... Sal...

**Enter Andrew in Court... he enters the witness box...**


**Andrew** May I show the court a drawing completed by Renes Descartes in 1644?  
**Simon** How do you think it'll go...? The court case...  
**Sally** I'm sure Andrew will give it everything he's got...

- Simon** Will you come to court with me?
- Sally** Yes
- Simon** Are you going to tell Andrew about him
- Sally** I don't know
- Simon** You should tell him
- Sally** I know, but I'm...
- Simon** **(making chicken noises)**
- Sally** Yeah chicken (She hits him) you asked for that!  
I'm worried he might get hurt.
- Simon** He might not

The following image is projected on to the screen:

**The Hard-Wired Nervous System**

“If for example fire comes near the foot, the minute particles of this fire, which as you know move with great velocity, have the power to set in motion the spot of the skin of the foot which they touch, and by this means pulling upon the delicate thread which is attached to the spot of the skin, they open up at the instant the pore against which the delicate thread ends, **just as by pulling at one end of a rope makes to strike at the same instant a bell which hangs at the other end.**”



Rene Descartes (1644), *L'Homme*

- Andrew** Descartes' bell... is the basis for all the medical opinions heard so far in this court. It requires though, the brain to be a machine – like a computer. But if the brain was a machine then it had a ghost haunting it – the mind. If then, there was pain but no fire, then this pain must be all in the mind – like a phantom. But we now

know the brain cannot be separated from the body...

- Simon** **(Pinches Sally on the arm)** Is that your brain or your body?
- Andrew** All his scans and x-rays are normal. But all the recent evidence says there is a severe pain the brain itself creates. The plaintiff has suffered an enormous physical impact.
- Sally** They will need to show the court the photographs of the car. Will you be Ok with that? **(The photographs of the damaged car are screened, Simon winces)** You know they're going to have problems with your loss of consciousness.
- Andrew** We can clearly see how destructive the impact was... He lost consciousness. But I am not convinced that he was *knocked* unconscious – in that his head was hit by or knocked against any object.
- Simon** Wait til he brings up the shell-shock stuff!

### **Screen photos of Passchendaele series...**

- Andrew** In World War 1 soldiers were subject to high explosive blasts that caused no obvious injuries yet they fell either unconscious or were killed instantly.
- Sally** I still can't work out why some were killed and some weren't!
- Andrew** It was a mystery. It was termed *commotio cerebri*: meaning a commoted brain or shell shock. But the many soldiers who survived these blasts, woke up in pain, sometimes not being able to talk – they even lost the use of



limbs. Many of them, including the ones who were killed, had any obvious injuries. So, their symptoms were diagnosed as being “all in the mind”, when it was a brain and nervous system disturbance all along.

**Sally** And that will take him to Andrew’s...

**Simon & Sally** Playful brain...

**Andrew** High explosive blasts and car accidents cause high-impact traumas upon the brain and nervous system, which, for want of a better language cause the brain to wire up pain states. Gold standard evidence exists from the most credible universities and medical journals across the world... its momentum builds like an incoming tide. Sometimes called Neuropathic Pain Syndrome where persistent and severe pain rages without obvious tissue damage. Neuropathic pain is far more complex and dynamic than merely tugging on a rope to ring a bell and... gets a life of it own... like lightning in a storm... A much better metaphor than a little bell that’s been ringing unchecked since 1644!!

**Simon** **(Sings)** The time to hesitate is through... No time to wallow in the mire... Girl we could only lose... and our love become a funeral pyre...

**Change lighting, music (slow powerful wistful rendition of *Come on baby light my fire*) up.**

**Lighting change, music up and cue very distant lightning with thunder.**

**Segue into Scene 14...**

## Scene 14

**Café Lavenir – screen *Sunset Lightning* photos...Sally and Andrew sit at *their* table drinking wine. There are distant rumbles and flickers of lightning (not flashes or strikes) of a receding storm throughout – but widely spaced.**

**Andrew** I'm glad you were able to make it

**Sally** How do you think it went today?

**Andrew** I think it went well. I want to talk to you about last night.

**Sally** You don't have to...

**Andrew** No I do. Not have to, want to. Are you involved with someone? Is it serious?

**Sally** What difference would it make. You and Cecile...

**Andrew** Cecile...She rang the other night...

**Sally** Is she missing you?

**Andrew** Anything but!

**Sally** Do you miss her?

**Andrew** Not now...

**Sally** What did she say?

**Andrew** Her message told me to read *Gabrielle's letter...*

**Sally** **(Cocks her head)** Who's Gabrielle?

**Andrew** O'l Bob's French lover.... They met in Arcachon, , during World War One. Bob returned to Australia promising he would send for her but he never did... In her letter Gabrielle scolded him for not honouring his promise.

Cecile's last words on the answering service the other night were Gabrielle's last words to O' Bob: *Celui qui vous aime, parle de mon coeur.* **(A long pause)** Whoever loves you speaks from my heart...

**A silence...**

**Sally**           Whoever loves you speaks from my heart...  
**(Pause)** Cecile is asking you to love her...

**Andrew**       To love her?

**Sally**           Enough to let her go...

**Andrew**       I think I have.

**Sally**           We'll see. O' Bob's pain... stayed with him for the rest of his life... **(Andrew nods)** But what became of Gabrielle...? Did she just disappear like Echo?

**Musician gives a loud breath which echoes on a delay effect...**

**Continue echo effect which builds into the music**  
***Narcissus and Echo...***

**Segue into Scene 15...**

**Scene 15**

**Multivalent scene... Andrew in court – Sally and Simon up stage...**

**Andrew** The *mind* is just a word that echoes in us... like Aristotle's heart. We use it all the time – *broken heart, heavy heart, soft heart, light heart...* but none of us think this has anything to do with the cardiac system. Soon Descartes' mind will be excluded from how the brain actually works. The idea that the human heart is the locus of our soul is just a story... but so is the mind...

**Sally** So tell me about Billy?

**Simon** I was searching the net to see if anyone apart from Tim wrote monochords... I came across Billy in California - he wrote monochords about his pain...

**Sally** Do you have any?

**Andrew** May I show the court an MRI scan?

**Insert Katherine Bushnell's scans here...**

It defies common sense but our common sense has often misled us... Phantom Limb Pain. Pain in a limb that has been amputated is another one that defies all common sense.

**Simon** *The phantom haunting the machines' ghost is pain...*

**Andrew** This pain cannot be caused by the limb – it's gone – so there's nothing to ring the bell... but the pain is real and shows up on MRI scans.

**Sally** Wow...

**Andrew** No credible medical practitioner doubts phantom limb pain now.

**Simon** Yeah... Billy found what I found with my photos... We got talking on this chat line and

decided he would write some monochords to go with my photos...

**Sally** Will you show me?"

**Andrew** The first scan on the left is of a subject in severe pain... The red to yellow and green areas circled are areas of perfusion that signal pain... See how the second one, taken after the *person* has heard soothing music of their choice has come up as blue in the auditory cortex here... but has modulated – yeah ok - turned down the pain on the forebrain - circled here... As a traumatic experience may precipitate pain – a creative one may soothe it.

**Simon** We were just starting to get them together...

**Sally** Did they help with his pain too?

**Simon** Yeah...

**Andrew** Like turning down a volume knob on a hifi. May I show the court another Scan?

### **Screen MRI (scan #2)...**

**Andrew** This scan is of a patient in persistent pain like the Plaintiff...

**Sally** Yeah...and?

**Andrew** There's no bell in the brain... no one place where the pain is centred – rather the neural activity is noncentred – the brain's going off all over the place!

### **Exit Andrew...**

**Simon** It helped... him – but what's going on is too... it comes back...

**Sally** So what happened with Billy?

**Simon** They were great... His monochords with my...

**Sally** Yeah I got that bit... But you said you walked into the sea, like Billy... and met his seals??

**Simon** Did I?

**Sally** Yes!

**Simon** Storms... You can't conquer 'em... Ya gotta wait for the bastards to come to you – get used to living in the dark, waiting... Otherwise you'll scare 'em off!

**Sally** Scare off what, Si?

**Simon** The things that emerge... The miracles... things... You gotta learn how to keep the companionship of sprites...

