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Diva Voce : reimagining the diva in contemporary feminist performance

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Divva Voce

*Reimagining the diva in
contemporary feminist performance*

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Submission Date: 5 June 2012

Abstract

This practice-led contemporary performance study investigates and invigorates the diva icon's usefulness to feminist theatre praxis. It traces the research journey from an unexamined belief in the diva as an icon of empowered, independent and expressive womanhood, to a more nuanced conception of the diva as boundless feminist performer and philosophical subject. Two major questions emerge from and drive the process. The primary research question asks: *How can the diva icon (in all her fury and glory and wretchedness and perversity and mastery and mortality) usefully inform a feminist theatre praxis?* Early investigations give rise to a subsequent social query: *How do (some) women collude in their own oppression; participate in their voice and voicelessness?* Critically engaging with these challenges leads me to conclude the diva icon is most useful to feminist performance praxis when understood as an icon for the richest possible expression of one's multifaceted, contradictory, poetic and polyphonous self *in dialogue* with other internal selves, and with one's community and world.

The study is framed by poststructural feminism in an (at times, uneasy) alliance with psychoanalysis, Jungian psychology, structuralism, positive humanism, and eastern philosophies such as yoga and Buddhism. The process of knowledge-making is experienced as embodied and non-linear, with key insights resonating in the spaces between the questions, the methodology, the literature and the praxis. It has been composed of: the creation of a solo performance; a daily astanga yoga practice; interviews with three senior Australian women practitioners who have referenced the diva icon in their own work; and a contextual review mapping the cultural and aesthetic territory of divas and contemporary female solo performance (literature reviews, performance reviews, popular culture reviews). It also critically engages the provocations of feminist philosophers Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous (among others), and with those of philosopher, poet and performer Margaret Cameron.

Throughout this study the diva is in dialogue: with western myth (romantic love, the handless maiden), with theory (voice, desire, the feminine divine), and with practice (the dramaturgy of breath). This critical dialogue reveals the diva's capacity for agency, poetry, divinity and mastery that enable her to resist, embrace and receive in ways that offer new possibilities of Being/Isness. From this, I suggest the transcendent voice of reason is, for the female philosophical subject, the *diva voce*: simultaneously divine and corporeal, located [heard] in the infinite moment between an out-breath and the returning in-breath, inhalation, inspiration. In the final analysis, the feminist performer can be empowered by transforming the the diva's traditional cry "*Lascietemi morir*," (let me die) to "*Lascietemi aprire*", (let me open).

Declaration

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

- i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or
- iii. contain any defamatory material

Signed:

Dawn Albinger

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I would also like to thank Margaret Cameron, Nikki Heywood, and Annette Tesoriero: three senior Australian investigative performing artists who agreed to be interviewed for this study and to act as a professional peer panel. Their generosity, candour, observations and questions proved invaluable.

Further thanks go to Margaret Cameron for her role as collaborative director and dramaturg on the performance outcome of this study; to Sam James for his sumptuous video imagery; to Linsey Pollak for the many musical improvisations from which key aspects of soundscape emerged; and to Lisa Businovski for her beautiful photography.

Special thanks are due to Julia Varley for the invitation to present work-in-progress during Transit 6 in Denmark, 2009; Magdalena Perth for the opportunity to present at the Magdalena Perth Workshop Festival 2010; and to Jill Greenhalgh for the invitation to present at the Magdalena@25 Festival in Wales, 2011.

Key support for creative development was also made available through the Judith Wright Centre's Fresh Ground artist-in-residence initiative, made possible through Arts QLD. I also thank the Blue Room Theatre for programming the work in 2010, and for awarding it the inaugural Blue Stone Award.

And finally I offer sincere gratitude to Helen Sharp for the *breath encounter* (2010); the women of the *Magdalena Talks Back* feminist reading group (2008 – 2010); Susan Midalia for permission to print her review of my work; Adrienne Barba of Bird Studio for her lovely graphic design and layout; Sarah Kearn, caring coordinator of research support; Suzon Fuks for patient digital support and friendship; colleague and girlfriend Mette Sorensen; yoga teacher Deva Prem; and for his love, support and provocations, my husband Hamish Alcorn.

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Introduction

A Personal Anecdote

In 2005 I endowed myself with the nickname: *Diva Dawn*. The appellation was chosen in an instant as part of a game, without any deep thought or reflection. Seven years later I understand it emerged from a desire to claim something for and in myself, some kind of ideal or 'divine' aspect. At the time, however, I felt there was something slightly awkward about this nickname, as though in claiming it I should simultaneously laugh it off, apologise for it, or down-play it as something I did not really mean about myself.

I regularly encounter, through my women's retreat work, a persistent contemporary cultural perception of the 'diva' icon: *I'd really like to be a diva, but I don't want to hurt anyone.*¹ Many women attracted to the kind of retreats and workshops I facilitate share a sense that it is not possible for them, in everyday life situations, to express their true thoughts and feelings. My instinct is that the desire to be a diva is linked to the desire for an unbridled tongue, a longed-for freedom that some women do not permit themselves to experience for fear of "hurting" other people. With my own naming and subsequent feeling of awkwardness I began to question this perception of a diva's freedom, its relationship to the perception that women are responsible for the feelings of others, and the choice of some women to then participate in their own constraint.

The Methodological Process

1. First phase of ripening:

This personal anecdote about intuitive naming coincided with a performance-making encounter with practice-led research: Dr Julie Robson's doctoral enquiry into the deadliness of siren vocality. Her research was conducted in conjunction with sacredCOW theatre's devising of *The Quivering: a matter of life and death.*² Robson's research findings named diva vocality as one of four siren vocalities, the others being the lamenter, monster and lullaby-maker. The diva nick-name and diva vocality provided entry points to my own research project, and the first phase quickly threw up the question: *How can a performance-*

¹ Since 2005 I have co-facilitated 'mind, body and spirit' women's retreats in the Noosa hinterland. Held twice-yearly at High Spirits Retreat in Kin Kin, they are underpinned by the Hawaiian principles and practice of Ka Huna bodywork.

² Dr Julie Robson and I were members of this original theatre group between 2000 and 2007.

*based investigation of the diva icon usefully inform (my) feminist theatre praxis?*³

I began a literature review of the diva, engaging with poststructural, queer and feminist critiques of the diva in opera. At the same time I went into the studio with the aim of making a solo performance. I anticipated making something big, beautiful, bold, epic, uninhibited, masterful, possibly even musical – all adjectives I associated with the diva icon. Working with the perceptual practice *what if where I am is what I need* I was confronted by silence, lassitude, and tears. It was during this first phase of research, that I stumbled upon the eleventh-century European myth known variously as *The Handless Maiden*, *Silverhands*, and *The Orchard*. From this unexpected encounter the secondary question quickly emerged: *How do (some) women collude in their own oppression; participate in their voice and voicelessness?*

Both icon and question became embedded within, and integral to, the research process, particularly to the studio research and process of creating new work. The Handless Maiden encounter led the literature review to include feminist perspectives on female ‘voice’ and silence, corporeal writing from gendered bodies, and the space of the hyphen (Cixous, 1975, 1991; Irigaray, 1986, 1992, 1996, 2002; Grosz, 1989, 1994; Carson, 1995; Butler, 1990, 2004; Bouldous Walker, 1998; Clément, 1999; Leonardi and Pope, 1996). With these additional elements as a driver, at the end of the first phase I was able to identify three key (and useful) aspects of the diva icon in a feminist theatre praxis: 1) *Mastery of instrument*, 2) *Permission to embody range*, and 3) *A warning or cautionary role*.

2. Second phase of ripening:

The second phase of the diva research led to a deeper consideration of: poetic form and lyrical aesthetic; the usefulness of resisting the western myth of romantic love as a political action; and an identification of the diva and the handless maiden as two aspects of a multifaceted femininity. During this phase I was confronted both by disenchantment with the diva icon and her (fatally) constructed femininity, my continuing ‘muteness’ on the studio floor, and a seeming inability to get to the heart (core/coeur) of things. The first interviews with the senior female theatre practitioners were also conducted during this second phase. In their function as a cohort of peers, I presented to them an early ‘sketch’ of performance material. The concurrent literature reviewed during this time focused on

³ *Contemporary feminist performance is defined below at pages 5-6. I use ‘praxis’ to refer to the nexus of theory and practice.*

themes such as eros/desire, love, agency, authenticity, and romantic love. I also reviewed myth and poetry; popular media references to the diva; fiction and diva biographies. And, because this is a contemporary performance research project, live performances were also 'read' through the diva trope.

3. Third phase of ripening:

The third phase was marked by two work-in-progress showings, one at the Transit Festival, Denmark in August 2009 and another at the Magdalena Workshop Festival, Perth in February 2010. These key showings, and the live dramaturgical feedback they offered, pointed towards a continuing shift in my performance work from structured narrative into a more radical poetics of form. It was during this phase, and in response to discoveries relating to breath in the practical work, that I engaged more rigorously with contemporary feminist theory, and particularly Irigaray's provocations to think, feel and find our way into a philosophical space where we know the feminine divine (1986, 2002). I continued to read into psychoanalytical, feminist and performance theories of voice and subjectivity (Dolar 2006, Schlichter 2011, and Cixous 1991); and eastern philosophies of breath, body and the divine (Stone 2008, Ray 2008). At the end of this phase I refined my definition of the 'claiming space' aspect of the diva to relate specifically to the way breath 'claims space' within the body, causing the body to literally claim more space. This led to the added consideration of 4) *Privileging desire* as a key diva attribute.

4. Fourth phase of ripening:

I am lightly calling the fourth phase *diva voce in practice*. What I call *diva voce* relates to Freud's ego and Heidegger's call to being but goes beyond both in its insistence on recognizing the specifically female philosophical subject (defined below). *Diva voce* is the coinciding of the material and the metaphoric voice. During this phase I have completed the studio research and its artistic outcome: the three-week solo performance season of *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* at Perth's Blue Room Theatre. But since then, remounting the work six months later for the Magdalena@25 Festival in Cardiff, Wales, has led to new insights and a clearer articulation of dramaturgy. This is the phase in which the expert practitioner becomes an articulate one, as my discursive, poetic and performative languages are woven or overlaid, offering multiple perspectives and entry points for theorizing the usefulness of the diva icon to feminist theatre praxis.

Key terms and definitions

A number of key terms will recur throughout the exegesis and require definition.

Feminism and poststructural feminism

Broadly speaking, feminism is the politics of aiming to change power relations between men and women in society. It aims to end sexism in all its forms. I refer to myself as feminist because this is a project to which I am committed and because feminism is a key lens through which I reflect on and critique human relations, subject formation and identity. In chapter four I trace my genealogy of feminist thinking, but here I will say I am strongly influenced by the French poststructural feminist theorists Luce Irigaray (1986, 1992, 1996, 2002) and Hélène Cixous (1975, 1991). *Poststructural feminism* uses insights from poststructuralism to explore relationships between language, sociology, subjectivity and power-relationships as they impact on the construction of gender. Here I also acknowledge the importance of Judith Butler's work (1990, 2004) to our understanding of the performativity of gender, and align myself with Elizabeth Grosz (1989, 1994) in understanding subject formation as resulting from both biology *and* cultural inscription.

Otherness and cultural labels

Feminist critique of the western canon of philosophy reveals the subject, the "I" position or point of view, as historically male. Man is the Self to which woman is Other (Cranny-Francis, et al). Non-white, homosexual, and working class men are also othered by institutional patriarchy in western culture, where *otherness* becomes a state of or condition for exclusion from power. I use a lowercase 'o' when using other and otherness in this sense. Influenced by psychoanalytic feminist theory I also use the term Other in the Lacanian sense of an always absent Other or object of desire. I capitalize the 'O' when using Other in this sense. For Lacan this lack or loss underpins the child's immersion in the Symbolic, the intersection of language and culture. The decentred Lacanian subject separates from the m/other and is caught in its own image (mirror stage), before "assuming signifiers from the speech of the parents as elements of identification" (Leader and Groves, 2010, p 43). In this line of thinking the subject is no longer perceived as a biological or natural entity but as an intersection of cultural codes and practices (Case, 2002, p 145). I use the term *cultural labels* to refer to these social-cultural codes and practices into which the subject is born and through which she continues to assume signifiers as elements of identification.

The female philosophical subject

My insistence on a female subject reflects my understanding that I write from a historically specific position that engages with and resists various cultural discourses. Following Davies, Browne, Gannon, Hopkins, McCann, and Wihlborg (2006), I attempt to “lay bare the bones and flesh of [my]sel[f] as [an] embodied subject[]-in-process as [I] remember [my]sel[f] in one particular moment in time” (p. 19). This ‘I’ is gendered female and this gendering creates “invisible threads” (p.21) in which the historically specific and multiple poststructuralist subject finds herself entangled. In Chapter Four I draw on the work of Davies, *et al*, to find a theoretical path through the tension that exists between poststructural ways of thinking about the subject and an enduring desire for certainty, identity and a will to act.

The feminine divine

The term ‘diva’ derives from the Italian for goddess and has led this enquiry into a consideration of what a feminine divine might mean for the female philosophical subject. When I speak of a feminine divine I think of Irigaray’s notion of a divine horizon, an ideal towards which we unfold yet never reach (1986, p.6). There is movement implicit in this unfolding towards, and at the same time there is a stasis, as one way to approach this horizon is to be utterly unto oneself, and no other. Irigaray describes this interior activity, this Being, as “[a] letting be that is open – in oneself and to the other – to a still unknown speech and silence” (2002, p.50). Later she describes the celestial as existing not only above our heads, but between us, and the heart remains “what most constantly links sky and earth, sustaining itself on the lowest and the highest, on the real in what is most elemental and most sublime” (220, p.148). In this study I have engaged with the feminine divine through the performance, with its representation of a woman thoroughly unto herself, and through this exegesis that traces the endless movement between being and becoming, seeking the heart (core, couer), and opening to new ways of Being and Loving in this world.

Contemporary feminist performance

Like contemporary feminisms, contemporary feminist performance responds in a multiplicity of forms to questions of human relations, power positions, subject formation, identity and desire. In 1990 Gayle Austin applied three stages of feminist criticism to theatre:

1) working within the canon and examining images of women; 2) expanding the canon by focusing on women writers; and 3) exploding the canon by questioning the assumptions underlying the entire field of study, including canon formation (Austin in Goodman, 1998, p.140). Some contemporary feminist performance extends this third point by developing a feminist aesthetics and engaging in a radical poetics of form (Case, 1998), and by focusing on questions of women's performative choices (L.Richards, 1995). My own enquiry reflects how attention to performative choices affects and revolutionises a poetics of form. Examining questions of how *I* might live and love differently has led me into what Susan Melrose describes as "a consideration of what theatre options might be adopted, reviewed and restaged, in order to enable spectators to see, know and do differently" (Melrose, 1998). Despite the specificities of my own line of enquiry I broadly use the term *contemporary feminist performance* to refer to any and all of the above projects.

Structure and thematics

This document sits between exegesis and dissertation. Literature review, practice and interviews have led to what Siobhan Murphy (2011) calls "novel apprehensions". In this case, the novel apprehensions are of the diva icon. Like Murphy, I am interested more with the discussions these novel apprehensions open onto, than I am in explaining the performance that has resulted from the research. Nevertheless there is an exegetical component to the writing that emerges and subsides throughout, and comes to the fore particularly at Chapters Five (Novel Apprehensions), Six (Deconstructing the Diva in Practice) and Eight (The Diva in Dialogue).

At Chapter One I introduce the performance and its reception through text, image and review. This foregrounds the importance of critical discussion to the development of work and the interrelationship between practice and conceptual framing that unfolds throughout the study.

At Chapter Two I position my practice in its aesthetic terrain and then dissect Haseman's five research precepts to explain and validate my own creative practice-led approach and its feminist foundations. I conclude with a note on multiple writing styles and alert the reader to the fact that I weave non-linear as well as linear writing styles throughout. This leads to a more circuitous writing style than is employed in a traditionally rational thesis, and with this in mind I endeavour to provide adequate signposts for the reader throughout.

Chapter Three paints a vivid portrait of the diva icon throughout history, and examines popular cultural use of the descriptor in the early twenty-first century. This contextual review reveals that the diva icon is of practical use to feminist theatre praxis in her *mastery of instrument*, and *permission to embody range*. In playing a warning or cautionary role that to be a diva one risks isolation and loneliness, she invites the feminist practitioner to question why a woman alone is considered either dangerous or an object of pity.

The cultural perception of a diva's "too-muchness" is linked with privileging one's desire and leads me to trace, in Chapter Four, a genealogy of poststructuralist feminist thinking on the emergence of the female subject. This opens onto a discussion of female philosophical subjectivity and I conclude the chapter by introducing emerging lines of enquiry and the eclectic pool of theorists with which I engage throughout.

Chapters Five and Six concern the practitioner interviews and performance practice. At Chapter Five the interviews inspire a re-conceptualisation of diva as a *strategy* for unearthing the poetic, a *concept* of countering a lack of residence in one's own subjectivity, and a *movement* or *energy* between one's semiotic interior core and a symbolic and transcendent horizon. These novel apprehensions of the diva icon provoke an articulation of a key finding of the study: the *diva voce*, or the coincidence of material and metaphoric voice.

Weaving poetic, narrative and discursive writing styles at Chapter Six, I elaborate the key devising strategies and processes engaged in this practice leg of the research. I mark the ways in which the process further prompts questions regarding the female philosophical subject in relation to the divine, and the way in which the feminist practitioner is aided by the diva icon to move towards strength through enduring ambiguity and making choices.