**Sally** Sprites?

**Simon** That's what Mary's been saying all along...

**Sally** Mary? OK... You have to let me in on what's going on. Either we're a team or we're not. I'll stop being your clin psych if you stop being...

**Simon** What!

**Sally** OK... the *King of Fucking Pain*. **(Pause)** Simon ...please... We're all in this together...

**Simon** I can't lose my bunker Sal... I just, can't.

**She nears him and he leans his head on her shoulder.**

**Lighting change transition to Scene 16...**

## **Scene 16**

**Simon is at his computer on the chat line with Mary....**

**Screen** Hi Si...How's the storms?

**Simon** **(Types)** Met Billy's seals in the last one...

**Screen**      **What happened?**

**Simon**      They sent me back... I think...

**Screen**      **You think?**

**Simon**      They're calling me back tho...

**Screen**      **That could be a good thing?**

**Simon**      Like Billy?

**Screen**      **You're NOT Billy... the future's not that predictable. Maybe you need to photograph something other than lightning?**

**Simon**      *What locks our knowledge keeps out, enters without knocking...*

**Screen**      ☺ **Your monochord or Billy's?**

**Simon**      Mine...

**Screen**      **Got anymore?!**

**Simon**      Maybe...

**Screen**      **Lovely...**

**Simon**      Are you still coming out if Sal and I get this programme up?

**Screen**      **Wild horses couldn't stop me or should I say seals! Gotta go... xx**

**Simon**      Me too... (pause – a moment here) x (pause)

x

**Segue into Scene 17...**

## **Scene 17**

**Andrew's office... He sits at his desk, working on his laptop and with some papers. He picks up and looks at various WW1 photographs including the Passchendaele series. Flash these photos together with high explosive flashes of light and rumbles that are only just**

**distinguishable from the lightning and thunder of the storm outside. Enter Sally after knocking. Fade the photographs... Andrew looks at Sally and sees something is wrong...**

**Andrew** Salut... Are you OK?  
**Sally** **(Nods)** You were dynamic today. The witness box suits you ...  
**Andrew** Are you mocking me? **(A silence)** I know that look...  
**Sally** What look?  
**Andrew** That come here, go away look.  
**Sally** Oh maybe just sniffing around for a little more... I don't know... proof? Do you have to give anymore *evidence*?  
**Andrew** Tomorrow morning...  
**Sally** What are these?

**She picks up and views some photos which are screened and faded respectively, as she views them.**

**Andrew** Some of Ol' Bob's photos...  
**Sally** I didn't know he was a war photographer?  
**Andrew** He wasn't. He was a linesman – but he carried a box-brownie disguised in his *gear*. **(Pause)** War...  
**Sally** Men and their big bangs! Jesus - there's your *it*.  
**Andrew** What?  
**Sally** War. Remember. You said to me that you went back to France to see *where it all began* for Ol' Bob.  
**Andrew** So... **(She doesn't respond – instead she moves on to his papers, but he places his right hand to protect them)**



- Sally** Are these his letters?
- Andrew** Yes...
- Sally** Is Gabrielle's letter here, too? **(Andrew nods)**  
What does it say?
- Andrew** She just echoes the promises he didn't keep.
- Sally** What is the sentence just before... *Whoever loves you speaks from my heart...?*
- Andrew** **(Picks up the letter and reads)** Je vous verrai en Australie... *I will see you in Australia...*
- Sally** I will see you in Australia...

**Sally takes it off him and tries to read it... but can't...**

- Sally** Je... vous... verr...ai... **(Pause)** Shit Drew!  
That's just what you wrote to me – in the only postcard you ever sent me... *I will see you in Australia...*
- Andrew** Hey, hey... stop, stop, stop.
- Sally** I think I know why your wife left you...
- Andrew** What...
- Sally** She didn't feel loved...

**She looks at him... Studies his face... touches his face in the same way.**

- Sally** **(Examines him)** Narcissus...
- Andrew** Sal...
- Sally** That's why you came back and left your kids behind... Isn't it?
- Andrew** Steady!
- Sally** You can't bear pain! So when you can't fight it you run from it! You love this courtroom stuff – don't you! – cos it's the big fight to conquer pain - the war to win all wars!

**Andrew**      **(Confused)** No...

**She moves to kiss him on the lips but he turns his face away enough for her to kiss him on his cheek.**

**Sally**          **(Takes his chin in her hand)** Narcissus.

**Andrew contemplates... Sally moves to the Narcissus and Echo print.**

**Andrew**      No it's my colleagues who gaze into the pond...

**Sally**          And we're back!

**Andrew**      Only the phantom isn't a nymph – it's the image of themselves as all conquering medical experts.

**Sally**          **(Snores)**

**Andrew**      The real echoes are like my grandfather... All he could do when the pain was unbearable was echo the last words of the diagnosis they gave him: *neurosis* and one of the bravest men of the war was reduced to the shame of a sick mind... Something that doesn't even exist!!

**Sally**          What and you don't wanna be all knowing! Look me in the eye and say you don't wanna beat pain?! You can't fix everything... **(She takes his face in her hands)**

**Andrew**      *Soulager la douleur est divin...*

**Sally**          Whatever you're saying in French...

**Andrew**      To relieve pain is divine... To relive pain is divine!

**Sally**          Oh Drew... but what if God is broken... what if God is in pain too? **(A silence – lightning and thunder)** Tell me... By pointing out where

they're wrong – does it make you right?

**(Pause)** This is something you can't win!

**Andrew** **(long pause)** That's just what Si's lawyer told me today – after my testimony... He reckons they're gonna carve him up and serve him on a platter... Bad father, bad husband...

**Sally** Bad person...

**Andrew** Worse – a *weak mind*...

**Haunting underwater music and lighting up... Exit**

**Andrew as Sally...**

**Segue into Scene 18...**

## **Scene 18**

**Simon's bunker... Screen Storm Radar scans....**

**Simon and Sal are at his computer.**

**Simon** Mary is a *fellow pain sufferer* I chat on-line with... She and Billy were... we talk a lot... How her arm became a violin...

**Sally** *Arm as violin*... beautiful.

**Simon** I dunno... Billy had this dream that he was playing her arm out of pain like it was a violin.... They were standing on *his* beach... When her pain's bad she shuts her eyes and imagines Billy playing her arm outta pain...

**Sally** So what's Billy's story.

**Simon** Same old, same old. Billy was in an accident at work... He fell off a ladder and hurt his back... no one believed him. Years later he's nothing

left except his pain – same ol’ deal, right – doesn’t matter where you are in the world, Descartes’ bell keeps fucken tolling yeah.

**Sally** Yeah...And the seals?

**Simon** Like me, he found himself walking the beach he’d surfed as a kid. And one time, he saw these seals surfing so close he could have touched them... So, against every piece of medical advice, he swam out to them. And voila! God’s a bastard!!

**Sally** Billy swims with seals, so God’s a bastard?

**Simon** For not letting us have joy without pain – yes! He’s a bastard!!

**Sally** Because pain and joy sometimes get mixed up together?

**Simon** Cos they are always mixed together - cos they can never be separated cos they come outta the same thing.

**Sally** So God’s a bastard but he’s also beautiful?

**Simon** Why is that so hard for people to get?

**Sally** Maybe you gotta be in enough pain before you can get it.

**Simon** **(A silence)** Maybe that’s why Billy wanted to be with his seals... He said they were calling him... into ‘the green world... of colours and play...’ One day he paid up all his bills and rent and...

**Sally** Drowned himself... Is that what happened to you?

**Simon** They sent me back...

**Simon** Take a look at this. **(Screen Atlantis).** Everyone wants to know how I got all the colours, right?!

**Sally** Isn't it something to do with the mercury vapour coming from the streetlights.

**Simon** Yeah – but why green? And why does green make us *feel* it more. Take a look at this.

**(Screen Storm Radar)**

**Simon** Notice how the colours are more intense in the centre....

**Enter Andrew with a CD rom... Simon checks his watch...**

**Simon** That was quick...I need to clear a few things up... these phantoms of the mind... you were talking about? Are these the scans?

**Andrew** Yes...

**Simon puts the CD into the computer. Screen MRI Scan 2...**

**Simon** These are the same Scans you used in court today...?

**Andrew** Yes.

**Simon** Scans of pain?

**Andrew** In a round about way – perfusion - blood flow related to pain... yes.

**Simon** *Look if you have eyes...*

These are what – different moments in time – like a cartoon flips from one frame to another?