In summary, Chapters One to Six introduce my engagement with the diva icon and the handless maiden of medieval myth. They also introduce themes of voice and voicelessness, the space of the hyphen, opening conceptual space, falling apart, breath, desire and self-reception. Chapter Seven goes to the autobiographical core/coeur/heart of the performance with a detailed discussion of handlessness, alienation, and resisting romantic love.

Here the diva and the handless maiden begin a critically reflexive dialogue. Indeed, 'dialogue' emerges as a key methodological strategy for a contemporary feminist performance-maker, and one that requires expert practice to be able to notice its occurrence, allow its resonance, and examine its 'fruits'.

Chapter Eight is a discussion on the importance of critical discussion to collaborative knowledge-making processes in feminist theatre praxis, and challenges the cautionary warning that to be a diva condemns one to being alone.

Chapters Seven and Eight make even more explicit the intimate, reflexive, autobiographical, and feminist approach I have taken as a doctoral researcher. In these chapters the research opens onto discussions of the usefulness of embracing disintegration, reimagining the feminine divine, and redefining ways of loving and being in the world. In recasting the diva as interdependent and in dialogue I conclude that the diva is indeed useful to feminist theatre practice, but only when resisted as a solo and autocratic personality and embraced as a concept or strategy.

In this introductory segment I have outlined the questions, the process, and the exegetical structure of this practice-led research project. In the next chapter, Chapter One, I turn to the artistic outcome of the practice.

Chapter One

No Door On Her Mouth

Foregrounding the practice in practice-led research

The performance *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* is an embodied response to the questions: *How can a performance-based investigation of the diva icon usefully inform one's feminist theatre praxis? How do (some) women collude in their own oppression; participate in their voice and voicelessness?* My own feminist theatre practice, with its focus on deconstructing the myth of romantic love and re-constructing ways of loving and being, has both preceded, and been deeply informed by, the context of the research. At the same time the *practice* has constantly nuanced and inflected my theoretical and conceptual frames. Beginning with the text and images of the performance, in this chapter I foreground the interrelationship between personally specific experience, practice, and conceptual framing that will continue to unfold throughout the exegesis. After this I include two written responses to the work. The first is a poetic and abstract response from Margaret Cameron, who has been intimately engaged in the development of the performance, and the second is a muscular review by a distanced but engaged audience member: writer and academic Susan Midalia. These responses acknowledge and underscore the relationship between reader (audience) and text (performance), and foreshadow the importance of dialogue to the practice. In presenting the performance text, and two critical responses to it, the *practice* that has led this research journey is fore-grounded as embodied knowledge.

The Diva in Dialogue

In a sense I am beginning at the end, for the performance *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* reveals the diva in dialogue and is a key finding of the research. Deliberately un-fixed and flickery, its abstraction invites audiences to overlay the text of their own lives onto the body, sounds, and words of the performer. Multiple readings are expected. Like Lekkie Hopkins (2009) I take pleasure in Irigaray's understanding of the reciprocity implicit in any meeting between reader and text: "Who are you?" the reader might ask. "And who are you?" responds the text. "Can we meet? Talk? Love? Create something together?" (Irigaray, 1991, pp. 139, 149). With this reciprocity in mind, the performance text comprises the greatest part of this chapter. I lead into it by naming some of the key interlocutors involved in its construction, both in 'real' time (in the studio), and across time

(the theorists with whom the performance engages). Here I also offer my own short poetic description of the work, framing it as a concert of worded and wordless 'songs'. In the third part I present responses to the work from Cameron and Midalia. These constitute what Cameron calls an *act of fidelity* (see Chapter Eight). Through their writing, Cameron and Midalia engage in what Cameron calls an articulation of "what is left in me of your work" (Cameron, 2003, p.73). Framing their responses as subjective, creative and dialogic enables me to hear/receive my own work in new ways, folding any residual resonance back into subsequent re-rehearsals. Such reciprocity and dialogue has been crucial in composing a performance that animates and breathes (life) into the worded philosophical space.

1.1 PRE-TEXT

In making and performing *No Door on her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*, I have actively anticipated Irigaray's *amorous exchange* between audience and performance. The script also reflects an *amorous exchange* between researcher and theorists, and contains implicit and explicit references to those with whom I have engaged (Irigaray 1986, 1991, 1992, 1996, 2002; Cixous 1991; De Beauvoir 1969; Rich 1980). It evidences my ongoing critical discussions with other practitioners, most notably Margaret Cameron (2003 – present), Helen Sharp (2010) and Julie Robson (2000 – present). Video artist Sam James has also dialogued with the work, creating a visual world for the performer to inhabit. And an improvised musical dialogue with musician/composer Linsey Pollak has formed part of the recorded soundtrack. Further dialogue occurs each time performance material is presented: work-in-progress showings have resulted in key moments of insight that occur 'live', informing my evolving theoretical and conceptual frames. As this thesis elaborates, 'falling apart' and 'self-reception' are central themes; so, too, is the importance of the breath to privileging desire, to articulating a female imaginary, and to moving towards a feminine divine.

A brief outline and poetic description of the performance:

No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation, is a concert (or recital) of breath, sound, movement and text for a solo woman performer: a diva. Comprising ten 'songs' and nine 'wordless songs', it is a polyphonous expression of one woman's disintegration, halting ambivalence, desire, and profound (self-) reception. It combines highly poetic and abstract text with vivid, visceral physicality as the performer enacts multiple shifts between three

spaces: The Dark Garden, The Crossing and The Orchard. These three spaces can be understood as internal psychological spaces, as physical states that affect the breath of the performer, and as external geographical locations:

- *The Dark Garden is the space of refusal to hear what one is saying (“lalalalalala lalalalalala lalalalalala”), the refusal to say what one is saying; it is the denial of breath, the braced inability to receive oneself.*
- *The Crossing is a moment in time, a millisecond that lasts an eternity. Vertigo, nausea and lassitude are experienced when, passing beyond known contours, the coherent self dissolves in the space between the exhalation and the returning inspiration. Crossing requires courage.*
- *The Orchard is the space in which the disintegrating and incoherent self is received and nourished. Understanding silence, here it is possible to tell of dark gardens and multiple crossings: To tell it exactly, and to let it go. It is a place of integration.*

Passing back and forth across multiple thresholds (conceptual, perceptual, emotional, somatic), a woman is falling through a thousand openings. Spaces enfold-unfold within her waiting. Muted, she is holding the weight of all sadnesses. Dissolving and resolving she falls too often, hesitates too long, clings too hard. She can neither return to her past nor escape its memories, inscribed as they are on/in her body/psyche. She forgets to breathe, is unable to breathe. Without breath, thought cannot become action. She is deflated. A returning inhalation creates the possibility of *being articulated*; it claims space inside her, makes audible the intimate kernel of diva voce, and she gives audience to herself. Once received she cannot un-know what she knows and is simultaneously liberated and made responsible: liberated from unconscious participation in self-limitation; responsible for unfolding towards her fullest expression. *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* is a work of dis/integration.

1.2 TEXT

No Door On Her Mouth – A lyrical amputation

Part One: The Dark Garden

NOTE: I have included sound and audio-visual cues, photographs, and most importantly the 'instructions to the performer', to remind the reader that the words of the text represent only one quarter of the information that is transmitted in a live performance. All photos are by Lisa Businowski – another person in dialogue with the work.

PRE-SHOW

Sound – Cue 1: Orchard 02 GO

AV – Dead Environment

Lights – lx cue 0.5 (Audience in, house down > table on

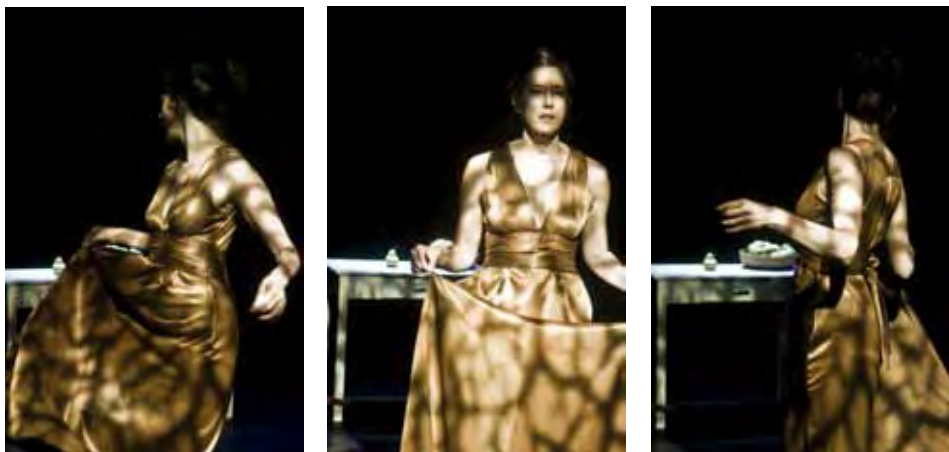
The space holds a small writing table stage right. A basket of pears sits on the upstage corner of the table. Nearby an overturned chair and red cardigan. A woman stands with both hands on the table, one of them holding a pear she has taken from the basket. The audience is invited to observe her in detail. She is barefoot and wearing a long gown of heavy fabric. She is concerned only with her breath. There is an ivory box upstage of the desk and a saw leaning against the back wall.

When Audience are all in

Lights – lx cue 1

Sound – Go cue 1.5, 2, 3.

Wordless Song #1:



The woman is moved by her breath from one position to the next and holds each 'shape' for as long as she needs, establishing a legato rhythm. At some point she straightens the chair. At the desk, and with deliberate movements, the woman opens and closes the drawer as many times as necessary until she removes the red tape and the snips. She creates a red horizontal line as high as she can reach on the back wall centre-stage. She runs another line down from the SL corner to the floor and continues the line diagonally out along the floor in a swooning motion. (SOUND NOTE: Orchard track #1 ends about here and goes onto Orchard track#2)



Rising, she more pragmatically runs tape down the other side. She has created a threshold, a door-way. She returns to the desk and places the red tape and snips back in the drawer. As she does so, the doorway darkens behind her.

**AV 2 – 1B Dead Environment
with black door**

**Light – moves to make door lx
cue 2 (on ground)**

Song #1 – Breath and Caress Song:

Instructions to performer: Notice the breath. Place your hands where you feel your breath, or where it is pleasurable to do so. When speaking, pause after one, then two, then three (etc) words. Deliberately pitch above and below beginning 'note'. Play the game lightly, privately (resist 'song', 'significance', and becoming too disjointed).

Woman: When all is said and done my dear will you remember?

The woman picks up the pear. She takes the longest way to sit in the chair. Her body facing diagonally DSR. She holds the pear in her right hand.

Light – she sits lx cue 3



Woman: *There is wrinkling
and turning just now I stop to gaze from a returning angle,
caught first by the sight of a dark indentation, a deep scar,
a brand.
She is leaning forward.
There is movement implicit. A still fruit.
Her stem curves, counterpointing the forward thrust.
The tree that bore her held firm a distant memory.
The colour of sunshine and dust.
Summer seems so long ago.
It has been winter now for years.*

[She shivers, wraps herself in her arms]

More closely I see. You are marked in all my body.

*I will answer your question, my dear, even though
My feet are cold. Even though it
Cost Me*

*Would you like a cup of tea, my dear?
Infinity is not so long and wide as when you clung
and the weight of all sadnesses surprised the fall,
when it was least expected.*

AV 2b – Fade to black

Wordless Song #2 - Denial of Pleasure:

The woman raises the pear to her Open Mouth. After too long she puts it back on the table.

Sound – Cue 4:

**crossfade Orchard 02.1 > Opera
1 (Loud) plays to end of track**

Light – with opera lx cue 4

She comes to standing, hand at her mouth.

The woman pushes her hand into her mouth and takes a long Diva walk to the red threshold that has disappeared under the projection of a skull with antlers.



AV 3 – skull and antlers

**Light – as she moves to door
lx cue 5**

AV3b – Antlers

AV 4 – Antler Arch

This in turn becomes an arch of antlers. Removes hand from mouth, wiping her face. Fans herself. Flaps. The breath is affected. She moves through exhaustion. Ends with raised shaking hands at the end of sound cue.



AV 5 – Window Mansions
Sound – Cue 5: Orchard 03
(one beat – in Loud)
Cue 6: Orchard 03
auto-follows in
Orchard 02.2
Light – as she leaves door lx
cue 6

Song #2 – Flapping Song

Instruction to performer: Voice is freed by connection to breath – Do not override the breath. Use the 'hah' to find the pitch. If it helps, lean over and place hands on knees. Pant it out. The task is to remain conscious of the need for air.

Woman : *Are you lonely, my dear?*
 Have you cried, my dear?
 Do you miss hope, my dear?

Wordless Song #3 - Romantic Dance (Will Someone Save Me Melodrama)

With sweeping movements and hiatuses (exploring caesurae), she paces back and forth, looking. She returns to the desk. Opens the drawer. Removes a long black glove and puts it on. Deliberately picks up the pear with the gloved hand (Death) and places it with others in basket. Removes red tape and snips from drawer. Cuts a strip and swiftly stabs it onto the space of the threshold.

Light – as she moves to door
with first piece of tape
lx cue 7

Repeats this action a second time. Returns tape and snips to drawer. Removes and puts on a second glove, stuffed with tissue paper. Reveals the stuffed glove and tapes to wall inside frame. Picks up saw. Saws off hand in slow deliberate actions. She turns and faces front, back up against the wall:



AV – White Door

Light – as she moves to chair lx

cue 8

Light – as she sits in chair lx

cue 9

Song #3 – Note of Alarm Song

Instruction to performer: Brace and Splat. Sound an impossibly high note with ease (no alarm, not forced) Over-articulate and control air pressure on the plosives (especially 'p' add 't'). It does not need to be emphatic because it IS emphatic.

Woman : *AaaaH!*
Things are falling apart
First the teapot
Then the wineglass
Then the casserole dish as it came out of the oven
All hot tomato and spitting oil
Things are falling apart!

She returns to desk and places saw on desk-top. She moves to chair, making the shape of age/exhaustion.

AV 7 – Plato's Cave

Wordless Song #4 – The Dream

In the chair, parts of her body fall. She is falling (asleep). She is dreaming. In her dream flesh is removed, pared back. Beneath, are tiny furled up wings, never to fly, never to fly, never to –

Song #4 – Daily Violations

Instruction to performer: Let go psychology. The psychology is invested in the text. The performance is something else – Crafted sound/colour placement. Return to the breath and caress. Find the exquisite tension between drive and restraint. Rehearse at a 10; perform at a 4.5. Wake first. Find the breath. Then speak:

Woman: *Does she go on?*
Behind the ugly broken window.
And the front door that will not budge
But admits only daily violations
beyond repair and ancient with aching on granite
outcrop un-heard a heart singing
out an opening mouth and
slowly pushing inside as a rock
unheard
to vomit again
In Exhaustion.



Light – first 'la' lx cue 10
AV 8 – Black

Wordless Song #5 - Stuttering Dance

Song of hesitation – Attempts to leave the chair. Every move she makes is wrong. Finally standing. Her hands are fluttering butterflies. She is on her toes. She wants to leave but is pinned to the spot. She makes 'lalalala' to keep from hearing anything. She does this for too long. Rising and rising...Crescendo!

Song #5 – A Falling Song (into the stomach)

Woman: *OH My Heart is beating wildly!
I will answer your question, my dear
Even though my cheeks are burning
Even though there is a stone in my stomach.*

AV 9 – Mirrors
(30 sec into 'again & again')

Song #6 – The Again and Again Song (After SB)

Instruction to the performer: Stay present to the breath, the gesture and the caress. The song comes out of the 'stomach' and is a movement of breath and energy upwards.

Woman: *I'm talking about everyday courage.
My dear, It requires conscious choosing
(aka De Beauvoir) Again and again.
And again and again and again.
(The priority is to choose. Each choice is new. The newness of
each perceptual moment requires courage)*

*when all is done and said my dear will you remember you were the
one who raised her fist.*

(After too long she sits)

*When all is said and done
Life goes on, my dear
Every crease enfolding
Unfolding
A Promise, my dear
A Breath*

AV 10 – Reverse image of Dawn

Song #7 – Pray With Me Song



Woman: (In the following return to the breath, the gesture, the caress.
Begin by raising eyebrows, focusing in turn on eyes, mouth,
throat, lashes)

*Have you cried, my dear?
So often there are salt crystals gathering
in the fine lines around your eyes
and your mouth
in the crepey folds of your neck?
Do you glitter my dear
In the preserving sun*

*Do your unborn sing to you of the desert
Wildflowers?
Do you miss Hope?*

*Pared back, my dear
succulent, glistening*

*Flesh removed, my dear.
All that is left to you
Of her
Is glossy blackness
Mute, my dear
Still
Pressed down
Buried, my dear?*

What if you made a tiny gesture towards warmth?

*What if
Knowing your capacity for violence
you made a gift, my dear*

*hope
rising from troubled sheets*

*racing across surfaces
tracing perfect imperfections, my dear
holding surprising weight.*

*(Calling quietly on a whisper)
Pray with me
Not on your knees, my dear
Unless your desire is kneeling*

*Pray with me
(aka Cixous) Calling [] quietly, calling [] , holding out a hand []...
keeping the space of waiting open, my dear*

*...there must be a wait long enough, powerful enough, precise
enough to save [you].*

*(Breath song)
breathe, my dear
your heart's desire
without fear or favour or the*

AV 11 – Red Hands

excuses the world has taught you to make.

(shifting perspective/direction, calling)

she does not hear a word she says

she does not say what she is saying, my dear



Once she has breathed, my dear, she cannot unknow what she knows

Once uttered

she utterly cannot unknow what she knows

- pleasing, reprising –

pressing intimately on me

she cannot unknow/stay sleeping,

and once awakened

is responsible, my dear.