**(Andrew nods)** And the colours represent pain in all these different parts of the brain... right?

**Andrew** Well yeah... Red's the most perfuse, yellow the next, then green and blue.

**Simon** But you said their scans didn't pick up my pain?

**Andrew** Because they're using the equivalent of a box brownie? But these are special scans more like your Nikon – expensive – limited to research projects in universities - the Commission won't pay for these...

**Simon** Or these!

**Simon plays the short film 'Lightning from space' which is screened...**

**Simon** It's a lightning storm filmed from space...

**Lightning and thunder... Andrew slowly smiles...**

**Andrew** It's amazing... How did you think of this?

**Simon** Think of it? I live it everyday of my life...

**Andrew** My God...

**Sally** Maybe... just maybe...The beauty of the universe in pain...

**Simon** **(Clicks a button the computer – Screen Radar of storm approaching)** And this little beauty is heading right for us!!

**Simon begins to gather all his photographic gear...**

**Simon** You're gonna use this in court tomorrow, right?!

**Andrew** It's brilliant! But...

**Simon** That doesn't sound good!

**Andrew** I'll use it but, it may not... do it.

**Simon** Whaddaya mean...?

**Andrew** Unless your pain can be measured... the court...

**Simon** Measure pain? Ya can't! Even you said these scans are just measuring blood flow - like this radar is measuring water density – it's not pain – it's not the storm – it doesn't tell you what lightning or the pain *is!!!* You just get pretty colours!!

**Sally** The court will want your specific brain measuring your specific pain... And the Commission won't even pay for you to see us anymore let alone perfusion scans. It will come down to your word against theirs...

**Simon** What, who tells the best story?

**Simon examines Sally and then Andrew... He starts breathing heavily...**

**Simon** Fuck... **(Pause – incongruent laughter) ...**

**Simon's pain nearly overcomes him. He squeezes his fists...**

**Simon** **(To Sally)** Did you know ?

**Sally** Whatever happens, they can't stop our programme. They can't stop what you've found...

**Simon** **(Pause)** What was that Ancient Greek word for pain again? Oh yeah – *Arrrrrrgh!*

**Lightning and thunder... He continues to look upward and breathes as if to inhale the whole storm...**

**Simon** Moments like these you need mobile phones... Been putting this off too long. Sal, can I borrow yours – I threw mine in the sea the other

night... I'll give it back to ya tomorrow morning... **(Pause – she hands him her mobile)** Ta...

**He gathers his photography gear up...**

**Simon**        **(Points to the radar)** Time for me to go into all the pretty colours again!

**Andrew**       They'll film you...

**Simon**        I'll be the belle of the storm, eh. Ring a fucken ding! **(Dials the phone)** Steph! I wanna talk to you about the house Chess Queen...It's time to castle... (To Sally) It's cool ...don't worry.

**Simon exits. Andrew looks at Sally...**

**Andrew**       This programme of yours? You really think it could...?

**Sally**         Oh yeah. It could be huge! What we want to do is stop people blaming themselves for their pain. If we could help them to not only understand it better, but to actually harness it's creative power like Simon. What we can't win in court we could achieve in practice?

**Andrew**       They'd still need medications!

**Sally**         Of course! It's not either or – it's both and...

**Andrew**       That would be great, but I'm not giving up on this!!

**Sally**         Who says we're giving up!

**Andrew exits...**

**Segue into Scene 19...**



## Scene 19

**Courtroom... Andrew into the Witness stand...**

**Simon walks obliquely through the multivalent space reciting monochords which are screened...**

**Andrew** In addition to the MRI scans – I'd like to show the court something that has just come to my attention that tells the story of pain beyond the bell?

**Screen film of thunderstorm taken from space over Argentina.**

**Andrew** **(As the film is played)** What we are watching is a thunderstorm taken from space – but it is, I believe, uncannily what the MRI scans of a subject in severe neuropathic pain, would look like if they could be taken over real time. I believe we are looking at is a God's eye view - the universe's equivalent of a brain producing pain - and somewhere down there on a beach, is Simon Sharrin photographing his own pain!

**Simon** ***A PHOTOGRAPH NEVER HAS WHAT IT IS BECAUSE IT YEARNES FOR WHAT IT ISN'T***

**First gentle chords of music up...**

**Andrew** What words will convince this court? Simon Sharrin is no different to the shell shock victims of World War One who were told *its all in the*

*mind...* But it's all in the brain and our brain is a more complex and wondrous thing than we ever imagined!! Credible evidence for this from the most acclaimed universities and research facilities across the world rises like an incoming tide, while all the specific evidence presented against the plaintiff in this court heralds straight out of the Flat Earth Society in the hope the plaintiff will drop off its edge...

**Simon**            **A SEA GLIMPSED IS OF EVERY OCEAN**

**Andrew**          That's why he is harassed, filmed and castigated in medical examinations and even risks losing his house under an order 24A to the very body responsible for compensating him!

**Simon**            **YOU OBSERVE ME, ALWAYS ASKING  
SILENTLY, 'PROVE IT'**

**Andrew**          This court has been told that he is a weak man – of body and mind – unable to look after his children or himself – someone unable to cope with a job or a marriage. But what he has found in the midst of this loss and staggering pain - I have only once before, in my Grandfather, seen courage like it. The Commission has made this a test case, conducted in the hope that he and all the countless thousands of others who suffer from the mystery pain, will just... go away. But this case is a test I personally, do not intend to fail!

**Segue into Scene 20...**

**Scene 20**

**Storm Scene on the Beach. Commence 'Digital Sky 3D'  
Storm video...**

**Music up...**

**Enter Simon struggling with a tripod and camera case.  
He sets up the tripod and camera – in painful stages –  
keeping a weather eye on things.**

**There is another brighter strike and louder thunderclap.**

**Enter Andrew behind Simon - conscious of his safety.  
Simon looks up at the storm. Loud overhead lightning  
and thunder crack. Simon suddenly becomes animated  
and throws his fists at the storm.**

**Simon**        So you want to take the house too do ya, ya  
                  bastard! Well have it! Take everything!!

**Slowly Simon becomes aware that his pain has abated...  
Enter Andrew... Another lightning and thunder crack...**

**Simon continues to set up his camera...**

**Andrew**        Jesus! That was close... You could feel it!!

**Simon**        Sure you wanna be here?

**Lightning and thunder.**

**Andrew**        How safe is this?!

**Simon**        Safe as houses...

**Andrew looks up at the storm.**

**Simon stands and grabs his hand-held control switch, kneels, checks his camera one more time...**

**There is another much closer and intense strike and clap. Andrew instinctively runs to Simon's side, kneels for protection and holds his arm. Simon looks sideways at him and Andrew let's go of his arm. Simon stands to welcome the storm. Andrew stays hunkered by the tripod.**

**An overhead strike and clap occurs – cueing the strike to occur on stage (if possible with FX). Andrew throws himself on the beach as if to avoid a high-explosive detonation.**

**Simon**        Yehaaa!

**Another strike occurs, followed quickly by another. Andrew is petrified but manages to look at Simon. Yet another strike occurs...**

**Simon**        **(Turns to Andrew)** You want to know what happens to me in storms – well this is it, doc!!  
No pretty colours, no fancy words... just this!!! I betcha never felt so much alive!!!

**Andrew realises that he still isn't safe. As if avoiding being shot at in a war, he moves to Simon...**

**Simon**        From the madness of the stars we are born!!

**The crescendo of the video is reached with the loudest and most dramatic strike and thunder clap. Then as sudden the storm eases, then passes...**

**Andrew** This is madness! You are mad you bastard!

**Simon** The only bastard I know around here is the spitting image of you and he's living at Sal's place!

**Andrew** **(Long pause)** Of me?

**Simon** Big bastard too. I'd say he was about sixteen.  
**(Long pause)** Your grandfather's medal was for bravery right?

**Andrew steels himself and walks towards Sally in Scene 21...**

## Scene 21

**Enter Sally. Andrew walks to her...**

**Sally** Andrew...? Is the jury still out?

**Andrew** Yeah...

**Sally** And they're likely to be for the next hundred years...

**Andrew** Were you ever going to tell me?

**Sally** I... Arrh...?

**Andrew** What's his name? Our son?

**Sally** **(A silence)** Nearly two decades ago you came into my life like... a drunken accident... and I... I have no idea what is happening but I am so overwhelmed by something in my guts. Like being in a storm... Then one day the storm's

gone but that thing inside - in my guts - is still there... and its growing... its alive... it makes you sick, it distorts you and everything about you rebels, breasts start spraying milk at delicate moments, and emotions that could clutch the sun from the sky... makes you glow as you vomit in the sheer bloody miracle of it – and then the agony of its birth... is the end of something that has only just begun... **(Pause)** I didn't see the point of telling you... at the time... But I hoped he would... In some strange space... *speak with most miraculous organ...* the way a phantom limb haunts... **(Slight pause)** Phantoms... **(Simon nods – Sally shakes her head)** He'll be... seventeen this October... He's gorgeous...My sprite!! And his name is Robert...

**Andrew** Robert..... Sal, I'm so sorry...

**Sally** I was so afraid you wouldn't want our sprite – that you couldn't give - him – us - the togetherness that we needed. I left us all in no-man's land. I should have had more of ol' Bob's courage. For all my talk about choice, I didn't give it to you. If I couldn't be certain I didn't want to know. I'm the one who should be sorry. L'avenir. You can't protect yourself from the unpredictable. - you faint in front of a café and Cecile comes into your life with *her raining hair...*

**Andrew** Cecile's gone.

**Sally** Nothing's secure that we can show... except the hope that the things we love always... always... do more than we know....

**Lighting to a light-blue wash... Continue slideshow but the theme of lightning segues into Nick Djordjevic's underwater with seals, Pinnacles' moon and landscape photography...**

**Enter Simon who picks up the mobile phone and dials.**

**Andrew** Nothing's secure?

**Sally** **(Puts two fingers on his lips)** Shhhsh...

**Simon** **(Into the phone while walking slowly towards the stage edge)** Hi Steph... It's me... **(Slight Pause)** Did your lawyers think it could be done? **(Pause)** At least the commission won't get my house that way – should the worst happen. **(Slight pause)** But the main thing is, whether they get it or not - it's over...the war's over... **(Slight pause)** Look - the reason I'm ringing is not about the house... **(Pause)** I'd like to start seeing the kids again... take 'em to the beach – play in the surf... you know - just play...

**A silence...**

**Simon** Thank you... Thank you...

**Andrew** **(To Sally)** Thank you...

**Sally** For what...?

**Andrew** For not disappearing...

**They kiss... Simon walks centre stage and addresses the audience... Music (opening to *The Beauty in the Breakage*) pianissimo throughout...**

**Simon** Now I am most weak and being at your mercy,  
I ask, as you would of any jury, that I too may  
soon have cause to thank you for sparing my  
own disappearance. It's true – all I can offer are  
glimpses of that which we cannot know, yet it  
goes, knowing as any of you do that touch  
beauty, the touching does more than it knows.  
Let sprites, seals and storms alike in most  
miraculous organ reign, that which plays in joy  
also plays in pain. Please... please as this  
music toys with both your ears and this air,  
don't let this ending be one of despair....

As you from pain would pardoned be  
Let your indulgence set me free...

**Music up to end play. Play video footage of landscapes  
to portraits: of Simon with his children; Andrew with his  
children; Andrew and Sally with Robert, then to Andrew  
with his arms around Sally holding up a newspaper  
article *PAIN PROGRAMME CREATES NEW LIFE*; then  
with all of them together on the beach smiling...**

**The End...**



I dedicate this play to all those who suffer from the *phantom* pain ... and to those who love them... and of course, to Nick and Dr John Quintner who have done it all... for so long... *Soulager la douleur est divin...*



# To Fall without Landing

A play for Radio National

by

**David Buchanan**

Cathy.....Melissa Cantwell (*Aug 30<sup>th</sup> 1000-1700, Aug 31<sup>st</sup> 1000-1400*)

Searle.....Richard Mellick (*Aug 30<sup>th</sup> 1000-1700, Aug 31<sup>st</sup> 1000-1400*)

Michelle.....Karen Rushworth (*Aug 30<sup>th</sup> 1000-1400, Aug 31<sup>st</sup> 1100-1500*)

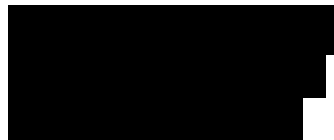
*PRODUCTION IN PERTH ABC STUDIO 621.*

**Recorded 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> August 2005**

Sound Engineer David Le May

**Produced and Directed by Gillian Berry**

**David Buchanan © 2005**



## Characters

|                 |  |
|-----------------|--|
| <b>Cathy</b>    | A woman in her late twenties, suffering from 'Vestibular Syndrome' |
| <b>Searle</b>   | Cathy's treating Consultant Psychiatrist<br>– mid 40s              |
| <b>Michelle</b> | Searle's wife  |

## Music

*Souvenir* by Something for Kate

*Endless* by Keith Jarrett Trio

## Scene 1

**MUSIC Q 1                    BEGIN THE PLAY WITH MUSIC CATHY IS HEARING IN HER HEADPHONES (SOMETHING FOR KATE'S SOUVENIR)**

**Cathy**                    *(dancing with complete abandon and singing along with certain lines in the song).*

**Enter Searle...**

**Searle**                    **(Muffled) Morning Cathy! (pause) Cathy!**

**Cathy**                    *(continues dancing and singing along...)*

**Searle**                    **(Shouting through the music) Cathy! (Pause) Cathy!!**

**SFX                    SWIRLING – AN INTRUSIVE IN-HEAD NOISE WHICH SHE HEARS WHENEVER HER EYES ARE OPEN. IT COMES AND GOES IN INTENSITY AND VARIES ACCORDING TO HER ACTIVITIES AND MOOD. THE MUSIC SHE LISTENS TO ON HER HEADPHONES MANAGES TO DROWN MOST OF THE SWIRLING OUT.**

**Cathy**                    *(pulls her head phones off).*

**MUSIC    STOPS**

**Searle**                    Cathy – I need to see you now...

**SFX                    THE SWIRLING BECOMES MORE PRONOUNCED – EVEN AGITATED.**

**Searle** You need to close your eyes and just follow my voice?

**Cathy** It won't...

**Searle** It worked last time...

**Cathy** Nothing... works!!  
*(She is going around in very small circles, which cause her to over-balance from time to time.)*

**Searle** Cathy! Let me ...

**Cathy** Stay still! Stay still you bastard!

**Searle** Close your eyes...

**Cathy** I'm not blind – am !!

SFX

PEAK SWIRLING INTO A WHINE...

**Searle** Cathy please let me help...

**Cathy** Leave me alone! Leave me! *(She puts her headphones back on)*

**MUSIC UP.**

*(She recommences dancing and singing along and instantly regains her adroitness).*

**Jump cut to next scene of a quiet office...**

## Scene 2

Searle's office where Cathy sits in a chair leaning back with her eyes closed.

Searle Cathy! Open your eyes.

## SFX SWIRLING STARTS AS SHE OPENS HER EYES MAINTAIN UNDER

Tell me what am I doing now?

Cathy Hurling through space... Like the rest of us...  
 Searle And when your eyes are closed, do I slow down for you?  
 Cathy Yeah...  
 Searle So, when you're listening to fast music... what happens?  
 Cathy I close my eyes and I can dance... **(Silence)** It's like being in a car or on a fast train – but planes are the best...  
 Searle So, still objects – people sitting or standing near you - are they worst then?  
 Cathy Yes... They fall as the world falls.  
 Searle So me sitting in my chair right now... I'm what...  
 Cathy Flying around the room!  
 Searle Which is why your head swirls so much – to try and catch up with me? **(Pause)** Right. And the things that are moving...?  
 Cathy Resist the fall. Or struggle to...  
 Searle Struggle?

**Cathy** I see the world as it is - falling through space,  
Searle... or should I call you doctor?

**Searle** Searle's fine...I'm not clear on this? At all...

**SFX** REDUCE SWIRLING

Why have you closed your eyes? Is that better?

**Cathy** Ever since the apple fell on Newton's head, we've  
been coming to terms with the fact that everything  
is falling.