Sound – Cue 7: Opera 02 (Loud)

Light – with opera lx cue 11

AV 12 – Gutted Hospital

Windows

Wordless Song #6 – Dance of the Handless Maiden.

(She hasn't heard a word/gets busy) She turns her head. Puts on her cardigan. Places her hands over her ears.

She rises, rips taped glove from frame. Drags chair and places it next to frame. Clears saw. Enacts returning memory, returning again and again to something that hurts.



Sound – Cue 8: Opera 02 Auto-follow > Opera 03

(plays to end of track)

Light – with opera 3 lx cue 12

AV 13 – Blue Bathroom Window

AV 14 – Pear Tree fence

Light – as she sits lx cue 13

Spins and collapses in crescendo.

Wordless Song #7 – Procession of The Fruits of Discourse

She collapses onto red cardigan.

She bandages her hands. She stands, showing hands. Move back into proscenium.

Her raised hands are mute supplication, surrender, generosity, protest.



She moves to the basket of pears. Lifts them. Carries them high – above and forward of head - to the chair. Sits with pears in lap.



Part Two: The Crossing

Song #8 – Crossing the Continent

Instructions to performer: begins with a light and easy lullaby. Change the melody from Persiani so it is an easeful and clear tone. Avoid gravitas with text. Begin with a sense of pace and ease to keep the sense. Then slower, as a prayer. Sing the final *Lasciatemi aprire* as long as you like as long as you are enjoying it, taking the breath needed. There is no forced effort at this point.

Woman: *You cannot go home, my love.
Even though your heart is beating wildly.
You cannot escape memory, my love. You cannot get out.
What are you saying my dear dear dear dear.
Have you have been forced to lie, my dear? For survival?
Forgetting is the danger.
Do you tell yourself you don't really know what you want?
Settling for what you get, yet, not really settling? Something inside
striving to live a larger life.
Have you have spent
many years fearing solitude, my dear?
Do you feel this as an exhaustion in your body?
Crossing the continent. Desert roads strewn
with bodies. Companions, mothers. Past
hunger and sharpened-tooth predators.
Wordless.
Silent.
To the edge.
Are you standing high above crashing waves? Are you standing on
crumbling rock? Are the edges ill-defined?
Are you falling past known contours? Are you falling through a
thousand openings?
Are you falling?
Let me open. *Lascietemi aprire*. Let me open. Let me open.
LASCIETEMI APRIRE!
(Gather the breath. Casual, incidental)
*The first thing you must do, my dear, when you reach the other
side, is to buy a tea-cup and saucer.
Understanding silence.**

lx cue 14

AV 15 – Sky and White Door

LX cue 15 – Table fade in

Sound – Cue 10: Orchard 04

Light – as she moves to table

lx cue 16

AV16 – Sky and Green Door

AV17 – Pears Falling

AV 17b – Pear Trees in Blossom

Part Three: The Orchard

Wordless song #8 – Silver Hands (Ridiculous Pears)

She walks to the table. She lifts the lid from the box. She removes a sheet of tissue paper that she lets fall. She begins an excavation of breath. She removes another sheet of tissue paper. She takes two large (fake) pears from the box and explores laughter breath. Round cheeks, round mouth. 'Hey hey hey', 'ho, ho' 'haha' 'hehehehe'. She turns upstage. With her back to the audience she slips the pears onto her hands. She turns to face front, revealing pear hands. She concludes her breath excavation with her arms in the air.

Song #9 – Laughing Song



Woman: *Look up my dear
What. Where.
What do you see?
A small hard green bud, smaller than a cherry.
What is it my love?
A small hard green promise. A breath.
My dear it is a nascent pear.
Oh!*

The woman removes the pears with big aspirated in and out breaths and places them in the box. Sound cue - Cut the orchard track when she places lid on box. She removes the black glove and sings her last song.

AV 18 – Cliff

Song #10 – Shooting star song

Woman: *Do you crave poetry my dear? When all is said and done
will you remain forever wanting what is readily
yours?*

**Sound – Cue 11: Opera 04
Light – with opera lx cue 17**

With the return of the breath she opens the drawer

Wordless Song #9 – The Orchard:

She returns to the desk and opens the drawer and removes a little blue book which she opens in front of her face in an attitude of reading.

She puts down the book. She collects the tissue paper and makes 'wings'. She collects cardigan and chair.

Sitting, she takes a tea-cup and saucer from the drawer. She chooses a pear. She opens the book, moves the pear to her mouth. She rises, moves into the av image momentarily.

**Light – lx cue 18
Light – count 5 lx cue 19**

Come back up and she exits, gently smiling.

Light – as she exits lx cue 20



1.3 CONTEXT

Dramaturgy as Perceptible Practice

I have been engaged in a dialogue about performance practice with Margaret Cameron since we met at the Magdalena Australia Festival in 2003. Since our meeting she has directed my solo *Heroin(e)* (2007), collaborated with me and others on a new music theatre lullaby *Falling Like A Bird* (on-going), and been an interviewee for this research project (2008, 2009, 2010). In 2010, with the support of the Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Performance 'Fresh Grounds' program, she acted as the directorial and dramaturgical consultant on *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*, leading into the Blue Room Theatre season in Perth. Her program notes for the Perth season constitute what she describes as an act of fidelity: both a description of what was left in her of our dialogue, and an articulation of what that dialogue *does*.¹ On first encounter Cameron's poetic language may seem obscure, yet its density reflects a rigorous attempt to tell something *exactly*. Cameron describes our dialogue as comprising more than spoken words, yet we "say words aloud" until "being is articulated" and "words become language":

Here in the orchard, will she remain forever in a paradigm of wanting what is readily hers?
But the bending arms of language accept her.

Because our ears are ripe for understanding, we speak to understand, not store each moment away, toward a future that will not occur, but 'write' it—saying words aloud. And in this saying aloud being is articulated between us — until words become language. We do not overlook our hearing, nor hold against a capacity to perceive the audible ... my self is not inaudible. Through saying I hear and through (y)our ear I hear more what I hear — becoming exact and telling — becoming (a) telling. Each presence is amplified by listening and as listening is amplified — sometimes you hear what I do not. And in hearing you hear I cannot un-hear our hearing. (Cameron, 2010)

Here I understand Cameron to be describing the complex way in which the articulation of misapprehensions fold into conversation and play a part in constructing meaning. She continues:

For we are listening toward each other, encouraged by each receptive body to pick the audible fruit of meaning. Our ears drop down, strung as droplets on the sagging arms of time, hanging ready in the air for a picking that delivers nourishment, value and understanding. And when dropping fruit of times own will, it is because our listening ears have ripened things so that they fall full upon the telling earth between us, on the ground where we stand ... these fruits of words made of flesh are full of flesh for they are my being articulated. In listening that listens I bend toward an understanding of this —

¹ Cameron's sensitivity to receiving feedback has led her to find another way: "If I tell you what is left in me of your work, it will also be my work of description, a telling. It will be an artistic practice for me. An act of 'fidelity' (Cixous)" (Cameron, 2003, p.71).

being articulated. To be in the word and in the world without being pronounced by it and to discover language in this context is also to recover it. And so bowing toward each other, we receive our own ears. Each giving of receiving we are, through self-regard, teacher and student both, to the occasion of this audience. And in receiving what we are giving — our giving in this discourse is ours to receive. But let us not forget that there are other sensibles, for if we do not understand our hearing, we may nose it and smell the smell of it. And let us not imagine that we need to understand that we are understanding. It is the procession of thinking that — in the procession of thinking — the fruits become what becomes and what becomes, becomes ripe in every sense that is not sensible but full of sense and becoming apparent it falls as insight.

A methodology centered on propositions of self-reception, giving and receiving audience and hearing oneself hear, develop psychoanalytic, philosophic, somatic and perceptual practices that enunciate the central dramaturgy I pose to your work through my own. (Cameron, 2010)

The density of Cameron's language will continue to be unpacked and become clear as the reader progresses through the following chapters. Here it is worth noting that our ongoing conversation about practice played a significant role in my being able to articulate self-reception as a useful diva attribute.

Review of No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation

I end this chapter with a 2010 review by writer, critic and academic Susan Midalia. Midalia was invited to attend *No Door On Her Mouth* at the Blue Room Theatre by my supervisor, and her colleague and friend, Lekkie Hopkins. We had not previously met, but afterwards we spoke at length about the show and my process. She was then inspired to write this review (below), as a way of interacting with the performance and of offering something back to me, the actor. As with Cameron's programme notes, Midalia's review constitutes an "act of fidelity", generously articulating what is left in her of my work. She has indeed entered into an amorous exchange with the performance, asking Irigaray's question: *Who are you?* And through naming her reception of those things I may and may not have intended (e.g. the intentional caged bird; the unintentional Virginia Woolf), she amplifies my capacity to receive my own work:

Dawn Albinger is the kind of performer who reminds us that knowledge – of the self, the other, one's world – is inevitably, and sometimes confrontingly, embodied. She dances, dips, paces, gags herself with an outstretched arm, whirls and flaps with astonishing energy

and concentration; and the slightest movement of her eyes, mouth, fingers, shoulders, can at one moment suggest inner composure and emotional anguish the next. 'No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation' is the name of what is usually called a one-woman show: and what a show it is. For if Albinger's performance is "about" anything, then it might be read as a series of arresting visual metaphors for a damaged woman valiantly struggling to find a voice for unspoken, unspecified trauma. One of the most remarkable metaphors in this one-hour piece is the spectacle of the female hysteric, her hands flapping with such ferocity that she becomes the caged bird, beating her wings hopelessly against invisible bars. The moment is all the more poignant because Albinger's relentless flapping of hands at one point creates the illusion that the woman is on the verge of flight, only to flutter down again into silent passivity. And lest all this sounds singularly bleak, it's worth commenting that Albinger's performance is also at times bracingly comic, a way of mocking the diva's tendency to self-dramatisation and self-absorption.

For what informs this show is above all the idea of ambivalence. Blending speech, song, dance, gesture, music, sound effects and visual technologies, the performance is unsettling precisely because it refuses the audience the comfort of distinct categories. 'No Door On Her Mouth' is, for starters, both a highly cerebral and abstract text (it gives knowing nods to, among others, Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous, the Handless Maiden of medieval myth and Samuel Beckett) and a vivid, at times visceral, physical experience. The distinction between nature and culture is similarly collapsed, as ominous animal sounds are counterpointed by sinister orchestral music. Speech and song become indistinguishable; the diva's russet evening gown can look both decorously feminine and seductive. A single gesture can be read differently: the woman's constant lifting of the hem of the gown, for example, can be seen as a symbol of feminine modesty, but also as a shrinking from some unnamable contamination. A raised eyebrow can signal disdain for another or for an abject self. Albinger's face, too, is extraordinarily mobile and expressive, by turns graceful, ravaged, almost ugly, defiant, defeated.

Ambivalence also informs the philosophically crucial moment of choice, presented as, variously, a source of liberation, a yawn-inducing burden and a resilient determination to endure. Albinger begins her speech by insisting that choices must be made "again and again and again and again and again..." but her initially declarative, confident tone slides into helpless sobbing and then into a tedious drone, as the constant repetition of the words potentially drains them of either existential or political meaning. It is both a clever and deeply disturbing moment, one reminiscent of Samuel Beckett at his nihilistic best.

But at this point the voice recovers its strength and chooses to resume the struggle, “again and again and again and again...”

And then there are the pears – golden-green, splendidly globed, a constant presence on stage. How might these be read? Hands behind her back, trying unsuccessfully to bite them, the woman evokes the myth of the Handless Maiden yet to be restored to her full selfhood. Or could she be a thwarted Eve, longing for forbidden knowledge? The two, almost comically monstrous pears which at one point appear tantalisingly in front of her, might be seen as a delectable “pair” - a visual pun that mocks the masculine reduction of woman to her breasts. We watch enthralled, amused, delightfully surprised, as Albinger tries on different feminine identities.

Albinger describes her purpose and methodology as “thought becoming a shape”, and this seems to me entirely appropriate for her astonishing performance. By fusing mind and body, idea and emotion, the visual, aural and tactile, and through the complex interplay of language and silence, she offers a resonant dramatisation of a woman’s search for self. She also gives us the gift of self-reflection, the opportunity to project our own inner dramas onto the canvas of her body and, later, to consider their possible meanings. The final idea I was left to contemplate was the image of Albinger as Virginia Woolf: her aquiline nose, the long curve of her neck, her hair tied back in an elegant bun, recalling those familiar and beautiful photographs of the apparently composed and self-possessed creative woman. Albinger’s pace is unhurried as she holds a book in one hand, her head bent in studious contemplation, and in the other hand a pear, which she raises to her mouth. The image suggests that she, like Woolf before her, has won through to some inner peace. The allusion, of course, might not have been intentional, but given Woolf’s ultimate suicide, it was nonetheless for me a haunting conclusion: to know that such poise and serenity, such nourishment of the self, might be a mere staving off of calamity. Even, especially, in this final moment, Albinger refuses to allow her audience a complacent happy ending.

(Midalia, personal communication, 2010)

It’s true I do not offer a happy ending. Midalia is right to infer I am not so complacent. The allusion to Woolf, though unintended at first, is apt. In refusing the diva’s personality and embracing her as a concept, strategy, movement and position, I create a small space in which a woman is completely unto herself. For this indefinite moment she is not in relation to an absent Other. And in so doing I invoke the feminine divine.

In this chapter I have introduced the performance through text, image and review; I have pointed towards the practice with the 'instructions to the performer' throughout the script; and I have indicated the importance of critical discussion through Cameron's dramaturgical programme notes and Midalia's review. Having foregrounded the embodied knowledge resulting from practice, I leave the work and its multiple meanings to hover.

Invoking diva mastery I turn now, in Chapter Two, to the dual tasks of positioning the study within the practice-led research paradigm, and articulating the theoretical and conceptual framework that underpins the exegesis. In doing so I position my practice within its political and aesthetic terrain: solo, personal, poststructural and feminist.

Chapter Two

The Articulate Practitioner

Positioning the researcher and her practice

My performance practice can be understood as an investigation of voice, agency and desire. The seed of each performance is sparked by provocation, by a personal discomfort that marks an imbalance, a sense that 'things-are-not-right', often experienced as anger or frustration, and in intimate relation to another. Each work has, in its own way, deconstructed notions of romantic love and reconstructed possibilities for being, loving and doing in the world. There has been an optimistic emphasis on agency – the power to change, to transform – that over time has been complicated by anti-essentialist notions of self, and recognition of discursive power relations. These shifts and complications provide one of the 'leaping-off points' for this study, and so I begin this chapter with a brief narrative of my performance practice, positioning it within its aesthetic and political terrain. I then introduce a genealogy of practice-led theorists in order to discuss what Karin Knorr Cetina (1991, and in Melrose, 2010) calls my *epistemic culture*. This leads me to situate the study firmly within what Brad Haseman (2006) calls 'The Third Research Paradigm'. Braiding a rich mix of practice-led and autoethnographic voices with Haseman's articulation of the five core research criteria, I alert the reader to key stylistic choices that inflect the ways in which this study and its findings will unfold. At the same time I lightly introduce core thematic threads that will be developed throughout. In doing so I position myself as the articulate and expert practitioner, and position the study as a clear example of practice-led research in contemporary feminist performance.

2.1 POSITIONING THE RESEARCHER IN AN AESTHETIC AND POLITICAL TERRAIN

Female Solo Artist

My career in theatre spans twenty-eight years and has its roots in Twelfth Night Theatre adolescent workshops (Brisbane, 1979-80) and the collaborative devising practices of La Boite Theatre's *Youth Theatre* under the tutelage of Ian Leigh-Cooper (Brisbane, 1986). Formal training includes Jim Vile's drama course at Adelaide University (1984-5) and later my acting degree through Victorian College of the Arts (1993-5) where I learned important skills of craft from Rob Meldrum, Anne

Thompson, Rinske Ginsberg, Bill Pepper, Julia Moody, Richard Murphett, and David Latham. While the first part of my career followed the path of many aspiring young actresses – working in cafes and department stores between auditions and ‘gigs’ – I was increasingly dissatisfied with the structures and content of the industry I found myself working within. In 1999 I encountered the Magdalena Project at the Magdalena Aotearoa Festival in Wellington, New Zealand. In a moment of clarity I realized that it was time to commit to my own artistic vision.

Between 1997 and 2007, and amongst other group theatre projects, I created three solo performances: the *chrysalid* (1998), *ruthless* (1999) and *Heroin(e)* (2007). Viewed through the lens of feminist theatre scholarship, my practice is the medium through which I deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge with the aim of shifting personal and cultural perceptions. My first impulse for making solo work is the desire to be heard, and to hear my self. I seek to achieve this by assuming multiple points of view, until I arrive at a set of perspectives that allow me to breathe. This insistence on personal subjectivity positions my work squarely in feminist theatre terrain, while its one-woman performance structure places it in the context of the 1990s “rise of the female solo artist”, (Aston cited in Case, 2008, pxviii). In creating solo performance I have been engaged in what Peta Tait describes as “the material process of innovatively producing both theatre and female subjectivity which makes a female identity or self the pivotal presence within the text” (Tait, 1998, p.225). Despite being solo, my work is not created in isolation, but within what Shirley McKechnie calls a “community of creative minds” (in Smith and Dean, 2010, p.93). I refer to this as my community of minds and of *practice*, and it is a community that often gathers under the banner of the Magdalena Project.