**Searle** So what is a scary thought for the rest of us is a  
reality for you...

**Cathy** Thanks to three tiny bones in my inner ears:  
*Vestibular Syndrome.*

**Searle** There's no conclusive proof of that –  
decompensating labyrinthitis has been ruled out  
and so has any structural vestibular abnormality...  
There are certain neurological conditions which  
may engender your condition...

**Cathy** Engender?

**Searle** Bring it about... conjure it...

**Cathy** Conjure?

**Searle** But you have been referred to me because the  
pathology may be in your mind...

**Cathy** How old are you?

**Searle** I don't see what relevance...

**Cathy** How old!

**Searle** Forty-five...

**Cathy** So is the fact that your face is slowly falling apart  
pathological or is *pathology* reserved for people  
like me? **(Pause)** Most middle-aged women I talk

to find their men unrecognisable at forty-five from the one they married in their twenties...

**Searle** I can't imagine how horrible it must be for you to see everything as it hurtles in real time through space.

**Cathy** Everything's falling Searle... even you... So let's not make me out to be too special.

**SFX                      SWIRLING UP.**

**Searle** What are you doing?

**Cathy** I wanna see you!

**Searle** Just let me fly off! Don't try and find me Cathy! Let me go!

**FADE SLOWLY THE SWIRLING SFX...**

**Searle** No! Keep your eyes open...

**RE-CUE SWIRLING SFX – HIS VOICE MOVES AS IF CIRCLING THROUGH THE SPACE**

**Searle** But let me go... let me fly around... Don't try to follow me. ... keep your eyes open – just let me go...

**Cathy** You're flying around, everything's flying!

**Searle** Yes! ... I'll be all right... Let me fly...

**Cathy** How can you be all right!! How can you be!! How can any of us be all right!!??? This is crazy – freakin crazy!!!

**Searle** Don't go there!

**Cathy** I already *am* there!



**Searle** I'll be fine – you'll be fine! Let me go... Just let me go...

**SWIRLING SFX INCREASES IN INTENSITY AND ATTACK TO A WHINE.**

**Cathy** How is it that I'm the one seeing a psychiatrist when it's the whole universe that's crazy...?

*(She stands)*

**Searle** Sit down Cathy...

**Cathy** (She breathes rapidly, agitated)

**Searle** *(grabs her by the arms)*

It's Ok... I'm here... I'm here... I'm not going anywhere...

**Cathy** You are everywhere but here!!

**SFX** **DOVETAIL WHINING SFX INTO THE SLOW GENTLE SIGHS OF A BEACH WAVEWASH...**

**Scene 3**

**Searle and Michelle at a beachside café table.**

**SFX** **KNIVES AND FORKS AND CUPS AND SAUCERS AND SUNDRY CAFÉ BACKGROUND WHITE NOISE...**

**Searle** Are you sure you wouldn't like something to eat –

**Michelle** A coffee's fine...

**Awkward silence...**

Searle Well...  
 Michelle Yes... well ...  
 Searle Just calm down...

*(She hands him a letter... he opens it)*

Searle What's this...??  
 Michelle My terms... 70% of the matrimonial home, 50% of all other assets including the beach house, superannuation, stocks and bonds. I'll leave your private hospital alone if you agree to four-thousand-a-month maintenance... plus schools fees. Otherwise I'll let the lawyer off his leash!! I may be doing many things to you right now – but *being unfair* is not one of them.  
 Searle Jesus... Michelle?  
 Michelle Let me go, Searle... I'll be fine... you'll be fine...  
*(she stands and leaves)*

**SFX** **SWIRLING SLOWLY AND PIANISSIMO AT FIRST...**

Searle *(Stands).*

**SFX** **SWIRLING INCREASES IN PACE AND INTENSITY AND VOLUME.**

Searle *(overbalances)*

A Male Stranger Are you right there mate?

**MUSIC UP... FADE SWIRLING...**

## Segue into Scene 4...

### Scene 4

**Michelle**

**(Intensely intimate, close mic)** I just want to thank you for hearing me out...I know most of you won't touch a psychiatrist's wife... especially a soon-to-be-ex-psychiatrist's-wife. At first I didn't care... Or I thought I didn't. The dinner parties weren't enough to dent my love... yes... love... for him. Once we were hitched I started to notice things... Like how they all live in the same suburb – there were three other psychiatrists living in our street alone. Their private practices were in the adjoining suburb next to the CBD. But by then John had been born and then Walter and before I knew it we had the nannies from Sweden and he travelled more – he must have seen more than twenty different countries through the singular eye of the psychiatric conference. Still I managed to get Searle to buy a few acres in the hills so I could *escape* - but after only two years, ten months and five days, he managed to get the thing sold. Course he then bought the beach house at Prevally but it wasn't the same. It wasn't *mine*. By then my focus was little by little more and more taken up by doing what was *required*. One night I found myself in yet another fusion cooking class as the spices fell into the bowl – asking myself - why am I so stressed over this new recipe? And it boiled down to this... so much depended upon the way the first sip of red wine went down at about 8.45 pm on any given Saturday night's dinner party. Was the dinner not

only well cooked but hip to please them? Was my hair right, my cleavage revealed without being revealing - were the kids well behaved and performing in an age appropriate way – were the downlights refracting the stained glass as Searle liked it? Would Searle’s first sip of red wine have in the moment of its savouring that glance he would give me – thumbs up or thumbs down ...

My first panic attack came to me like a thief in the night on a warm still Sunday morning – sudden, fast and devastating.... It was prompted not by the ignominy of a failed dinner in front of all Searle’s *guests* – but by my son John’s perfect shining face smiling at me through the clear blue waters of Cottesloe beach. He ran out of the surf so happy and beautiful and innocent and I saw everything I treasure about him swept up in a wave of some terrible expectation that flung me to the four corners of nothingness...

### **Segue into Scene 5...**

### **Scene 5**

#### **Searle’s office - Cathy sits in a chair opposite Searle.**

**Searle** Does the falling ever go away?

**Cathy** We’ve been through this.

**Searle** I mean apart from when you’re dancing or in a car or plane or have your eyes closed...

**Cathy** When I’m asleep... when I dream, I think.

**Searle** You think?

**Cathy** I'm not sure... I just am. There's no-one in my sleep saying anything is wrong.

**Searle** Wrong?

**Cathy** Judging me.

**Searle** You think I'm judging you.

**Cathy** Of course.

**Searle** How does that make you feel?

**Cathy** How do you think it makes me feel?

**Searle** I don't know – it's why I asked I guess.

**Cathy** My guess about you Searle – is that you'll never die guessing.

**Searle** Are you saying I do know how it makes you feel?

**Cathy** I think we all know how I feel... because the bigger reality is we're all just... like... me.

**Searle** How so?

**Cathy** Falling through space on the third rock from a tiny sun...

**Searle** You make it sound so nihilistic?

**Cathy** I get to see the way it is more than most. That's all.

**Searle** So what do you make of the chair you're sitting in?

**Cathy** A deceptive security - like your house, your wife, and two point two children you must have.

**Searle** I might be gay?

**Cathy** Unlike you I'm guessing you're married or have been with two point two kids, oh and the big house and convertible BMW – besides if you were gay you'd look after yourself better...

**Searle** Excuse me...

**Cathy** Be thinner, better groomed, not so bloated.  
Sorry...

**Searle** No apology required...

**Cathy** Are you sure...? I think that you think of yourself as different enough – even collect the odd bit of art

but the reality is you pathologise the rest of us for a living, so the dominant can feel better about being pathologically normal.

- Searle** (Pause) How can you be pathologically normal?
- Cathy** You tell me?
- Searle** I have just told you that you can't be pathologically normal.
- Cathy** Then what's *normopathy* about?
- Searle** Normopathy?
- Cathy** It's the latest psychiatric diagnosis.
- Searle** I'm a senior consultant psychiatrist – I think I would know of such a condition.
- Cathy** Do a Google search – voila!
- Searle** Google...
- Cathy** Then while you're at it do another search for the DSM five... *Diagnostic Statistical Manual volume five* – it's been delayed until the year 2010 ... Why!
- (Pause)** Because it's over Searle!
- Searle** What is...
- Cathy** In 1952 there were 60 psychiatric diagnoses. By 1994 there were 410. You get it, right. Being normal was getting harder and harder... The DSM 5 cannot be published...
- Searle** Never?
- Cathy** Your profession requires pathology to be distinct from what is normal. But to find what is normal was more difficult than you thought – so you only know what is normal by diagnosing what is abnormal – so *you* had to pathologise more and more things until finally you lot pathologised *normal* as well. But the moment you did that, *normal* ceased to have any meaning because it was pathological too... You can't tell them apart anymore.