Community of minds and practice: The Magdalena Project, sacredCOW, Margaret Cameron

The Magdalena Project, an international network of women in contemporary theatre, has existed since 1986. Committed to nurturing an awareness of women’s contribution to theatre and performance, it aims to explore new approaches to theatre-making that profoundly reflect the experiences and political priorities of its members.¹ I first encountered The Magdalena Project in 1999 at Magdalena Aotearoa, a ten-day international women’s theatre festival in Wellington, New Zealand. Here, a sense of ‘muteness’ and a desire to ‘find a voice’ came into sharp focus. I witnessed numerous productions that spoke to, and were at odds with, my experience of being a woman in the world. Numerous challenges and possibilities of belonging to the gender called ‘woman’ were articulated through culturally and aesthetically diverse theatre praxes. Within this

¹ See the Magdalena Project website for details of its aims and objectives. <http://www.themagdalena-project.org/en/content/aims>

rich celebration of diversity, many performances spoke to me through form and content, and across language and cultural divides. I was lit up like a firecracker. I simply had never been so excited by theatre and witnessed extraordinary skill. And I marked the words of its artistic director, Jill Greenhalgh, who said “If we are going to change the world with our theatre we have to be bloody good at what we do” (Albinger, 1999, Unpublished journal, March 30). Since then, the Magdalena Project has provided a context in which to engage critically, through my work, with the culture that has constructed me. This critical engagement is made possible through dialogue, through a “listening toward each other that amplifies hearing” (Cameron, 2010, *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* programme notes). As noted in Chapter One, Margaret Cameron has written about this eloquently in *Dramaturgy as Perceptible Practice*, a reflection on her practice and our dialogue: “sometimes you hear what I do not. And in hearing you hear, I cannot unhear our hearing” (Cameron, 2010, *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* programme notes).

My solo praxis is also deeply influenced by my seven years as member of sacredCOW, a trans-national theatre ensemble formed to devise adventurous and original performance. Co-founded with Julie Robson and Scotia Monkivitch in 2000, the ensemble’s long-term training in voice, movement and performance-making was a laboratory style practice, and feminist in its politics. My 1999 encounter with the Magdalena Project had propelled me to Denmark where I participated in a month’s theatre training under Tina Nielsen at the Odin Teatret. On my return to Australia I was keen to continue this kind of training that placed the actor’s body and voice at the centre of the dramaturgy. Monkivitch’s physical exactitude and social justice politics and Robson’s vocal flight and research on deadly female vocality complemented my own budding enquiries into voice, agency, female imaginary and desire. To develop the art, audiences and cultural relevance of our work, sacredCOW sought collaboration with other artists and organisations. An example of this was our rich exchange with the Mt Olivett Palliative Care Unit while making *The Quivering* (2000-2005), a practice-led research project submitted as part of Robson’s doctoral work. The sacredCOW members were also co-founders of Magdalena Australia, the network of women-in-theatre linked with the worldwide Magdalena Project, and were key drivers of the 2003 international festival at the Brisbane Powerhouse themed *Theatre-Women-Travelling*.

I met Margaret Cameron through the Magdalena Australia festival in 2003 where she performed her solo work *Knowledge* and *Melancholy*. I recognised that as an artist she was doing something very specific that I was at a loss to identify but which gave her performance a literalness – an apparent truth (at least, a truth apparent to me) – that had nothing to do with naturalism and was

not reliant on psychological realism. Influenced by an ongoing conversation and collaboration with American choreographer Deborah Hay, Cameron works with *perceptual practices*, many of which I now engage in my own praxis. These *perceptual practices* set Cameron apart as theatre-maker and performer on the Australian and international landscape. They are described in more detail in Chapter Six, but here, by way of brief example, I will say that the practice of asking ‘*what if where I am is what I need*’, of ‘*telling it exactly*’, and of ‘*listening for the feedback*’ have been key practices in the development of *No door on her mouth – a lyrical amputation*.

Agency, identity, subjectivity

Taken chronologically, my solos trace a developing tension between essentialist notions of a unified self and post-structural readings of subjectivity as de-regulated and heterogeneous. This tension has been further amplified by an understanding that discursive gestures of power, if left unacknowledged or unexamined, undermine a capacity for individual agency. Over time this understanding has complicated my earlier belief that to ‘have a voice’ is simply a matter of telling one’s own story. These shifts and tensions are evidenced by the content of my solos becoming less overtly autobiographical. Engagement with identity and subjectivity are also evident in the form each solo takes. For example, the circular narrative/poem cycle of *the chrysalid*, performed precariously on a completely wet clay surface, points to the slipperiness of a subject claiming to be “whole”. In *ruthless* the folksy ‘stand-and-deliver’ anti-fairytale structure, presented in non-theatre spaces, underscores a socially and narratively constructed subject. *Heroin(e)* features a de-centering of narrative, as the now fractured subject physically plays through a very strong central metaphor of a domestic-and-car wreck. As my ideas of self, and self in relation to cultural discourses, evolve, the theatrical forms I employ have shifted from dramatic to post-dramatic styles, marking the interrelationship of form and content.

Julia Varley, actress with Odin Teatret, and one of the founders of the international Magdalena Project, has written “Perhaps...because it follows simultaneously two different sets of rules, that of experience and that of representation, theatre allows me to sense the possibility for deep changes.” (Varley, 2011, p.4) This paradox — following two sets of rules — and this *sensing of possibility for deep change* that Varley says it allows, speak to my earliest impulses to metaphorically ‘find a voice’ through making theatre. However, by the time I made *Heroin(e)* my optimistic adherence to the possibility of re-presenting myself and claiming agency through semi-autobiographical narrative was fracturing. In retrospect, I see that it was time for a conceptual and theoretical deepening to inform and interact with my practice. Several years later, it’s clear that a practice-led investigation of what the diva could offer to a feminist theatre praxis offered the ideal site for such deepening.

2.2 A GENEALOGY OF PRACTICE-LED THEORISTS

Positioning the study in the field of practice-led arts research

In performance practice, knowledge construction is not necessarily fixed and linear, or structured towards a positivist conception of truth. The literature on practice-led research considers the implications of a whole suite of questions, including: What are the implications for receiving and critiquing new knowledge claims in practice-led research, especially when (some of) these claims are embedded in a live art event? How does one receive and critique new knowledge emerging in the constant dance between observer and what is observed (the artist and her impulse; the researcher and her question; the spectator and the performance), between an autobiographical experience and the attempt to “tell it exactly” (Cameron, 2011, p.7)? What role does the aesthetic sensibility of the audience, and in particular of the examiner, play, in creating, contextualizing and validating that knowledge? These questions are pertinent especially when the performance is not fixed but dynamic: deliberately changing in relation to the daily questions and insights of the performer-researcher, to daily fluctuations in her breath rhythm and thought patterns; responding to new audience relationships each night, to the physically different performance spaces in which the work is/will be situated. How does the reflective practitioner structure her intentions and assume a critical position?² How does she find a voice, become the Articulate Practitioner?

It is beyond the scope of this study to attempt to answer all the questions that emerge when one begins to undertake practice-led research. I include them here as an introduction to an epistemological genealogy of theorists concerned with recent discussions of knowledge production in the field of contemporary performance. In particular, I trace conceptual associations from Knorr-Cetina’s ‘epistemic culture’ through to McKechnie’s articulation of implicit and explicit knowledges, and Melrose’s distinction between expert spectatorship and expert practice. I arrive at Haseman’s “third research paradigm” (Haseman, 2006), within which I firmly position my own practice-led research.

My understanding of knowledge-production in the field of feminist contemporary performance is that knowledge is produced in the resonating spaces between theory, research, and practice (Case 2008, and in Goodman 2005; 1999; Melrose, 2006, 2007, 2011, and in Goodman 2005). I would call this my “epistemic culture” after Knorr-Cetina: the amalgam of mechanisms and arrangements,

² I have used the term ‘reflective practitioner’ for some years to refer to my practice of writing a journal, writing and publishing articles, and critically dialoguing with peers. While I am not referencing anyone else’s work here I note the term has been used by a number of performance theorists, e.g. Donald Schon (1983).

which in my given field make up “*how we know what we know*” (Knorr-Cetina 1991, p1). The practice does not demonstrate or illustrate theory, nor does the research explicate performance. In this research project, insights emerge from the literature review, the studio practice, the yoga practice; from the interviews, and from random conversations; from daily observations; from work-in-progress showings and the live dramaturgical feedback they provide; and from the (most recent but not final) performance text itself; from the playing of that text before live audiences; and from the reflections that take place in the hours, days, weeks that follow. Here I find McKechnie’s articulation of implicit and explicit knowledges useful. That which is explicit can be written, verbally encoded, uttered. That which is implicit is written in the body: “bodies are the repositories of the ...works they have performed” (McKechnie, 2009, p.85). She references Robin Grove (2000), who likewise describes the performer’s language as an utterance of the body, “or the body *being* uttered by a language it doesn’t entirely know” (2009, p.85). McKechnie and Grove are researching dancers’ bodies and languages, but their observation that dance language is full of “potentialities and pressures” can also be applied to the body in contemporary performance. Fluency in these implicit and explicit languages is the domain of what Susan Melrose calls the *expert practitioner* (Melrose 2006, 2011).

Melrose writes about implicit languages by invoking what she calls expert *discipline-specific intuition*. In “The Vanishing – or Little Erasures Without Significance?” (2006), she distinguishes between expert practice and expert spectatorship and asserts, “the operations of ‘expert’ or ‘arts-professional intuitive processes’ are fundamental to practitioner expertise, and to expert performance-making process” (2006, p. 99). More recently she has observed that these operations are not always evident to an audience, and spectators:

...tend only to see the results of expert-intuitive processes, often qualitatively-transformed, through collaboration and the application of the production processes equally constitutive to the discipline. Such constitutive processes specific to expert making need, therefore to be studied *in their own time*, and not at all in the times and spaces of the performance event. Even from the perspectives of an *expert* spectating, these constitutive making processes can only be speculated about, can only be inferred from the quite specific perspective of their (modulated) outcome. (Melrose, 2011, p.3)

While Melrose does not explicitly write about implicit languages in the same way as McKechnie, one can infer a relationship between *implicit languages and expert discipline-specific intuition*. As Melrose notes, these are constitutively unavailable as such to the spectator, and yet expertise can be recognized, without those who have recognized it necessarily being able to articulate it

discursively. Melrose is compelled to ask, “Is it unspeakable? Or have we not yet determined how to speak and write it?” (2011, p.2). This is one of the questions that go to the heart of the practice-led research debate. In formulating a response to this question, Haseman (2011) asserts that practice-led arts research comprises a third research paradigm entirely, one that sits alongside the quantitative and qualitative (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2008).

2.3 RESEARCHING IN THE THIRD PARADIGM

Five Core Research Categories

In the past two decades, arts-led researchers have tended to either embrace or refuse the practice/theory binary: “[D]o the research / read the theory, then produce the work; or produce the work, then explain it in theoretical terms” (Hecq & Bannagan, 2010, paragraph 5). Another possibility, and one which this research project exemplifies, is that one might theorise *through* the practice. Whichever approach one utilises, the challenge for the practice-led researcher still remains, for, as Hecq and Bannagan point out, just because an artwork is new doesn’t make it original or groundbreaking in terms of knowledge-production. Haseman’s approach has been to demonstrate how the practice-led paradigm, while different, still meets five core categories used by the Academy to define research. These categories are as follows:

1. That there is a clearly established problem which drives the study, usually made clear through a ‘research question’ or ‘an enthusiasm of practice’;
2. That, just as the research problem and its content are under scrutiny, so too will the process of research be scrutinised. It is necessary for the study to articulate its methodology convincingly and so make it available for scrutiny;
3. That the research undertaken is located within its field of enquiry and associated conceptual terrain;
4. That the knowledge claims made from the study must be reported to others and demonstrate the benefit of the study in social, cultural, environmental or economic terms;
5. That what becomes known is made available for sustained and verifiable peer review. (Haseman, 2011)

Elaborating each of these categories below, and braiding the voices of other theorists with Haseman’s, I position my own study within this practice-led arts paradigm.

Enthusiasm of Practice

Haseman's distinction between problem-led and practice-led research is situated in the artist's 'enthusiasm of practice' which can also be understood as the artist's tendency "to 'dive in', to commence practicing to see what emerges" (*ibid*). In this he follows Gray (1996), whom he cites as a chief architect in redesigning arts research as:

...initiated in practice, where questions, problems, challenges are identified and formed by the needs of practice and practitioners; and secondly, that the research strategy is carried out through practice, using predominantly methodologies and specific methods familiar to us as practitioners. (Gray 1996, p.3)

Melrose (2007) agrees, referencing Peter Osborne (2000) when she observes that:

...the artist is existential - he or she 'has to' make new work; that work is likely to be characterised by the quest for that 'qualitative transformation', which means, amongst other things, that one significant part of the performance decision-making cannot be figured in advance of its emergence. It will surprise its maker/s, and to the extent that it is unknowable in advance, even/especially by its maker/s, it tends to be constitutively speculative, as well as expert. (Melrose, 2007, paragraph 11)

The 'problem', as such, emerges from the needs of the practice and/or the 'expert' practitioner. There can be a long time within the frame of the practice-led research project where the question or problem cannot be known, seen, articulated, or named. In this project, the initial question regarding the diva icon's usefulness to feminist theatre practice emerges from numerous 'thresholds' of practice over a time period spanning 1999 – 2007. Most significantly it emerges from, and is directly linked to, Robson's 2005 study of the deadliness of female vocality. Asking how the Sirens could usefully inform a feminist theatre praxis, Robson identified four 'siren' vocalities: monster, diva, lamenter and lullaby-maker. I have taken one aspect of siren vocality, the diva, and similarly asked how *this* icon might usefully inform a feminist theatre praxis. As mentioned at the Introduction, perceptions of the diva held by women attending my retreats coincided with my participation in Robson's research to suggest the diva icon as a subject for study. The question regarding some women's participation in their own oppression or voicelessness has its genesis in personal autobiography and emerged on the studio floor as my process led me into places of stillness and silence.

Scrutinising the Methodology

The second research criterion, as articulated by Haseman, requires the methodology be as transparent as possible for purposes of scrutiny. This requirement is entirely consistent with feminist research practices (Reinharz 1992; Hesse-Biber 2007; Letherby 2003). Melrose, writing specifically about practice-led performance research from an 'expert spectator' position, acknowledges the challenge inherent in this task when she asks how the:

...expert spectators might ordinarily have access to the operations specific to the times and places of performance-making, where that making tends, in addition, to be driven by a production deadline, to a range of external criteria, and in terms specific to the artist's expanded signature? Each of these aspects renders the undertaking fragile, the practitioners more or less vulnerable. (Melrose, 2007, paragraph 6)

The distinction between expert spectatorship and expert practice is useful here. There are areas of expert practice that are invisible to the spectator. I am returned to the necessity of reading the performance *with* the exegesis, not so one can explicate or demonstrate the other, but so new knowledge can be heard (read) in the resonating spaces between them. Margaret Cameron refers to this as a *syntax of perspectives*: where perceiving something from two or more perspectives enables a resonance before words, a third meaning, new knowledge (Cameron 2011, p.12).

Throughout this exegesis the reader can expect to find a *syntax of perspectives* as I flow between the practical, the conceptual and subjective experiences. Melrose defines expertise in performance practice as something that is elaborative and learned progressively in relational processes, "practiced and felt, rather than known discursively" (Melrose, 2011, p.5). She returns, via this definition, to Knorr Cetina's notion that "practices that are creative and constructive" are not only felt, "but likely to be strongly felt and contradictory" (Melrose, 2011, p.5). Expert intuitive processes are "retained as a possibility for making new work that feels right, as a tactic" (2011, p.5). In reflecting on my own strongly felt, and often contradictory, expert-intuitive processes, I reveal the deeply autobiographical material that undergirds the creative work. Following Margaret Cameron's lead, I have deployed these same expert-intuitive practices in the pursuit of leveraging conceptual space between an experience and its cultural labels. This has been a key tactic.

Feminist researchers have long endorsed the power of autobiography and anecdote to grapple with the nuance of lived experience and to invite unanticipated questions (Moss, 2007; Hopkins, 2009; Reinharz, 1992). Arguably, for writer-researchers, the motive of anecdote and autobiography

is to invite the intimate, intersubjective, subjective and personal in order to produce more exciting writing and engage the reader, creating the potential for exchanges as story generates story. Miller (1991) and Gallop (2002) demonstrate that thinking through a life experience is productive thinking that enables rhetorical couplings and creates the chance for something unanticipated to happen. In this study, the narrative of personal experience is transformed through creative process to poetic expression in *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*. Here in the exegesis, however, the reader can expect intimate revelation as the diva and the handless maiden lead me to critically reflect on a set of intersecting themes. Moments of illumination may take researcher and reader by surprise, and what emerges is the rich relationship between the practical and the theoretical. In moving between that which intuitively *feels right* in the studio, a reflective journal practice, and conceptual engagement with feminist and performance theories, I reveal how the context of research deeply informs the artistic practice. The theorists I use, the topics I investigate, and the reflexive, transparent stance I adopt allow me to claim the research as feminist.

Conceptual Terrain

In addressing the third research criterion, *that the research undertaken is located within its field of enquiry and associated conceptual terrain*, Haseman posits an alternative or complement to the traditional literature review: a contextual review, following principles of inter-textuality. Such a review will capture:

... perspectives that flow from the interdependence that exists between a present practice and the intersecting and ever-expanding web of references and quotations that have preceded it.

So even though it works differently, this credibility test is met; practice-led researchers are able to locate their research within its field of enquiry and associated conceptual and aesthetic terrain. (Haseman, 2006, paragraphs 27, 28)

In the field of contemporary feminist performance such a review will consider not only the literature surrounding her emergent 'problem', in this instance the diva, voice, subjectivity and agency; but also contemporary performance literature, and cultural products themselves (for example, performances, plays, poems, movies, fiction, and popular representations of 'divas'). And because the performance practice foregrounds intuitive leaps, and takes as a fundamental perceptual practice *what if where I am is what I need* (Deborah Hay, 2000, p.6), a contextual review will also include texts, performances, poems that come *absent-mindedly* or *accidentally* to hand, such as

the Handless Maiden myth of medieval Europe, picked up as a bed-time read at a friend's house, and now essential to my reading and definition of the diva. I also align myself with Siobhan Murphy (2011) in further understanding the relationship between the practice and theory as recognizing that "what calls my attention, what calls out to be said, to be written about on a philosophical level, does so because it rings true with the embodied findings of my studio practice" (Murphy, 2011, p.8). What has called my attention repeatedly is the relationship between the diva and the handless maiden, the western myth of romantic love, female subjectivity, breath, desire and the feminine divine.

Knowledge Claims and Symbolic Languages

Haseman suggests practice-led researchers also accept and meet the fourth research criteria: an insistence that knowledge claims are made through the symbolic languages and forms of their practice:

This insistence on reporting research through the outcomes and material forms of practice challenges traditional ways of representing knowledge claims. It also means that people who wish to evaluate the research outcomes also need to experience them in direct (co-presence) or indirect (asynchronous, recorded) form. (Haseman, 2006, paragraph 31)

The examiner is invited to the performance, or views it on dvd, or both. However, as Smith and Dean observe:

[P]eer assessment in the arts is something of a minefield because of the highly subjective element in judging artistic work and the tendency for ground-breaking work to be greeted with opprobrium rather than praise. (Smith and Dean, 2009, p. 26)

Melrose points towards a possible resolution of this dilemma by offering a criterion for judging the success of a performative action:

The performative (which works) engages a spectator in an event-constructive activity... The actor's performance is performative, as soon as its actions, and the framing allowed by *mise en scene*, together cause spectators to imagine and develop fictional character (largely, it might be added, in spectators' own terms). (Melrose, 2007)

The contemporary performer may or may not be interested in developing fictional "character" in a traditional sense. In a post dramatic work the audience is invited to overlay their own experiences

and concerns on body, voice and *mise en scene* the actor creates. Her actions, dramaturgy, and framing choices can be considered to have 'worked' if the audience is engaged in some way, either intellectually, imaginatively, or somatically. And by 'actions', here, I refer to more than physical actions. Words are actions, "to utter is an utter act" (Cameron, 2003, p.71), and thoughts and perceptual practices are also actions. It should be clear to the reader that this dissertation is to be read together with the performance *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*, either in "direct (co-presence) or indirect (asynchronous, recorded) form" (Haseman, 2006, paragraph 31).³ It should also be noted that symbolic forms of language are not restricted to the performance text, but appear throughout the exegesis, most notably in notating the practice. Between these different styles of 'writing', insights and further questions resound. This is praxis: the nexus of theory and practice.

Reporting Knowledge Claims

The fifth and final category addressed by Haseman is that what becomes known is made available for sustained and verifiable peer review. Given that artist-researchers insist on the primacy of the symbolic languages of their given form in reporting their knowledge claims, this fifth category represents a particular challenge for time based art-forms such as live performance. A recording of the thing is not the thing itself. Filming and film editing are art-forms unto themselves. The choices of framing a shot and editing between camera angles made by an artist untrained in the media, or by a second artist unfamiliar with the work of the first can result in limiting the capacity for imaginative engagement. Haseman agrees that time-based artforms suffer in this category, and calls for a system "for commenting on and annotating works, some citational infrastructure, a digital platform that allows peer review and artists to interact and exchange views and interpretations on artworks" (Haseman, 2006, paragraph 37). It is an idea worthy of development, but such a system would still need to meet the multiple challenges of translating live time-based art into another form and the implications this has for how the work is, or can be, read. Here the reader of my study is asked simply to bear this in mind as she remembers whichever performance she attended, and (or) watches the dvd, (re)reads chapter one with the script in its current form, and looks at photographs taken during the Perth Blue Room season of *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*.

³ See Appendix 4.2.2 for the 50-minute DVD of *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* performed at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Wales, August 2011.

A Further Note on Styles of Writing

Following Langer (1942) and Eisman (1979; 1993), Haseman (2006) makes a distinction between the way words are used in discursive and non-discursive symbolic systems. The discursive has, since the time of Socrates, operated powerfully in the West to frame our world and drive policy. However, as Haseman asserts, “excluding ‘poetically treated’ forms from ‘legitimate’ means of representation...can only result in an impoverished understanding of what it is to know, what it is we can say and what it is to be human” (Haseman, 2006, paragraph 47). The language used in qualitative research falls into the discursive set, and Haseman points to the growing number of qualitative researchers who feel constrained by the capacity of the discursive to capture the nuance and subtlety of human behaviour, and who turn to “presentational symbolic forms such as poetry, fiction writing, theatre, performance, dance, music and the visual and graphic arts to represent their claims to knowledge” (Norris in Haseman, 2006, paragraph 50). Where Haseman uses the terms ‘discursive’ and ‘non-discursive’ to describe the way words are used, I follow Hopkins in using the terms ‘linear’ and ‘lyrical’ to describe the different writing styles used in poststructural feminist and performance research.

Autoethnography, and specifically *performance* autoethnography, is one academic field in which embodied, autobiographical and self-reflexive writing styles have been rigorously theorized. A fine example of feminist performance autoethnography comes from Tammy Spry who argues that representing the performing body in the written word requires an expansion of form in academic writing: “Embodied writing must be able to reflect the corporeal and material presence of the body that generated the text in performance” (Spry, 2001, p.726). Autoethnographic texts are “generated in the liminal spaces between experience and language, between the known and the unknown, between the somatic and the semantic” (2001, p.726) and “critically turn texts back on themselves in the constant emancipation of meaning” (2001, p.727). Spry’s feminist autoethnographic texts are at once linear and lyrical, reflecting a deep engagement with the construction of female identity. Similar to autoethnographic texts, my own solo performances have autobiographical underpinnings and my process is critically self-reflexive. My solos, too, are *generated in the liminal spaces between experience and language, between the known and the unknown, between the somatic and the semantic*. One of the chaotic and messy human experiences inherent in contemporary performance-making involves the relational, collaborative and dialogic nature of the creative process. Adopting a *pluralism of discursive and interpretive methods* enables me to tease out one of the key findings of the study: the diva in dialogue.

Siobhan Murphy (2011) has also theorized styles of writing and their implication for knowledge production and reporting. In reflecting on her own creative PhD process, she distinguishes between the exegetical and dissertational writing styles, noting in particular the implication in the word exegesis that the work needs to be interpreted (Murphy 2011, p.4). Though I refer to my own study throughout as an exegesis, like Murphy I want “to discuss, rather than interpret, explain or prove” (2011, p.5). I disagree with Murphy in understanding artworks as ways of *seeing* rather than *knowing*, but I find her notion that artists generate “novel apprehensions” (2011,p.6) through their creative research to be a useful descriptor of knowledge production in practice-led performance. For Murphy these novel apprehensions, arrived at through the practice, are further unfolded through her different dissertational writing styles: “as a narrative of practice; as a process of cumulative sense-making; as a forum for examining the philosophical implications of my practice; and as an excavation of lived experience. These functions intersect and support one another and are expressed in different stylistic choices.” (2011, p.3) These stylistic choices include the discursive style, writing that is embedded in studio practice, narrative style, and poetics, all forms of writing that I, too, employ throughout this study.

And so the written component of this study will not critique the performance itself. Sitting between the exegetical and the dissertational, I employ multiple writing styles, as I move between linear forms of writing and the presentational, symbolic forms of language common to the epistemic culture of contemporary arts- and performance-making. Novel apprehensions of the diva icon are arrived at through moving reflexively between studio praxis, performance, interview, and the literature/contextual review. This reflexive movement will be traced in detail in the Chapters Five and Six while discussion of female philosophical subjectivity, the feminine divine, and the coincidence of metaphoric and material voices are woven through Chapters Four, Five and Six. Chapter Seven unfolds themes of alienation, agency, and resisting romantic love, and Chapter Eight reveals the diva in dialogue and discusses collaborative knowledge production.

Now in the following chapter, Chapter Three, I turn to the literature/contextual review. In juxtaposing historical and contemporary images of the diva in opera and popular culture a vivid portrait begins to emerge. From this ground it is possible to begin to theorise how she might (and might not) be useful to a feminist performance practice.

Chapter Three

Traditional and Contemporary readings of the Diva icon

Contextual review

Michel Poizat (1992), Wayne Koestenbaum (1993), and Catherine Clément (1999) have each produced comprehensive studies of opera and/or the diva. Despite their different lenses - poststructuralist, feminist and queer - they provide matching or related descriptions of diva attributes, behaviours, and codes of conduct, which render the diva icon definable and recognizable through history.¹ Pope and Leonard's study of the diva in literature (1996) interrogates the genre of diva fiction, and more interestingly, *detective diva fiction*, and marks subtle changes between early and mid-to-late twentieth century emphases. In the first part of this chapter, the picture of the diva icon is distilled through these sources. In the second part, I turn to representations of the diva icon in contemporary popular culture and consider media use of diva 'tropes'. These are fantastic and heartbreaking for their invocation of Western cultural fascination with, and (often vicious) desire to constrain, women whom we consider to be 'divas'.

3.1 A PORTRAIT OF THE DIVA ICON

Early assumptions regarding the diva icon

When I began this study the first 'diva' image to come to mind was that of Queensland-based performer Christine Johnson. I recalled her performance titled *A Decent Spinster* (2002), in which she appeared in a long gown, hair piled outrageously high (more than a little gothic), and her wide open mouth producing sounds that slipped easily between rock aria and birdcall. Casting further back, I can remember being a teenager in the 1980s and listening again and again to my cassette of German operatic punk diva Nina Haagen. At the time she created the most unpleasant and compelling sounds I had ever heard made by a woman. Later I became aware of Diamanda Galás with her 'kill sounds' and her heavy black eyeliner; like the kohl-lined eyes of Maria Callas; of Elizabeth Taylor playing Cleopatra; of a good friend of mine, part punk, part gothic and capable of saying the most outrageous things. This friend commanded an audience, commanded devotion (in men), and loyalty (in me). I invoke these personal memories to demonstrate the currency of the

¹ I use the term 'queer' to refer to the suite of theoretical practices that reject heteronormative definitions of gender and sexuality and challenge the concept of identity; introducing a problematic of multiple differences into what has tended to be a homogenizing discourse of sexual difference.

diva as a popular icon, and to note some of the culturally constructed notions of the diva I carried with me into this study: beautiful, talented, outrageous, flaunting convention, with a speaking and/or singing voice that can both delight and shock. With regard to my feminist theatre praxis I assumed she would be useful in her sense of entitlement: claiming space with an unbridled tongue. The literature surveyed has both affirmed and nuanced these early conceptions.

Divinity, Mastery and Permission to Embody Range

In opera, where common usage of the word diva originates, the diva is la prima donna, the first woman, the principle female voice. The Italian word 'diva' first appeared in print to denote a celebrated female singer in 1832 (Poizat, 1992, p. 179). Since then the female voice in opera has been conceptually linked to the feminine form of the word divine. In *The Angels Cry – Beyond the Pleasure Principle in Opera* (1992), Michel Poizat's complex examination of the voice, and particularly of the 'cry', in opera, is a response to his question of what *desire* brought opera into being. He locates this desire in the high voice most often embodied by the diva, and observes that the adjective 'divine' is reserved, in opera commentary and criticism, solely for the female voice (1992, p. 179). Type the Italian signifier *La Divina* into a google search bar today and you will find links to the official website of Greek-American opera legend Maria Callas. Do the same for *La Stupenda*, and the first ten links are to Australian opera star Joan Sutherland. Divine and stupendous, the high voice of the diva astonishes and astounds.

Wayne Koestenbaum, in *The Queen's Throat – opera, homosexuality and the mystery of desire* (1993), traces this desire for high voices even further back in history to the castrati: castrated male singers who originally sang the women's roles in opera (Koestenbaum, 1993, p.166). Like the voice of the diva, the high voices of the castrati were considered angelic, divine, and unintelligible, and were both loved and loathed for the pleasure they brought to the listener. The practice of castration for the purpose of producing angelic voices ceased in the nineteenth century, but since then the voices of divas have continued to climb to "stratospheric" heights (Poizat, 1992, p.76). Such high-pitched singing is unintelligible, says Poizat (1992, p.42), and in it "the distinction between humanity and animality collapses" (1992, p. 44). Yet Poizat argues the pursuit of this high voice is driven by a search for *jouissance*: that which is pleasurable, orgasmic and transgressive. Reading Poizat and Koestenbaum I understand that since the term diva came into popular use in 1832, it has been linked with longing and loss, and her high voice linked with desire, divinity, *jouissance*, loss of sense, loss of reason, and loss of intelligibility.

The French word *jouissance* used in this way derives from postmodernist Jean Francois Lyotard (1974). I use it here to invoke transgressive and orgasmic pleasure and, after Cixous (1975) and Irigaray (2002), the female libidinal economy. For Cixous *jouissance* is the source of woman's creative power and is linked with sense, sensation, eros and pleasure. Cixous' proposition is that unsuppressed *jouissance* releases creative power in ways that emerge from the body and resist rationality. I begin to theorise that the diva is useful to feminist performance for her capacity to embrace *jouissance* and unleash creative potential. At the same time I hear the caution: high voices are linked not only with angels but also with unintelligible animality. It is this prohibition on female sound that Anne Carson refers to as female *sophrosyne* (1995). I will unfold themes of female sound and silence further in Chapter Four.

Poizat and Koestenbaum position the diva as a creature of fascination, possessing a voice that demands to be obeyed and believed (Poizat, 1992, p.183). Divas are considered less human, more animal, and belonging to something 'other' – a class comprised of women and castrated men. This otherness of the diva is compounded by her contradictions: beautiful/grotesque, disciplined/capricious, powerful/vulnerable, divine/monstrous. Neither Koestenbaum nor Poizat question the hierarchy of values implicit in these pairings. Koestenbaum celebrates the diva's capacity for exceeding the "bounds of acceptable gender behaviour" (1993, p. 150), reading possibilities for positive (queer) self-identification. Poizat, on the other hand, reads "capricious behaviour" and "bizarre demands" as "the abuse of a position of absolute mastery" (1992, p. 180). He goes even further, locating diva monstrosity not only in abuses of power but in a locus of Freudian lack, so that Woman becomes the site for suffering - her monstrosity here due to deficiency rather than excess (1992, p.147). The capricious and grotesque diva destroys, but diva as a site of suffering is her-self hurt. This last pairing of seeming opposites – destroyer/destroyed – acts as an enduring and powerful social constraint, particularly on consumers of the western myth of romantic love (many of whom are women). Feminist sociologist Stevi Jackson and feminist Jungian theorists Clarissa Pinkola Estes and Rebecca Pottenger offer useful framings and modes of resistance to the romance myth and will be further explored at Chapter Seven.

These pairings of apparent opposites provoke questions for the feminist theatre-maker considering the diva icon's usefulness to her practice. Is it possible to exceed the value hierarchies implicit in these binaries? Rigour and discipline are clearly understood as pathways to excellence, and to the possibility of authority, autonomy, and perhaps even divinity. Diva biographies abound with stories of the diva voice being at once a gift, and the result of punishing discipline (Adams, 1980;

Stassinopoulos, 1981; Bach, 1992; Morton, 2001). Despite their inherent gifts, Joan Sutherland, Maria Callas, Marlene Dietrich, and Madonna have all been recognized as having worked hard to reach the pinnacle of their craft. So where do capriciousness, monstrosity, and vulnerability lead? I argue that in her capacity to non-hierarchically embrace *both* one quality *and* its opposite – magnificent and terrible, unpredictable and exciting – the diva suggests *permission to embody range* as a useful attribute for feminist performance.

These are some of the qualities and attributes traditionally associated with the diva in opera and, as we shall see, many of these are evident in contemporary references to the diva icon today. Referencing 'diva prose' (biographies, autobiographies, and stories) Koestenbaum also delivers a rich list of behaviours associated with the diva, and imitated by anyone who wants to appear strong:

I write diva prose if I am weak but want to appear strong, if I want to cut out opposition, if I want to feign beauty while knowing I'm plain, if I want to bully but seem polite, if I want to praise myself lest no one else praise me. Diva prose is the style of the outsider who has arrived inside, but still fears the sentries. (Koestenbaum, 1993, p. 85)

Koestenbaum identifies and exposes certain behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions (both a diva's perception of herself, and other people's perceptions of her), events or experiences (vocal crises, comebacks), aesthetic choices (such as gowns) and choice of companions (dogs, 'buffers', fans, royalty) as all being part of an elaborate code of female behaviour. He concludes that "Diva conduct...has enormous power to dramatize the problematic of self-expression" (1993, p. 133) and mimicking the diva is a positive act of self invention, "– of pretending, inside, to be divine – to help the stigmatized self imagine it is received, believed, and adored" (1993, p. 133). Can a feminist theatre praxis likewise benefit by mimicking the diva's elaborate code of female behaviour? Or does such mimicry simply reinforce a masculinist society's perception of ideal and fatally constructed femininity? My early encounter with these pictures of female opera characters, and the "God-voice of the Diva" that "penetrates the soul" (Poizat, 1992, p. 186), filled me at once with a desire to open wide and unbridle my tongue, and a self preserving instinct to contain and mute myself for fear of ostracism, isolation and death. For, as Catherine Clément says: the diva always dies (1999).