**Searle** So we're both pathological?  
**Cathy** Hey don't worry - its normal...  
**Searle** So why are you sitting in this chair in this office?

## **SFX SWIRLING**

**Cathy** A much tougher question Searle, is why are you flying around this fucking office?

**Briefly increase swirling SFX then fade...**

**Scene 6****Michelle**

I met this couple at an art exhibition in an old church. Searle figured collecting art would be a good hobby for me to distract me from *my condition*. I don't remember the name of the gallery – just that it was in an old church. I liked his paintings – the wife managed his work. I thought I wouldn't like them but I came to love them. I bought two of his nudes and they invited me to their soirées. So I went. At first I just watched a lot. Searle had no idea where I was, which was the main reason I was there in *their garden* and everywhere there are paintings and pottery and sculptures and colour – colour is everywhere you are and look. And there is this one far room made completely of glass with a piano in the middle. This one particular night happened to be a New Years Eve. I was leaning against the table when suddenly he was talking to me. I don't remember if we told each other our names. Everything was effortless – nothing contrived. I don't know how long we were talking but suddenly I felt my head want to touch his and I swear in that instant his went to touch mine. When they touched it was not a bit self-consciously... we spoke about music and he told me he played double bass for a trio that was neither jazz nor classical but engendered both... *Engendered both...* I repeated those words to myself for weeks afterwards almost ritualistically – as if to invoke his re-appearance. He took me in to the piano room made of glass and played me something very slowly... **(Cue wistful piano...)**



“Do you see what I mean?” “Piano too?” (I said very quietly). “A bit” (he whispered). **(Cease piano)** We went back outside and didn’t say a word to each other just stayed side by side. Then he said to me “Is this just me or is there something really strong happening between us?” “No...” I said, “It’s not just you...”

## Scene 7

**Searle** You seem to have an awful lot of knowledge about psychiatry for someone who lists their occupation as a puppeteer?

**Cathy** Internet...

**Searle** But... how do you manage to read the screen?

**Cathy** Sometimes after I sleep... there’s this hiatus... So I jump on the net... I look for causes, names, cures... for *my condition*. Then little by little the screen begins to move... then it begins to swirl and then my neck gets sore and then my head is turning and then the world flies off again and resumes its falling...

**Searle** Tell me about your puppetry?

**Cathy** You and I aren’t so different in that regard.

**Searle** Again we’re the same...?

**Cathy** **(Pause)** We both resist falling for a living.

**Searle** You’ll need to enlighten me?

**Cathy** No I won’t, it’s so obvious – all you have to do is see a show and you’ll get it straight away...

**Searle** Get what?

**Cathy** How the puppets come alive! How gracefully they move – their arms, their legs, heads, torsos, how effortlessly they leap and supply they bend and

adroitly they spin and turn... Any dancer would give their soul for such freedom of movement. It's irresistible to the eye and then voila! – it happens – they *become* real...

**Searle**

Wonderful.

**Cathy**

Yes...

**Searle**

For you...

**Cathy**

For both of us...

**Searle**

Both...

**Cathy**

When the punters forget what they're dealing with is wooden or plastic – they forget that at the very moment the puppets seem most real they are being most manipulated... by *us* ... Doctor puppeteer.

**Searle**

You think I am a puppeteer?

**Cathy**

Yeah, an illusionist, just like me! You can x-ray a broken leg, operate on appendicitis, MRI scan a tumour. But your trade is my trade – nothing's real - only puppets with names... a contrivance of strings being pulled so cleverly, skilfully that their dance and grace is so lifelike the audience's jaw drops and their eyes widen... and magically they forget about the puppeteer. The trick is not to let go of the strings even though each movement can only happen by allowing the thing to fall but they must never land or they will crash into a terrible lifelessness – into the thing we both fear the most...

**Searle**

Loss of audience?

**Cathy**

Worse... nothingness.

**Searle**

**(After a long silence)** Your condition maybe neurological...

**Cathy**

Meaning...?

**Searle**

It's not in your mind.

**Cathy** Meaning it is caused by my body?  
**Searle** Your brain...  
**Cathy** Isn't that my body and not my mind?  
**Searle** It engenders both...  
**Cathy** Engenders both...? **(Pause)** You mean it's a mystery?  
**Searle** Yes...  
**Cathy** Are you referring me on to a neurologist?  
**Searle** Would you like that?  
**Cathy** **(A silence)** No...

## Scene 8

### Michelle

So I said to him “Come out and see me off.” We just seemed to... I mean it was so gorgeous... I use that word more and more these days – *gorgeous. Gorg-e-ous....* Then he saw me get into my car... It’s a convertible BMW. He flinched. He definitely flinched at the car I drove... I noticed that. Suddenly he was tall... and slender. Although he wasn’t, in that light, he seemed beautiful... fleetingly. So... diffident. It drew me in... I moved towards him and then he came to me. Then I got the softest kiss I think I’ve ever known. I let go. Not him. Even when I had backed off, he lingered – perfectly still. Next day he rang – later than I thought he would. **(Pause)** I told him that I had to take my son to a party and would be away for the rest of the evening I told him I couldn’t talk – that I was too busy.

Three days went by... I couldn’t... not think about him. I literally had my fingertips on the phone numbers when he rang... His voice was so soft. I admitted straight away I was just about to ring him. I told him I thought it wasn’t a good idea to see each other again. I told him I was too busy. There was a silence.

. He then told me that what he had felt with me he hadn’t felt in the longest time. That he would wait. He would wait until I wasn’t busy. I gave him my email address. He sent me two really sanctimonious emails – setting himself up as an impossible good guy and me being some notorious *A list* social celebrity. **(Pause)** Is that true? Was I

an A list socialite? **(Pause)** He said we could, no matter how different our two worlds, *engender both...* Engender both...

**Segue into Scene 9...**

## Scene 9

### Searle's office...

**Searle** No?

**Cathy** Would a neurologist want to know about my dreams...?

**Searle** No. But you can discuss your dreams with someone who you are intimate with surely – you don't need a psychiatrist.

**Cathy** Are we even talking about the same thing?  
Dreams – as in what happens to you when you're asleep. Not the ones of a waking ambition... like the house in Subiaco and the convertible BMW...

**Searle** My point still holds – talk to your lover...

**Cathy** *Thoughts tending to ambition do plot unlikely wonders...*

**Searle** What, don't you talk with...?

**Cathy** I don't *have* a lover or any thing like a lover to talk with... What makes you think anyone would put up with... **(Pause)** You happy now?

**Searle** **(Begins to write out a referral)** A neurologist has the best chance of dealing with your condition...

**Cathy** I keep having this dream... Instead of the world falling I've let go like you said I should... and I'm in sync with the things that are falling so they have stopped swirling... just like when I'm on a plane or in a car... I can just.... *be.* **(Pause)** I'm actually doing what you asked me to do... I've let everything go... Everything stops swirling and I move gracefully like a dancer through the air... effortlessly.

**Searle** Cathy, I still think...

**Cathy** And then it happens...

**Searle** (*Stops writing*) What happens?

**Cathy** Arrgh – you are curious after all.

**Searle** What happens?

**Cathy** He's there...

**Searle** Who?

**Cathy** It's nothing grand or spectacular or romantic or anything. It's more like being on a plane and suddenly there's someone sitting next to you. You don't notice why or how they're there. They're just there. And little by little this *pull* starts to happen. And you know it's the same force that makes you fall... Only this time it's pulling... Very very gently at first – gentle enough to almost miss... then you sense it growing – internally – you know... what's the word...

**Searle** Visceral?

**Cathy** That'll do... No... *Muscle and guts* pulling! No – like hunger. Yeah that's better. And he's nothing like you thought he might be – not even your type... Inexplicably you are talking, quietly, yet this pull is irresistible... when you lean your head towards each other and let them touch... and then *bang* – you're together.

**Searle** And then!

**Cathy** What?

**Searle** What happens next?

**Cathy** That's what I need to talk to you about...

**Segue into Scene 10...**

## Scene 10

### Michelle in her chair...

#### Michelle

For four weeks I heard nothing. Then another email. It was an invite to a concert his trio was performing at my favourite venue among the Norfolk pines. Jesus... I mean I it read on a computer screen but somehow it spoke to every blood cell in my body. I didn't answer it and I didn't go to the concert. But two days later I found myself replying,

Re your e-mails.....nice to see you're one of the good guys!!

I'm still focused on the work..... looking forward to some time off soon.

With kind regards

M

He responded with too much haste. It was the haste that ... I don't know... made me pull back. I didn't respond. Why should I? **(Pause)** Three weeks later another email – but in between the first of these dreams where I'm on a plane and I sit down next to him... **(Pause)** His email said he had posted me some CDs – of Keith Jarrett, Arvo Pärt, some others... names names, I don't care about names anymore... He said there was also a DVD... of his trio's concert. In a similar haste his discs arrived - like they had fallen from the sky.



**(Pause)** I listened to *this* music... **(Cue music Keith Jarrett Trio's *Endless*)**

God...I didn't expect anything and half wanted to hate it. But then... there it was... **(A long pause while the music plays...)** I put the others on like a diabetic with a secret lolly jar. Then I looked up at my grandmother's clock and at precisely two minutes to midnight I put on the DVD... There he was... playing this gorgeous music on Searle's widescreen television... and as if pulled I inched towards the screen... It might have been a short DVD cos suddenly I'm at the bit where he's patched in an ending of his own and there he is before me again... He says one word only ... and walks slowly towards the lens and gently... very gently... lets his head touch my own head now leaning against the same screen. **(Pause)** I rang him straight away. He was out. I got in the car. He was lugging his double bass up his driveway in the headlights when I arrived. He turned with his arms held around his bass like a lover. I left the headlights on with the driver's door flapped and let his eyeshine guide me in...

**Music into Scene 11...**

## Scene 11

### Fade music... Searle's Office

**Searle** My guess, is that you'll never know while you're living your life with your eyes closed...

**Cathy** Ditto...

**Searle** Touchè...

**Cathy** Know what?

**Searle** Isn't that what you wanted to talk with me about? **(Silence)** Are you playing dumb? **(Silence)** My guess is you're not that worried about the world falling and everybody swirling around... That's not the tough question is it? **(Pause)** No, the tough question is about you never being able to *be* with someone... to love and be loved? Like the rest of us! Isn't it? **(Silence)** You *are* playing dumb?

### SFX SWIRLING. MAINTAIN UNDER

**Cathy** You think this is dumb!?

**Searle** You talk better with your eyes closed young lady...

**Cathy** Bastard!

**Searle** That's better – now you're getting it!

**Cathy** **(Stands)**

**Searle** I'm over here! You're too busy keeping the world the way you'd have it – nice and still and safe... Well bad luck sister – it ain't – so where are my strings, eh? Come on, pull me in and make me dance? What, no strings, *ms* puppeteer.

**Cathy** Prick!

**Searle** Oh you dish it out but take yr own medicine with difficulty...

**Cathy** *(She overbalances a bit. She is beginning to panic and grabs for her headphones)*

**MUSIC** **A BRIEF BURST FROM SOUVENIR**

**Searle** Nar arrh – leave your headphones off, thankyou! *(He takes them from her)* Dancing is such antic gesture – don't you find?

**Cathy** Give them back, you smug prick!!

**Searle** Come on, I'm over here – I haven't moved – I've been right by you all along, Cathy! Just like the rest of the world! No need to shut your eyes – everyone's right where they should be – all you have to do is to keep your eyes open and let yourself fly!

*SFX*

*SWIRLING BECOMING A WHINE*

**Cathy** *(lunges at him with a determined yell before wrapping her arms around him crying)*

**Searle** *(Catches her...)*

**SFX** **DOVETAIL SWIRLING SFX INTO THE GENTLE WHIRRING OF LEVEL FLIGHT.**

**Searle** Its ok... Its ok... relax... relax... Look at me – just look... See...

***(Long silence during which her tears subside.  
Then he reaches over and turns on a CD - cue  
Endless)***

Some music someone special left behind to help  
me appreciate the flight? **(Pause – close mic -  
whispered)** Lately... **(Pause)** I've come to  
appreciate the terrible beauty of keeping your eyes  
open as you fall... **(Long pause)** Hi... I'm Searle...  
Pleased to meet you...

**Cathy**

**(Long pause – close mic - whispered)** I'm  
Cathy... Pleased to meet you... too...

**MUSIC ENDLESS UP TO END PLAY.**

## **Part 3**

### **The Poetry**

#### **Monochords**

##### ***Secrets of the Driftwood***

## Introduction

It is hoped that these monochords will accompany the selected photographs of Nick Djordjevic's landscape and lightning photography, for a book that mutually speaks of poetry and photography's ability to creatively reference the inseparability of unexplained persistent pain and joy. Nick and I are currently negotiating with a number of publishers to this end and have enlisted Dr Ben Horgan from the 'Bone and Joint Decade' to speed this process up for us.

Aside from the discussion in Chapter 7 of the exegesis, I am intensely uncomfortable about discussing my poetry in any domain. I agree with Randolph Stow's afterword on his own poetry:

I really have nothing to say about poetry in general (except that mine tries to counterfeit the communication of those who communicate by silence). And these poems are mostly private letters. (Stow, 1975, p 175).

If anyone has tried to communicate through a kind of enforced silence, it has been my own deeply flawed attempts to communicate this thing the English language calls 'pain'. I wrestle with my pain and this flawed communication in my day to day existence. It is a deeply volatile and at times violent struggle that has often led me to sense I will not survive. It is a violence born within – a kind of corporeal deconstruction of the self – the self undoing the self. But it is also a self that does more than we can know and offers me extraordinary

moments, not despite my pain but because of it. I gather a sense from Stow's counterfeit of silence that there is a translation going on from one volatile body to another not unlike the acts of erotic love – beautifully flawed in their ambition of a communication of union – a doomed reclamation of the an ideal sense of self in the other. In this sense the poem is itself a kind of volatile and self-referential body. I could not hope to speak of this volatility better than Jacques Derrida did in his attestation to the body of Paul Celan's poetry:

There is a hand to hand, bodily struggle "within" every national language. Each time there is writing. No writing opens a passage without this bodily violence. How otherwise does one explain the charge – others would say the investment – the libidinal, even narcissistic charge that everyone brings to his own texts? It is my body, this is my body. Every poem says, "This is my body," and the rest: drink it, eat it, keep it in memory of me. There is a Last Supper in every poem which says: This is my body, here and now. And you know what comes next: passions, crucifixions, executions. Others would also say resurrections... (Derrida, 2005, p169).

## References

- Derrida, J. (2005) *Sovereignties in Question – The Poetics of Paul Celan*. Thomas Dutoit and Outi Pasanen. Fordham University Press: New York.
- Stow, R. (1975) *12 Poets 1950 1970*. Jacaranda Press: Brisbane.