The stories opera tells: the diva sounds a cautionary note

Despite the loss of distinct language in high voices, Poizat and Koestenbaum agree that something pleasurable and transgressive occurs for the listener and lover of opera when the ear is "tickled"

by an aria (Koestenbaum, 1993, p.183). This transgressive pleasure is the basis for Catherine Clément's study *Opera, or the undoing of women* (1999). Clément is both enthralled by and resists opera. She argues that the seduction of music encourages one to minimize the endless procession of female characters in opera who disrupt authority and pay with their lives. She claims that one is moved by it because the music presents an opportunity for "[r]isk-free identification" that enables the listener to be blissfully moved "for no apparent reason" (1999, p.9). This ambivalence leads to a deconstruction of opera's plots: forgoing the music she closely examines the stories, in the belief that the unconscious is not deaf (1999, p.9). To paraphrase Clément, opera is filled with women who are foreigners: embodiments of exotic otherness. They are from somewhere else – mysterious, dangerous, transgressive (they resist the dominant order; they resist love or love the wrong man too passionately), and they almost always pay with their lives. They are stabbed, they stab themselves; they are crushed; they leap into water, from parapets, into fire (1999, p. 11). Or they are married, but even then some part of their nature must die and another woman's blood will inevitably flow (1999, p.98). The women she uncovers through the stories opera tells have each trespassed some invisible line of geography, of detail, of profession, or of an age (1999, p.59) that makes them unbearable. They must be punished for these transgressions and so they struggle "for several hours of music" and then they die (1999, p. 59).

In focussing on opera's narratives Clément does not lose sight of the fact that the diva sings, but claims that "music makes one forget the plot", which is, so often, the story of a woman loving and losing her life (1999, p. 10). She tells us, "(s)inging and wasting your breath can be the same thing" as she presents the women who break rules and threaten to disrupt "the things at stake in sexual and authoritarian power" (1999, pp.10-11). Carmen the gypsy takes the initiative in love (1999, p.50), Isolde loves the wrong man (1999, p.54), Tosca loves too much: "*Vissi d'arte, vissi d'amore*" (1999, p. 41). Clément calls love a dirty trick, for "(e)very crime in opera is committed in its name!" (1999, p.65). And yet she, too, loves the "women victims of the operatic stage" (McClary in Clément, 1999, p xvii) and finds their magnificent, subversive voices to be powerful, despite their inevitable deaths.

Death is the ultimate silence. No more can a woman cry, talk too much, or sing once she has died. Dead, she can no longer think, speak or act: her power to disrupt ceases. She has been managed, while the fathers and the heroes live on. Loving these women, Clément mourns their passing, but ultimately invites us to heed their cry "*Lasciatemi morir*" – Let me die (1999, p. 22). Only when we cease opera's ceaseless murder and resurrection, says Clément, will opera itself cease, and

instead we will sing together and “women will sing of happiness” (1999, p. 177). One does not necessarily need to call for the death of opera, nor cleave to utopian visions of group singing, to take Clément’s point: the stories opera tells need to be re-visioned. Our unconscious is not deaf. Revisioning these stories requires a close look at the myth that underpins them. The western myth of romantic love, with its emphasis, especially for women, of loving or being loved to *death*, undergirds the narrative trajectory of most classical opera plots. The diva has sounded a cautionary note: to live and love with the passion of a diva leads to isolation, tragedy, loss, and death.

Although Clément’s focus is on the women characters in opera, rather than the divas that portray them, she says there is an important connection to be made between the two. These rebellious women characters are adored and hated, simulating a society all too real (1999, p.9). The divas who portray them are also women, who are similarly adored and hated: “the demands of the public that the singer conform to their ideals of femininity, temperament, sexual behaviour, beauty, and weight” is coupled with “the viciousness with which the inevitable decline of her singing ability is greeted by her former idolators” (McClary in Clément, 1999, p. xvi). Like the characters they play, divas are considered fair game for vicious attack, and fans love to dissect them, dismember them, pull them apart, and pull them down, once vulnerabilities are detected. Faced with inevitable decline and attack is it any wonder divas have developed a reputation for throwing ‘hissy fits’?² Or is it that our framing of this behaviour is deeply gendered? So that privileging one’s desire, cleaving to one’s vision, and articulating one’s expectations and standards, while expected and acceptable in a man, is (still) less acceptable and threatening in a woman?

The Diva in Literature: Voice and agency – Diva Politics

Pope and Leonardi position their collaborative study, *The Diva’s Mouth: Body, Voice, Prima Donna Politics*, in the “complexities, complications, and exceptions to the masculinist tradition” (Pope and Leonardi, 1996, p 17) that Clément’s study lays bare. Offering a humourously passionate feminist critique of diva narratives in literature, they “demonstrate how widespread a cultural icon she is and...track her significance in different modes of cultural production and for persons variously socially situated” (1996, p. 23). What they reveal is the constructed-ness of diva identities *both* fictional *and* ‘real’, and their manoeuvre is to locate the diva not so much as a person but as “a position, a condition, a situation” (1996, p.9). This manoeuvre reflects an engagement with feminist poststructural thinking, particularly with Judith Butler’s theory of performativity, and Elizabeth Grosz’s both-and thinking regarding the double roles of biology and cultural inscription in subject formation. These theorists and their projects will be introduced at Chapter Four.

² *Throwing a ‘hissy fit’ is Australian vernacular for throwing a temper-tantrum*

Examining divas in literature Pope and Leonardi demonstrate that most women writers are concerned with what it means for a woman to “have a voice”, where “voice” becomes a metaphor for female empowerment and agency. For Pope and Leonardi, “essentialist and performative notions of the diva’s voice intersect at the site of the social and political” (1996, p. 18). Where writers in the masculinist tradition are concerned with what the diva’s voice does to men, the counter-discourse is concerned with what it does *for* women: operating as a political force that gains power and equality for women in a masculinist world, it connects the diva to other women and helps them to discover (or articulate) “new vision, strength, desires” (1996, p.19). This is not to say the authors are constructing a “dated feminist” counter-discourse of essentialist authentic selfhood, nor a queer reading of the diva as “an icon of performativity” (1996, p. 20), though they do concede that some of the texts they review flirt with these discourses. Nevertheless they suggest the diva may “have the potential to mediate these conflicting theoretical positions” (1996, p. 20). The authors themselves state explicitly that whilst they are intellectually committed to theories of cultural construction, they believe (as a result of their own construction) in the category of woman and “take pleasure in the diva as figure of powerful, independent womanhood” (1996, p. 20).

Pope and Leonardi find the divas in female-authored diva narratives such as *Prima Donna at Large* (Paul, 1985), *Goodmorning Irene and Irene at Large* (Nelson Douglas, 1990 and 1992) tend to redress gender stereotypes (just as the divas in men’s texts tend to preserve them). In women’s texts the diva is more likely to be “interested in music than marriage, in empowering women than seducing men”; she gains respect for her singing voice, and this procures for her “a ‘voice’ in the music she makes, in her own destiny, in the larger world” (1996, p.74). Developing a great singing voice requires many sustained hours of physically exhausting work, and so the cultivation of a voice in early twentieth century diva narratives further underscores the diva’s ‘masculine’ stance of agency and of knowing – and speaking – her mind. But the masculinity of the stance itself is further troubled by the awareness women writers demonstrate of the performativity of gender, as evidenced by cross-dressing divas, and by other female characters who openly admit to ‘playing the part’ of mother/wife/daughter.³ Diva narratives, written by women, are primarily concerned with the diva as artist herself, assuming ‘masculine’ traits and prerogatives of “ambition”, “hardness” and the “freedom to leave one’s family, to refuse marriage, to travel abroad, to make work the centre of one’s life” (1996, p.97)

³ “cross-dressing divas” is a reference to the early operatic tradition of breeches roles, like Cherubino in the *Marriage of Figaro*, in which women singers would play male roles. Some famous divas to play breeches roles include Geraldine Farrar and Sarah Bernhardt.

According to Pope and Leonardi, this clarity, drive and freedom were more apparent in the first part of the twentieth century than in the second. American soprano Geraldine Farrar (1882 – 1967) was particularly known for being daring and adventurous, qualities that led novelist Barbara Paul to cast her as diva and amateur sleuth in *Prima Donna At Large* (1985). On her website, Paul reveals that when she published this detective novel she started receiving fan mail from women in their nineties:

They were the Gerryflappers.⁴ My book had taken them back to an exciting time in their lives, and they wanted to let me know that. And they all had stories to tell. “I was there the night Farrar and Caruso got into a fight during the last act of *Carmen*” and “I couldn’t believe my eyes when Gerry dropped her blouse in *Zaza*,” and so on. All these reminiscences, from women who’d actually been a part of it. (Paul, 1995, paragraph 7)

In contrast, Leonardi and Pope observe that divas in the second half of the twentieth century (e.g. Maria Callas and Cecilia Bartoli) have returned to, or reinscribed, an image of womanhood that places marriage and motherhood hierarchically above career. Is this indicative of the greater options that have opened up for women (career and family), or is there still something ‘monstrous’ about the diva (woman) who speaks her mind, refuses marriage, makes work the centre of her life? We shall see below as we look closer at contemporary diva references, the cautionary note still resounds: the price of self-reception (knowing one’s own mind) and articulation of desire (speaking it), is to risk metaphoric death. It is to find oneself alone.

3.2 The ‘Diva’ in Contemporary Culture

The Soul/Pop/Rock Diva

In 2009 Channel Nine aired a television programme titled “20 to 1: Delicious Divas”. Introduced by iconic Australian show-host Bert Newton, it claimed to list the twenty greatest divas of twentieth-century popular culture. These divas were described as difficult and demanding, and as likely to hit the bottle, or an assistant, as a high note. The list included eighteen Americans, two Australians, and one man. Equal or greater emphasis was placed on each one’s behaviour and looks, than on her singing voice. To cite a few examples, Beyonce is “bootilicious”, Streisand is “god’s gift to drag queens everywhere”, Dolly Parton is the butt of “boob” jokes, and much

⁴ *Gerryflappers* was the nick-name given to Geraldine Farrar’s fans, most of them young women who sought to emulate the stars’ look and behaviour.

is made of Donna Summers twenty-two simulated orgasms on her recording of “Love to Love You, Baby”. Liza Minelli’s “love of drama” extends to her personal life of alcoholism and marrying gay men. Perfectionist Madonna has a self-confessed “huge ego”, Celine Dion is described as both “puppy” and “monster”, and Elton John is a “pain in the ass” and “queen of tantrums”; his sexuality, as well as his behaviour, providing the grounds for low-brow humour. At the other end of the spectrum, Australia’s Delta Goodrem is described as having a strength of character that causes commentators to ask if she is “too good” to be a diva. The distinguishing factors in the top three nominations – Mariah Carey, Diana Ross, and Whitney Houston – include the extreme ‘highs’ and ‘lows’ of their personal biographies, and their capacity to reinvent and/or to make a ‘come-back’. To be ‘the best of the best’, it would seem, the ‘highest’ diva pays for her professional success with an unsuccessful personal life: addicted to drugs, alcohol, her craft, and/or the spot-light, she is either single, or lurches from one failed relationship to the next. All of the twenty performers on the programme’s list are recognized as talented singers in their own right. What makes them *divas*, however, is the combination of this talent with a stunning wardrobe; a tough, neurotic, energized, and demanding personality; a body that is often highly sexualized and capable of being endlessly ‘re-made’; and in the end, again, being seen to be a woman alone.

The Diva Trope in Popular Australian Media

“Actually I would say she is far too big to be a movie star, but she is very much like an opera star. She hates being called a diva, because she suspects (probably rightly) that it implies temperamental, but she certainly has a diva’s huge presence, imperious manner, and dramatic wardrobe.”

(Lynn Barber, referring to internationally acclaimed architect Zaha Hadid, 2008, p.31)

Between 2008 and 2010 I collected a number of newspaper and magazine articles that referenced the diva in contemporary culture. Two of these, almost the first and the last collected, left indelible marks on my thinking. In 2008 the *Australian Magazine* ran an interview with Zaha Hadid, a top female architect who has won contracts all over the world but none, at the time the article went to press, in London where she lives. Hadid attributed this state of affairs to the fact that so much British business was being conducted in places she was not invited to go – gentlemen’s clubs, golf courses, sailing trips (Barber, 2008, p.30). The interviewer did not follow this line of enquiry further but instead asked Hadid to reflect on her self-perception as employer and role model, before asking: *Was she beautiful as a young woman?* Hadid responded that she was unusual

looking rather than beautiful and that people have always treated her like a movie star, “but I’m not” (2008, p.31). This prompted the extraordinary observation from the interviewer (above) that Hadid was “too big” to be a movie star, but that she demonstrated the size, temperament, manner and wardrobe of an opera star, a diva. The article ends with the following comment: “Despite her achievements, I came away feeling slightly sorry for her and thinking how sad it was for her to have to go home alone to that awful bare comfortless flat” (2008, p.31) The implicit warning was clear, and depended on the journalist’s ability to invoke the diva trope: stellar career and fabulous wardrobe aside, women beware – to be a diva is to be fat, difficult, and alone.

Two years later in 2010, an article on American soprano Renee Fleming by journalist Peter Conrad from the UK Observer, was reprinted in the Weekend Australian Review Magazine (May 15 – 16, 2010, pp 8-10). It is fantastic and heartbreaking for its re-inscription of so many diva codes. Conrad’s heady introduction of Fleming as “the most acclaimed of operatic sopranos, vocally luxurious and also, in an age when people listen with their eyes, fetchingly glamorous” (Conrad, 2010, p. 8), is made in order to contrast with the voice we can expect to hear on the album, *Dark Hope*, which is described variously as “salty”, “guttural”, and “demotic”. The next line brims with the enduring dominant construction of divas: “Operatic heroines are exalted, transcendent beings but here the soaring angel has come down to ground” (2010, p. 8). Rather than a criticism, however, this is cause for even more adulation. We are told this woman “shares our reality” of bad jobs and emotional wounds – she feels our pain, she understands – both human and divine she becomes a female Christ, the god(dess) made flesh.

Conrad reinscribes the usual binaries when he describes her musical loyalties as ‘divided’ and her ‘complex character’ as both ‘heady’ and ‘earthy’. He seeks to reinforce this with observations of certain codes of diva conduct. For example, she exercises “the diva’s prerogative” by arriving late to the hotel suite reserved for the interview, she comes with an entourage (hairdresser and PA) and “a baggage train of clothes – Miyaki, Armani, Valentino, all negligently tossed on the bed for inspection” (2010, p.8). These, presumably, are the “heady” aspects of her character, while her earthiness is represented by her candid observation that “You could put a kid through college for what this costs” (2010, p.8).

Perhaps what is different about this re-inscription is the subtle deconstruction of the usual hierarchy: we are being asked to celebrate Flemings ‘earthiness’ as much as her ‘headiness’. Conrad carries

this both-and manoeuvre into an observation that her singing voice is “molten gold or glistening silver” while her speaking voice is “throaty” and filled with “flat vowels” and “down-beat realism”. He quotes Fleming herself describing operatic singing as “controlled screaming” or cultivated hollering. She is described as hankering after music that is “unbuttoned” (2010, p.8).

Conrad continues to wax lyrical about the success of her efforts on the new album this article is designed to sell. He points to her “musical finesse”, “emotional authority”, “exhilarating exactitude” and her ability “without resorting to operatic exaggeration” to “suggest adult disillusionment and heartbreak” (2010, p. 9). Fleming puts this down to her life experience, “not all of it good” (2010, p.9), which provides Conrad the leaping-off point to mention her divorce and “*the equally painful realisation that her career makes any other permanent relationship unlikely: few men are willing to dwindle into a consort, smiling from the sidelines*” (2010, p.9, italics added). This is an extraordinary comment on our so-called post-feminist culture. Why on earth should Renee Fleming’s career condemn her to a life of solitude? Why should a single woman with a fantastic career and great family be presumed to be unhappy, simply because she doesn’t have a man? ⁵ Why should any man who has the honour to be her partner “dwindle”?

By now the picture of the diva as a woman alone, single, solo, is clearly etched. Yet I detect something more than this caution at play in Conrad’s picture of Fleming. Below the surface I read a desire to keep the diva single: available as an object of ideal beauty and sensual pleasure, to be revered and adored from afar.

Returning to my initial assumptions, the diva does indeed claim space, centre stage, often with an unbridled tongue. Early twentieth century operatic divas claimed the public space of theatres and concert halls; ‘pop’ divas in late twentieth and early twenty-first century claim public and private space on cinema, television, and computer screens, in print media, and in the genre of diva fiction. Twentieth century female-authored diva texts link an unbridled tongue with positive attributes of knowing and speaking one’s mind. In early twenty-first century media, the unbridled tongue is linked with a demanding, neurotic, egoistic, and sometimes plain nasty, personality. This, and the prevalence of images of the diva as a woman unhappily solo, lead me to question whether one of her chief iconic functions is to sound the cautionary note that to be a diva is to end up alone. On the upside, her distinguished discipline and skill, and her capacity to embrace the full spectrum of

⁵ *The image of Renee Fleming with two funky teenage daughters, sister, and mother, who all love to sing together, recalls Catherine Clément’s utopian vision.*

human emotion and behaviour, suggest *Mastery of Instrument and Permission to Embody Range* as key diva attributes for a contemporary performer. Multi-faceted, magnificent and monstrous, the diva is an icon of strength for the outsider, the voiceless, the one who is "other".

In spite of her positive attributes, the portrait of the diva emerging from this chapter raises questions and concerns for the feminist performance researcher regarding fatal constructions of femininity, the disruptive nature of female voices, the deadliness of romantic love, and the female imaginary/feminine divine. In the next chapter I introduce the feminist theorists on whose work I have drawn to shape my own understanding of subjectivity, providing the base for engaging with these concerns. This opens onto a discussion of female philosophical subjectivity, and an articulation of the lines of enquiry emerging from both the contextual review and the practice that will continue to unfold throughout.

Chapter Four

The Diva and Feminism

Female subjectivity & emerging lines of enquiry

Having painted a portrait of the diva icon as recognizable throughout history, and nuanced this image with a contemporary cultural emphasis (Chapter Three), my aim in Chapter Four is to sketch the emergence of a female poststructuralist subject, and introduce the broad cross-section of themes that will be taken up in the chapters that follow. As a theatre-maker I am in dialogue with a number of discourses that inflect my desire to both fly with and resist the diva. Mixing the personal with the theoretical, my practice of working from autobiography drives a careful consideration of philosophical subject formation as I take up Pope and Leonardi's suggestion that the diva may have the potential to mediate conflicting theoretical positions. In the first part of this chapter I trace a genealogy for the emergence of a female subjectivity, linking diverse poststructuralist theorists in order to ground later discussions in a self that is fluid, de-centered, embodied, multi-vocal, in process and relational. In the second part I introduce the feminist lines of enquiry emerging from the literature and contextual review, and the eclectic pool of theorists with whom I will continue to engage. Despite my shift to poststructuralist ways of thinking about the subject I am aware of an enduring desire for certainty, identity and a will to act. In the third part of this chapter I find a theoretical path through the discomfort of this internal tension offered by Davies et al (2006) and their proposition that the subject be read through *both* poststructural *and* humanist discourses. Having nuanced my own poststructural position, I then identify an embrace of disintegration in Cixous' essay *On Coming To Writing* (1991), and examine feminine specificity and the divine in the writings of Irigaray (1986, 1991, 1996).

4.1 A genealogy for the emergence of female subjectivity

Early assumptions regarding the diva icon

As described at Chapter Two, I previously subscribed to a discourse of essentialist, authentic selfhood that was in a state of decay at the beginning of this project. Conducting this study has effected a further shift in my thinking about our ways of being, thinking, loving and living. In effecting this shift I am indebted to the projects of Irigaray (1986, 1992, 1996, 2002), Grosz (1989, 1994), Butler (1990, 2004) and Rosi Braidotti (1994). Each of these theorists demonstrates diva-like qualities of rigour, discipline and mastery of craft, as well as having a (metaphorical) voice through her writing. While linked in their embrace of poststructural understanding of subjectivity,

these theorists have complex and conflicting ideas about its nature and construction. The most notable difference is between Butler's focus on gender and the sexual difference projects of Irigaray, Grosz and Braidotti. Despite being differently situated on the sex and gender debate, I have grouped these theorists for their emphasis on dialogue in shaping the female subject at the level of intersubjective relations, and at the level of cultural or regulative discourses, which act on and through, or are resisted by, the emerging female subject.

Irigaray's ongoing project has involved a sustained critique of our western metaphysical heritage and its understanding of identity as unified, univocal, disembodied and masculine. She claims that identity in this tradition has been "constructed on a model that privileges optics, straight lines, self-contained unity and solids" (Battersby, 1993 cited in Hay, 2000, p.13) According to Irigaray, the western tradition has left unsymbolized a self that exists as self not by repulsion/exclusion of the not-self, but via interpenetration of self with otherness. In response to this Irigaray argues for a subjectivity that is embodied, gendered, in dialogue and multivocal. However, this does not lead her to theorise a perpetually fractured subject. Instead, as Hopkins (2009) points out, she articulates a permeable yet cohesive sense of "self" which "remains open into the present, closed and enveloped enough to make a self, yet separate enough so that I can affect it and be affected by it" (Irigaray, 1993, p. 62).

Central to Irigaray's thesis is the idea that humans are not one but two (or more) sexes, and that female subjectivity is diminished when perpetually defined in relation to the masculine. Taking on limiting cultural discourses is identified as a deeply entrenched practice that continues to cause many women to be lesser than they are. Her focus on sexual difference has led critics such as Toril Moi (1987), Diana Fuss (1989) and Butler (1990) to argue that Irigaray attempts to describe "woman" thereby essentialising her. However I align myself with Grosz, Braidotti, and Hopkins in reading in Irigaray an "intensely political attempt to theorize feminine *specificity*" (Hopkins, 2009, p. 31, italics added).

In her landmark study *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler theorises gender, and sex and sexuality, as performative, and reconceives the sexed body as culturally constructed by regulative discourses (1990, p. 185). She is deeply suspicious of the idea of the 'naturalness' of sex, and claims this notion conceals its production in discourse. In breaking the link between sex and gender, Butler aims to liberate gender and desire from "restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life" (2004, p.1). Her proposition that desires do not arise from within the subject but are culturally

produced, requires the subject to recognize, and empowers her to critique, the social and political discourses through which she is constructed. Butler's cultural construction argument challenges normalising hegemonic ideas such as "human", "sex", "man", and "woman", while her theory of performativity rests on the rejection of any kind of "essence" arising from one's sexed biology.

As Braidotti points out, what Butler misses in her assumption that men and women are constituted in symmetrical ways, is the feminist point that the masculine and the feminine are in a structurally dissymmetrical position (1994, p.38). Braidotti rejects Butler's conception of sexual difference as a monolithic or ahistorical theory, and articulates the starting point for the project as:

...the political will to assert the specificity of the lived, female bodily experience. This involves the refusal to disembody sexual difference through the valorization of a new allegedly "postmodern" and "anti-essentialist" subject; in other words, the project of sexual difference engages a will to reconnect the whole debate on difference to the bodily existence and experience of women.

...The real-life women who undertake the feminist subject-position as a part of the social and symbolic reconstruction of what I call female subjectivity are a multiplicity in themselves: split, fractured, and constituted across intersecting levels of experience...This multiple identity is relational, in that it requires a bond to the "Other"; it is retrospective, in that it rests on a set of imaginary identifications, that is to say unconscious internalized images which escape rational control. This fundamental non-coincidence of identity with the conventional Cartesian idea of consciousness is the crucial starting point. Because of it, one's imaginary relations to one's real-life conditions, including one's history, social conditions, and gender relations, become available as material for political and other types of analysis. (Braidotti, 1994, p 40)

Taking Simone de Beauvoir's cultural construction stance – one is not born a woman, one becomes one – as a point of departure, the difference between Braidotti's and Butler's positions seems to turn on the question of whether one is born, becomes, or *performs* being "woman". While I align myself with the sexual difference projects of Braidotti, Irigaray and Grosz, I find Butler's ideas extremely useful to the subject who seeks to articulate an experience of being and desiring that falls outside the social register "normal". Such being and desiring can lead to individual experiences of being "undone", and Butler observes that, "the experience of a normative restriction becoming

undone can undo a prior conception of who one is only to inaugurate a relatively newer one that has greater livability as its aim" (Butler, 2004, p.1). Butler's point here resonates with my question of how to *hear past the white noise of one's culture* and the key theme of *disintegration* that emerges from the practice.

Corporeal feminist Grosz also reads subjectivity as tied to the specificities of sexed bodies (Grosz, 1994, p.208), while acknowledging that differences between bodies enjoy considerable social and historical variation (1994, p.191). Her framework acknowledges the "interior dimensions of subjectivity and the surface corporeal exposures of the subject to social inscription and training" (1994, p.188). In Grosz, subjectivity is comprised of *both* sexual difference (biology) and a cultural overlay of sexual (and other forms of) inscription. This movement between one thing and another is a feature of poststructuralist thinking which Jerry Aline Fleiger eloquently describes as, "metaphoric thinking, which crosses the bar, the divide, between two apparently unlike terms, making a connection that manages to include them both, even while gaining in force from a maintained tension between the terms" (Fleiger, 1993, p. 264). This 'both-and' thinking, the *space of the hyphen*, can be traced to Julia Kristeva's (1987) proposition that the subject emerges from the constant movement between the realms of the semiotic (pre-verbal) and symbolic (language). It is this kind of both-and thinking that undergirds Grosz's understanding that the task of sexual difference is to *both* find a position specific to one's lived bodily experience *and* to find one "encompassing enough for a sexually specific perspective to be able to open itself up to, meet with, and be surprised at the (reciprocal) otherness of the other sex(es)" (Grosz, 1994, p.192).

In a recent interview Grosz admits that, for her, the questions "who am I, what am I, how am I produced, or how is my identity stabilized", while relevant, are no longer the most interesting to ask. She prefers to ask, "how do I act, what enables me to do this, what acts in me when I act?" (Interview, Ausch, et al, 2011). Her understanding is finely nuanced: "This philosophy of imperceptibility is about the capacity to act, whether or not it is received by someone as its audience or addressee... Acts have their effects even if no one receives them" (Ausch, et al). I take from this an understanding that the question of one's capacity to act is strongly linked to one's formation as a subject, and both are tempered by an understanding that "unconscious desire and willful choice are of different registers" (Braidotti in Butler, 1994).

The question of what the embodied, gendered, dynamically dialogic and multivocal subject might *do*, returns me again to Irigaray, who proposes that what we do requires a radical shift in our ways

of *speaking* and *loving*. Placing profound importance on the role of love to knowledge-making, she takes the word “philosophy” to mean the *wisdom of love*, as well as the *love of wisdom* (Irigaray, 2002, p.1). In *I Love to You* (1996) she calls for a relational dialogue, based on respect and reciprocity, and keeps present the question “who are you” as a strategy for acknowledging the irreducibility of the one to the other. In *The Way of Love* (2002) she posits this idea of respectful, relational speaking as a pathway towards greater human potential:

To go in search of oneself, especially in relation with the other, represents a work not yet carried out by our culture of speaking. It has little investigated this being on the way toward and into interiority, still leaving it to the silence of the without-words, to the night of with-out light, to which the poet at the end of their course, or the mystic on their journey should be resigned. The task of discovering, beyond the customary rationality of the West, a different speech and reason has not seemed imperative. It appears however the most indispensable and the most sublime task for the human subject, the one able, beyond our oppositions and hierarchies, to recast the categories of the sensible and the intelligible in a rationality that as a result becomes more complex, more accomplished for human becoming, and nevertheless everyday and universal. (Irigaray, 2002, p.43)

Here I read in Irigaray a female subject resistant to modes of speaking that close meaning, and a preference for language that opens possibility and celebrates complexity. This aligns with an imperative I have taken from my dialogue with Cameron’s practice: that our job as artists is to generate possibilities and to delay closure, to be with ‘not-knowing’, with loyalty and disinterest. “The empty space (of the studio) represents *I don’t know*. As soon as we think we know we close down possibilities” (Cameron, personal communication, September 29, 2008).

In summary, my investigation of what the diva icon can offer to a feminist theatre praxis has led me to be in conversation with a suite of feminist philosophers (Irigaray, Grosz, Butler,) whose work taken separately and together has allowed me to conceptualize a female subject not limited by masculinist modes of rationality and constraint. Rather, the subject I conceptualise is multiple, fluid, in process, in conversation with self and others, overflowing, unbounded. In creating this thesis I have drawn on Irigaray’s conception that “the subject-in-process is a subject in dialogue, engaged with the other” (Whitford, 1991, p. 48); with Grosz’ notion of the female subject being *both* biologically *and* culturally inscribed; with Butler’s theory of gender performativity and restrictive regulatory discourses; and align myself with Braidotti in understanding that:

[n]ew subjects also require new social and symbolic structures that allow for changes in identity and structures of desire to be enacted socially and registered collectively. To achieve this, we need a quiet, molecular, viral, and therefore unstoppable revolution within the self, multiplied over a multitude of different selves acting as historical agents of change (Braidotti in Butler, 1994).

Finally, I respond to Braidotti's call for "a merrier brand of idiosyncratic and hybrid thinking, something that is neither conceptually pure nor politically correct" (1994), by drawing on a number of diverse and differently situated theorists, as I unfold the emerging lines of enquiry in the second part of this chapter.

4.2 Emerging Lines of Feminist Enquiry

Having established a genealogy for the emergence of a female subjectivity I turn now to the diva and feminism in order to map the questions and concerns emerging from the portrait painted at Chapter Three. The multi-faceted picture emerging leads to questions regarding voice/lessness, the deadliness of romantic love, desire, and the feminine divine. To articulate my questions and concerns I draw on theorists as diverse as poet, playwright and philosophers Cixous (1975, 1991) and Cameron (1998a, 1998b, 2001, 2003, 2005, 2010, 2011); poet, essayist and theorist of desire Adrienne Rich (1980); poststructural feminists Irigaray (1986, 1992, 1996, 2002) and Michelle Bouldous-Walker (1998); Jungian and post-Jungian feminists Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) and Rebecca Pottenger (2011) feminist novelist and memoirist Sue Monk Kidd (2002); gender theorists Butler and Annette Schlichter; (2011) and feminist historian, poet and opera librettist Anne Carson (1992), to name but a few. By introducing them here I explicitly prefigure the core themes that are discussed chapter by chapter to come. I begin with Cixous, who writes, "an opera inhabits me" (1991, p.53). Through the course of this study I have returned again and again to her essay *On Coming To Writing*, in whose pages I hear a disruptive diva calling to me to break the bonds of good behaviour. If the stories of opera teach women the folly of transgression (remember the self-immolating divas leaping from parapets, into fires, into water), Cixous dares women to leap into the abyss "(a)nd fall not like a stone, but like a bird." (1991, p. 40).

Feminism and Voice/lessness

Forging an imaginative link between flight (falling like a bird), vocal flight (singing like a diva) and metaphoric flight (in thought, in imagination, in writing), Cixous' urgent literary and philosophical

gesture finds resonance in my breathing body. She writes of Beauty, Desire and Love and I immediately want to go outside and climb a tree, climb a mountain, let the on-shore wind tangle my hair and blow thoughts clean out of my mind. She writes long, long sentences in short phrases that build one upon another creating pathways to places unexpected, and suddenly I find myself thinking about the difference between the “hand that takes and encloses” and of “the hand that points out, the fingers that see, that design” (Cixous, 1991, p.4). This makes me think of love in terms of holding on and letting go, and I consider the fact that without hands, the handless maiden of medieval myth has no way to write, could not have a narrative voice, until seven years in the forest leads to the regeneration of her hands. And once she has hands she can, like Cixous – a diva animated by desire – make a gesture of love.

‘Voice’ has long been a metaphor for female empowerment and agency in the literature, philosophy, and the theatre of women. As Leonardi and Pope’s study revealed, female-authored texts offer the possibility of a cautiously positive self-identification with the diva icon. In Cixous’ essay themes of ‘voice’, ‘beauty’, ‘love’ and ‘desire’ overlap, surge and recede, in a joyful and (for me) seductive invitation for just such positive self-identification. However the call to *have a voice by coming to writing* is also vulnerable to the criticism that to equate voice with agency denies the materiality of the voice and runs the risk of essentialising women’s experience. In her article *Do Voices Matter* (2011), Schlichter addresses the gap between metaphorical and material voices in feminist scholarship and describes this as *phonocentrism*. This leads me to consider one space in which material and metaphoric voices coincide: the theatre, and specifically, the theatre of the articulate and critically self-reflexive feminist performer.

A focus on physical and metaphysical voices also calls into question female voicelessness and silence. Boulos Walker references Irigaray and Le Doeuff in her rethinking of “the complex relations between philosophy, reading and silence” (Boulos Walker, 1998, p.26). She asserts that Irigaray situates herself outside the domain of philosophy (speaking against) and Le Doeuff from a place inside (speaking with) (1998, p.10) and concludes that despite their differences both agree: “silencing does not entail a simple sense of absence, that it actually involves something we might more appropriately refer to as a readable absence” (1998, p.27). She follows this with a close reading of Jean-Francois Lyotard’s *The Différend* in which he explores the question of “whether not speaking is a form of the ability to speak” (1998, p. 69), and defines critical philosophy as “the art of marking the silences and exteriority that inhabit language” (1998, p. 61).

This is exactly what Hopkins does in reading Drusilla Modjeska's fictionalized biography *Poppy*: she *marks* qualities of silence that *inhabit* the narrative. There are the unspeakable silences "both negative and confining", silence as resistance (Hopkins, 2009, pp. 12-14), and those powerful and positive silences that mark intuition, and "connection before and beyond language" and even "mystical transcendence" (2009, p. 12). "Silence is also used to indicate restraint, ambiguity, complexity" (2009, p.15) in the interconnections between characters. Referring back to Irigaray, Hopkins suggests that "[s]ometimes women's strengths are hidden, silent, secret" (2009, p.15).

Cameron demands that language work for her in order not to be muted. "Mute" carries with it the sense of being hushed, toned down, turned down, less than, silent. Embracing Grosz's assertion that "To speak as a woman...involves speaking from a position in the middle of binaries" (Grosz, 1989, p. 132), or valuing *both – and*, I consider the value of having a voice and the value of muteness, or silence. I question my own assumption that an unbridled tongue might be better than a bridled one.