***Secrets of the Driftwood***

--white lines of the highway her face in the sky—

--seagulls peel either side of her gait the wake from a boat—

--silence lies behind your eyes closing—

--Cable Station's beach lands an edge all tides forget—

--my daughter's overnight bag - the divorce begins—

--this bed breathes without you a torso missing a lung—

--her hair in the plughole the shower's rain on my face—

--motifs and chords your voice softens under breath-swells—

--the mornings are worse the moon drowns in the sea—

--that five year old – left – jumps up and down on my fence—

--not a word spoken your sigh turns the sea green—

-tonight there is no moon only the sirens call to your dark hue—

--epiphany is a fashion worn only as you undress—

-locks keep out only the honest – you enter without knocking—

--I was five – she was twenty-five – and both awaited the fall—

--the bullseye men targeted was no reference – that was the fall—

--a bullseye made her fall and in falling she referred—

--her reference was her eyes forgiving us this fete and my love—

--dragged away from her kicking and screaming—

--riddled as the tides, puzzled as a five year old—

--her death their target, her beauty the bullseye—

--the Fete's there again in Claremont park but her attraction's left—

--if they were lucky she waited and waited and waited—

--it's just that she wanted the end to come soon—

--when she broke the water their hands flew as gulls over a chip—

--even now a housewife in the sixties prepares her escape—

--even now the five year old waits and waits and waits—

--even now she leaves the *horned man* each day—

--a rainsquall darkens the sea locusts sweeping a crop—

--fifteen years... its silence spans our time left—

--the metaphor in a poem I never quite make up the difference—

--smoke gyres up your cheekbone, scars the air, dissolves—

--your head against hers in the parisienne café one cup is full—

--and arm-in-arm under the Eiffel tower heads tilted, just so—

--photos taken in the hope their secret is not safe—

--island blues and whites bleached to salt sprays to fecund sky—

--nationalism is in the air I stay inside & board up my windows—

--Lesbos? Rottnest will do—

--lithe her clothes wild as driftwood on our bed—

--how does this night, its cold, make you whisper?—

--Celan's Seine my Hampton Road eyes its current: a black truck—

-droplets fall off her chin her cheek turns sunset red in the rain—

-the earth is lichen the sky is a skeleton dancing with black hair—

-knowing out there something swells rises makes her veil fall—

-I saw you in Vespers café now you're in every cafe I see—

-the space of poetry mottles its air glimpses visibility—

-marriage felled logs the stochastic colour of tree rings—

-the figure in the tapestry the threads of each in the other—

-the mystery of blood and sunset through her fingertips held to sky—

-would we trade Celan's work for the man? one body left the other—

-no-one saw the Seine sweep him under its wheels like a truck—

-*Mr Celan – he dead*—

-left, left, left, left, (right!) left, left.....left...—

-the noon-sun freckles her moonless night sky—

-my death, is it possible on this perfect day her hands are cupped—

-my pain cannot be held as pain itself holds what I am—

-hope is to die before my children - not to wake as they burn—

-selling the house: removal vans, art, beds, couches, *that vase*—

-she didn't feel loved but was, I felt loved, but wasn't—

-Somme – the green silence of their songs the birds won't sing—

-Passchendaele - impassioned dales the locals leave to fallow—

-Poizierres – my grandfather was nowhere, anywhere, everywhere—

-so I rode all day through Biscay storms south south south—

-*Archachon* - I fainted & woke wet with her hair raining on my face—

-her hand on my cheek is the snow on Mt Everest—



-And here she is with fish on the menu—

-Pyla – her husband is in Paris I'm in her medoc—

-even dying on Mt Everest mobile phones keep us close—

-the storm is out to sea insistent so insistent!—

-light aircraft drone in *Eb* it's the music of Nelson, Paris, her eyes—

-my fingers type trying to touch your email softly through glass—

-a seahorse dead in my cupped hand still clings to its kelp—

-her death in France comes to me in an email – late late late—

-beach-sand sieves the break leaves her lines of salt on your face—

-what we all do what we all have done is fall...--

-eyes combing tidal shores for seahorses—

-a poem is not you mapping their kelp in your eyes—

-Good Friday, a black dog is touched by a tipuana everything shines-

-still clouds fray curtains of rain tears Celan's heartblue to grey—

-moonlight cups a breast your eyelids close like lips in a nocturne—

-you are a boat harbour gulls settle on masts that ache for sails-

-we hear the thunder but doubt the lightning was more than a flash-

-as for pain as for joy the most we can say is yes—

-doctor on a scale of 1 – 10 how much of an expert are you?--

-you observe me always asking silently “prove it”—

-I learn to think of you the way a farmer thinks of drought—

-the four-wheel-drive that burst my car into this universe was drunk—

*-a four-wheel-drive drunk or just the whole universe?—*

-the phantom haunting the machine’s ghost is pain—

*-intensely I hear silence tonight. Without you is everywhere.*

-*I will not sleep* in case you end and go on forever—

-taunted by mellifluous signs, symptoms always regret the honey—

-those storms came at us from in us hurled across each ocean—

-why storms form is inexplicable as rain forming prepares only its fall-

-soon a grace will descend a sunset after air-burst heat—

-the bath is running, the meal eaten, the incense burns, touch wafts—

-I dreamt your arm was a violin & played away my pain my joy-

-is there some record of what happened? What happened?—

-what happened is always always always still happening—

-yes our eyes yes the storm howls, outside holed buckets fill—

-bent over hair wet and flayed to ground your bum is a loveheart-

-braided hair, those beads run like your children by your side-

-and then the spring was here and the storms had passed—

-green poured from yellow canola fields all over us—

-the dawn pitches the land arcing like star trails into the sea—

-you walk head bowed among the ancient headstones—

-but the cold brings back this cry the stones rise up against—

-the dark a tabula rasa dawn pinnacles will soon clutter like verbs—

-*did you get them?* Words run everywhere on the dawn's aperture—

-the moon is in my bed her face is in the sky—

-awake I hunger but asleep her hands come touching—

-how do I mourn something this unfaithful yet persistent?

-you name me one thing we hold without being held—

-I meet you in the same moment you begin your leaving-*ness*—

-holy water in my palm... it leaks only what clutched would be spilt—

-earth shadow's lilac dawn hues seals dismissed as sprites—

-but that moon in blue was there in me still—

-the moment pain is a set of neuronal assemblies it's all over—

-unless those molecules defy the cipher and just play play play—

-this doctor is a bachelor of medicine wedded to affairs of the state—

-in his rooms he makes us strip before he strips us in court—

-*rule 1* - do no harm – *rule 2* – be an expert – *rule 3* – ignore rule 1—

-*Hippocratic oath* – h y p o cratic oa...ph – h y p o crite – i – cal oaf—

-last night again your spooned thighs a cantus *are you awake?*—

-sleepless we sleep together it ebbs and flows into distance—

-*The ogre will come in any case* more god-like than they thought—

-*Come the Sabbath?* A bridge the Seine's waves nape your neck—

-your cheek pressed against glass curling lip and tongue—

-déjà vu always already does more than we know—

-under the lightning a flash *is this pain*—

-your eyes Bret Whitely's bridge and a boat's wake widens blue-



-each wave's a miracle so ordinary our eyes scan the horizon—

-we name things in hope but it's in how they touch that hopes—

-what's ultramarine in a view spills colourless from your hair—

-always *on the beach* this music begins after every wave's sigh—

-edges let go of *always* if only to meet who *I am* already falling—

-a sea glimpsed is of every ocean—

-so much is about timing and the spaces it defers in us here now—

-outside, your eyes eye the morning, a dew-swollen tree-fern—

-when the frond unfurls its music it opens to rain swept like grain—

-not even these chords sustain the motifs of your hair—

-vines march through the valley fog like swimmers wading into surf—

-the fingers of your right hand slide down the glass like rain—

-I'm dancing with my black dog her tail and eyes smile bark—

-your words flat-stones skip across a calm dusk sea—

-your hand on your breast a tide rises against a shore—

-a dead mother's silent face. Kelp swaying in the driftwood's grain—

-remember when we would rub noses with more warmth than a kiss?-

-each land elsewhere to each hand a distance our touch never joins-

-I sink under fitful sleep, scissor-kick, rollover & float on my back-

-alone in this bed adrift—

-terns fan out from my gait a dawn swim lights the shore—

-a sea-breeze billows a curtain spinnakers dissolve into sunshine—

-my hand tests yours like breath on a window—

-meeting at Claremont jetty the winter river's still and brown as tea—

-I knew I would love you, a migrating bird knows when to land—

-your head tilts fifteen degrees as you fold your wings up tight—

-a face as between your hands a whetstone—

-rain hues auburn hair your fingers spread like spilt dye—

-footprints and bits of red seaweed wind-strewn as your hair—

-after storms a still small voice the surge behind breakwater-

-my daughter bursts out of the backdoor water from a faucet—

-spectres return every night, we wake to a dust on every shelf—

-when at last I surrender fog to winter air—

-our joy has its spectre in the entropy of its enjoyment—

-a photograph never has what it is but always yearns for what it isn't-

-I have been here digging, digging, Ritsos buries his bottles—

-you lie on the beach, from Tehran, Paris, secrets of the driftwood—

## **Appendix 1**

**The program for *A Bell in the Storm*, produced by deckchair theatre.**