In her 1992 essay "*The Gender of Sound*", Carson explores the theme of journeying from the interior to the exterior on a woman's tongue (or voice, pen, computer, body). Where Poizat and Koestenbaum link high voices with a desire for *jouissance*, Carson talks of high female voices as objects of male abhorrence (Carson, 1992, p.128). Taking a gender joke from Aristophanes, she observes that whilst "[w]oman is that creature who puts the inside on the outside", man breaks the continuity between his interior and exterior "by interposing *logos* – whose most important censor is the rational articulation of sound" (1992, p.129-130). She shows how the Greek virtue of *sophrosyne* is marked by "prudence, soundness of mind, moderation, temperance, self-control" (1992, p.126) whereas female *sophrosyne* "is coextensive with male direction and rarely means more than chastity" (1992, p.126). In other words, the feminine virtue of *sophrosyne* requires closed lips and crossed legs. But it is hard to keep both mouths shut if, like mythical Echo, woman's mouths have no doors (1992, p.121)! In listening to female sound Carson distinguishes sound from language, quality of sound from content, and wonders whether there might be another notion of human virtue other than self-control (1992, p.128-137). In Carson, questions of female vocality, and the continuity between interiority and exteriority, intersect with my own project of articulating the role of material and metaphoric voice in the formation of subjectivity.

Feminism and Resisting Romantic Love

The repeated stories operas tell of women loving and losing their lives, and stories of real-life 'divas' in failed relationships and (tragically) solo, initially lead me to humourously propose "*resisting romantic love*" as a useful *survival* strategy for any woman contemplating her own divahood. Yet *resistance* has a long history within the feminist movement and my throwaway line requires a deeper consideration. Concurrent with a reconsideration of resistance, my fascination for the handless maiden story leads me to investigate the western myth of romantic love and its relationship with women's voices, alienation and agency. Sue Monk Kidd (2002) contends that, for women, the value of stories originating from within the patriarchy is limited to revealing how women react under, and cope with, the patriarchy. However, in so doing a myth can motivate a woman to confront the faces of the feminine she has adopted, "to understand what had motivated them, and to begin to break their patterns" (Kidd, 2002, p. 110). While I am uneasy with the essential feminine nature that many Jungian and post-Jungian feminists embrace, their engagement with myth in general, and the handless maiden myth in particular, offers useful levers for shifting perspective on the autobiographical core of my performance. As I consider links between *voice*, *hands*, and *agency*, the diva and the handless maiden enter a dialogue and begin to be conceived as two aspects of a multi-faceted and polyphonous subjectivity.

Alongside the handless maiden myth I also consider the western myth of romantic love more generally, exploring the psychological and physiological factors at play when we 'fall in love' before turning to Stevi Jackson's proposal for radical non-monogamy (1993, 2004). Jackson reads emotion as culturally constructed and her position of non-monogamy reflects a muscular resistance to the ways in which this powerful discourse shapes human relationships. Unable to unequivocally embrace Jackson's position, I return to Cixous and Irigaray. As I consider Cixous' linking of writing and love in a lover's embrace (1991), and Irigaray's question "How can we say *I love you* differently?" (1996), I engage in deeper considerations of desire, the female imaginary, and the feminine divine.

Feminism and Desire

In considering feminism and desire I explore feminist engagement with eros. According to Cheryl Hall (2005), *eros*, linked with sexuality (and its wildly irrational, messy bodies), and with emotions (again irrational and messy), is something we have been "raised to fear". Audre Lorde calls this "the yes within ourselves, our deepest cravings" (Lorde, 1984, p.57). Hall theorises that we learn to control our bodies, our desire, our emotions in order to maintain independence, autonomy, and

power, and in so doing we maintain distance in our relations, and we limit our connectedness. In fearing the yes within us we keep our mouths shut, we dare not utter our utter delights, we aim for invulnerability. This is one way that we participate in our voicelessness: swallowing our yeses and stifling ourselves with brittle dignity.

Lorde also claims “our erotic knowledge empowers us” (1984, p.107) and Hall agrees, because attunement to the erotic provides us with self-knowledge about what we need and want in the world, and this knowledge provides power (Hall, 2005, p.107). The relationship between desire and power underscores my engagement Adrienne Rich’s essay on Honour (1980) in which she asks *do you tell yourself you don’t really know what you want? Settling for what you get, yet not really, settling?*

Feminism and the Female Imaginary, the Divine

Investigations of voice, agency, desire and love lead me to spiral back over the earliest diva associations made at the beginning of Chapter Three: the diva and the divine. Attraction to the divine is attraction to an ideal. Here I align myself with Irigaray’s project of the feminine divine, of the necessity of woman finding an ideal “which figures the perfection of her subjectivity” (Irigaray, 1985, p.6). I am not interested in substituting a goddess for a god, nor in a belief in anything other than Irigaray’s “reasoned proposition” in the “possibility of our autonomy” (1985, p.9). How then do we articulate an ideal that suits us, liberates us, fosters our progress in love, art, thought, “ideal and divine achievement” (1985, p.6)? Irigaray writes, “[i]t is vitally...important to want something. It is the condition of our becoming. To have a will, it is indispensable to have a goal. The most valuable of which is to become. Infinitely” (1985, p.4). I understand this ‘becoming’ as an approach towards a never-to-be-reached horizon, a dance between that which one is constituted to be (biology, genetics) in dialogue with the dominant shaping discourses of the culture into which we are born. Yet how does one discern what one “really wants”? Is it possible to “want” something outside the shaping discourses, the “white noise of our culture” (Albinger, 2010)? How does one *hear* or *receive* oneself; how does one sense, identify and articulate one’s own desire? In attempting to answer these questions I turn to Davies et al (2006) and consider how the subject might be read through humanist *and* poststructural discourses, before returning to engage more deeply with Cixous and Irigaray on female philosophical subjectivity, disintegration and the divine.

4.3 Female Philosophical Subjectivity

The Dark Garden: The refusal to hear what one is saying, the refusal to say what one is saying; it is the denial of breath, the braced inability to receive oneself. It is filled with the white noise of (y)our culture, the internalized hum of voices – familial, cultural, political – describing, as Cixous would say, what ‘woman’ ‘is’, or ‘can be’, or even, ‘can hope to be’ (Cixous, 1991, p.5.) Here the biologically female performer is denied self-reception and so reflects back to her culture the images of her constructed femininity. And yet her very constitution as performer suggests another voice (vocation): quietly and lovingly insistent, an “intimate kernel” (Dolar, 2006, p.102), ever-present beneath the hum. It is the diva voce, the voice of (y)our desire, “striving to live a larger life.” (Rich, 1980, p.189)

(Albinger, 2010 Unpublished journal, p.47)

This description of the Dark Garden is an early attempt to describe and theorise a *lack of residence in one’s own subjectivity*. The phrase, *lack of residence in one’s own subjectivity*, is an extension of Nikki Heywood’s suggestion that diva consciousness might usefully counter one’s lack of residence in something elemental (Heywood 2008 Interview, Appendix 1.1.3, lines 125 - 149). By replacing the phrase ‘something elemental’ with the word ‘subjectivity’, I appear to link both the diva icon and subjectivity with forces of nature. This manoeuvre might suggest a humanist tendency towards a coherent unified self, towards essentialist notions of woman as ‘natural’ or more ‘in tune’ with nature than man. As such, it is in tension with my understanding of the ‘self’ as multiple and constructed by cultural discourse and relational forces. What I intend however, in a very subjective and specific way, is to open a conceptual space between specific, individual experience and the cultural labels that might attend that experience (for example, ‘abused’, ‘domestic violence’, ‘victim’); a space in which new ways of living, loving and being have room to breathe.

As described at 4.1 and in contrast to Jungian archetypal work explored later in Chapter Seven, I am influenced by notions of subjectivity that understand the self as gendered, decentered, fluid, multi-vocal and in dialogue. This self is further shaped by the process of engaging with, and resisting, various cultural discourses. This multiple perspective is further affirmed by yoga practice and philosophy, through which I understand the ‘self’ as “dancing between form and impermanence” (Stone, 2008, p.101). Nevertheless I experience a tension between positioning myself as a poststructural subject and personal (subjective) experiences that seem to belong to a ‘core’ component of self, or the part of me that hankers to present as a unified whole.

In their article 'Constituting the Feminist Subject in Poststructuralist Discourse' Davies et al (2006), go to the heart of this tension with a focus on the subject and how she might be read through humanist *and* poststructuralist discourses (2006, p.92). These authors respond to what they perceive as the "double challenge" laid down in the writing of Foucault: to see the processes of subjectification, and to break with what we have become now (Davies, et al, 2006 p.11). Suggesting that a conceptual error has occurred in constituting a poststructural subject in binary opposition with the humanist individual, they respond to Foucault's challenge by separating out two conceptual tasks:

1. to see what the new questions posed by Foucault and other poststructural writers, along with their conceptual repertoire, enable us to see about *what we are now*;
2. in making visible what we are now, to develop strategies (conceptual and practical) for making a radical break with current forms of domination, for imagining a new kind of subject. (Davies, et al, 2006, p.11)

They respond to these tasks through a poststructural writing practice of collective biography, making visible "the relations between the fictional, universal, unique humanist individual and the historically specific, multiple poststructural subject" (Davies, et al, 2006, p.16). In this process of collective biography there is movement between individual writing and collective reading, listening, responding, and imagining (in specific bodily detail). They describe how this form of writing

...peels away those clichés, generalities and explanations that are the specific technologies of self used by the rational individual of liberal humanism, and attempts to lay bare the bones and flesh of ourselves as embodied subjects-in-process as we remember ourselves in one particular moment in time. (Davies, et al, p.19)

I recognize a relationship between their description of writing and my own practice of 'writing' as a performer. I, too, through my engagement with perceptual, somatic and writing practices both respond to the question of *what am I now* and aim to discover *strategies for making a radical break* with current forms of domination, including my own blind assumptions. I also, like these authors, "do not aim to construct a pre (or post or apart and outside of) discursive self, but to see some of the invisible threads within which [I am] entangled and to seek some mo(ve)ments in [my] remembering" (Davies, et al, 2006, p.21). Those invisible threads work at the level of desire,

of attitudes and of values, and, as my practice shows, are often revealed in those moments when specific and lived experiences are at odds with 'who I think I am'.

These authors find the embodied subject-in-process emerging from the Kristevian subject constituted in the back and forth between the semiotic and the symbolic. This embodied subject-in-process is in relationship with my own specific experience of being a yoga subject, dancing between form and impermanence. I link 'form' with the symbolic order of language and reason, and 'impermanence' with the semiotic realm of gesture, rhythm, melody and desire, unbounded by linearity, syntax and reason. I propose that overcoming the challenge I pose in the journal entry above – that of *hearing past the white noise of one's culture* – rests in understanding the subject as "a subject who is in process, a verb rather than a noun, a subject with boundaries permeated by others, by discourse, a subject identical with the text through which it is being constituted" (Davies, et al, 2006, p.93). Moments in the semiotic (pre-verbal) realm return to the symbolic realm where it is possible to construct both the linguistic descriptions and non-linguistic expressions that profoundly reflect the experience of being a woman. It is a multi-directional dance in which the subject is both storying herself and "not so caught in definitions of herself as she might have been." (Davies, et al, 2006, p.101). Here a space opens for re-theorising agency and resistance. In this multi-directional dance, and in the specificity of story-ing that dance, my practice intersects with the projects of Cixous and Irigaray.

Cixous: Embracing Disintegration

In many ways, *hearing past the white noise of one's culture* involves hearing past cultural constructions of femininity. For Cixous, the question of how a woman moves past cultural constructions of femininity is answered by a process of immersion in writing. Writing becomes an act of courage, of staring death in the face, of looking at oneself and not "dying of fear" (Cixous, 1991, p.6). This courageous act of writing, argues Cixous, is primarily an act of love: Love as growth, as an expansion, an impulse to leap in to the abyss and profit from its immensity (1991, p.40). She uses the word love as an embrace, an opening, and as a dare to follow terror and *gain freedom* (1991, p.40). It is the thing she writes for, and from. "I write out of love. Writing, loving: inseparable. Writing is a gesture of love. *The Gesture.*" (1991, p. 42).

Love is also what she writes *towards*. To write, as a woman, is not to fill the abyss,

...but to love yourself right to the bottom of your abysses. To know, not to avoid. Not to surmount; to explore, dive down, visit. There, where you write, everything grows, your body unfurls, your skin recounts its hitherto silent legends. (Cixous, 1991 p. 42)

If writing is a gesture of love, Cixous makes this gesture in response to an experience: "Writing: first I am touched, caressed, wounded; then I try to discover the secret of this touch to extend it, celebrate it and transform it into another caress" (1991, p. 45). For my own part I interpose the words 'making theatre' for the word 'writing'. *Making Theatre: First I am touched, caressed, wounded; then I try to discover the secret of this touch (caress, wound) to extend it, celebrate it and transform it into another caress.*

I read Cixous, immersed in her writing, as utterly unto herself. She is not in relation to a man, or to an intimate Other. Her subjective 'self' is oceanic, tidal, moving between felt sensation and language:

In me the song which, from the moment it's uttered, gains instant access to language: a flux immediately text. No break, soundsense, songsound, bloodsong, everything's always already written, all the meanings are cast. Later if I emerge from my waters dripping all over with pleasures, if I go back the length of my banks, if from my shore I observe the revels of my dreamfish, I notice the innumerable figures they create in their dance ... Ourselves in writing like fish in water. (Cixous, 1991, p. 58)

If I follow Cixous, the ideal towards which a woman may move is a multi-directional self-love: diving into multiple abysses, allowing the exterior to enter and the interior to open out, listening, as she would say, to the opera that inhabits one (1991, p.54). The act of resistance that makes this manoeuvre possible is the refusal to willingly whittle away oneself in order to fit the picture of the *culture sized proper woman* (1991, p.56). Cixous says that woman is well positioned for love to find its way in us because we are "close to loss, close to the abyss" (1991, p. 39). In her seminal essay *On Coming To Writing*, I hear a call to handless maidens everywhere to dare metaphysical and material loss, to dare the disintegration such loss incurs. For, as Butler proposes, "the experience of a normative restriction becoming undone can undo a prior conception of who one is" (Butler, 2004, p.1). This *undoing* of a *prior conception* can feel like a loss of identity, of coming completely undone, but has as its aim "greater livability" (2004, p.1).

Diving into the abyss, Cixous celebrates disintegration as a path towards *being*. Being, *isness*, or subjectivity, is made *sensible*, as Margaret Cameron would say, through the senses, through the enactment and articulation of experience. Such *articulation* is a refusal to be muted, and establishes the contract with time that enables me to engage with Cixous' ideas today (Cixous, 1991, p.15).

Her call for women to come to writing is a call to articulate *specific* experience. In it I recognize a path of resistance to unconscious positioning by dominant cultural discourse, including the myth of romantic love. It is a path that resists automatic identification with the labels and expectations that in our culture attend one's biology and gender, a path that embraces dis/integration and the constant movement between ones' senses and the making of sense.

Irigaray and Feminine Specificity

In *Divine Women* (1986), Irigaray's "reasoned proposition" (Irigaray, 1986, p. 9) is that a woman needs a divine horizon towards which to unfold if she is to "accomplish her feminine subjectivity" (1986, p.6). For Irigaray, women can limit themselves through taking on limiting cultural discourses, and for some this can lead to being lesser than they are, to sacrifice their very souls or lives. She conceives this as the central dilemma for women – because they are not perceived philosophically as unbounded persons in their own right, they (we) mirror masculinist discourses and self-limit, so preventing any possibility of exploring their (our) potential as women with souls and lives. A woman can be limited by what man sees as her imperfections and by what she sees as culturally appropriate ways of being. I read in this position an example of Irigaray's "intensely political attempt to theorize feminine specificity" (Hopkins, 2009, p. 31) and respond by theorising from my own specific experience of being a biologically female, culturally constructed, woman. My 'coherent self' disintegrating in the gap between intellectual understanding and lived experience, leads me to theorise that *falling apart* is an experience to be embraced for the opportunity it affords to make apparent previously invisible desires, attitudes and values. Finding herself in *The Dark Garden*, unable to hear past the white noise of her culture, the task of the handless maiden is precisely to fall apart. The concomitant task of the diva is to breathe in (inhale) the Orchard: a focus on breath and being, or isness, offering an experience of semiotic 'core'.

Turning Kristeva's work to my own ends, I read in Cixous' call to writing, an exhortation to women to each articulate their specific dance (oscillation and fluctuation) between the semiotic and the symbolic realms. Irigaray furthers this project by underscoring the importance of how each singular life-size woman stories that dance in the return to the symbolic order of language. It is not that Irigaray privileges the symbolic over the semiotic, for she regularly distinguishes between matter and the word in her critique of western philosophy. Her call for us to transform our ways of speaking and of loving requires dialogue and a re-imagining of the way women and men encounter each other in speaking, and in silence (1996, p.133). Concurrent with this is the imperative for a woman to achieve her feminine subjectivity, which Irigaray approaches through an "appeal to the forces

of change which the *logos* has attempted to exclude: to love, to the imagination which desires, to a possible female homosexual economy, to amorous exchange." (Whitford, 1991 p.190). Irigaray, according to Hopkins, understands the subject-in-process as a subject in dialogue, engaged with the other, and cognizant of the role love plays in our processes of meaning-making:

...contrary to the usual methods of dialectic, love should not have to be abandoned in order to become wise or learned. It is love which leads to knowledge... It is love which leads the way and is the path, both. A mediator par excellence. (Irigaray, 1991, p.190)

Irigaray's proposition that cultural change requires us to transform our ways of loving resonates with my own project of resisting the western myth of romantic love. She asks how to say *I love you* differently without it meaning *I wonder if I am loved?* (1996, p. 130), and observes that while humans have learned something about sharing, many of us "still do not know how to love ourselves with respect and in reciprocity here and now" (1996, p. 129). Understanding the myth of romantic love as one of the discourses that continues to limit its consumers, particularly women, I am excited by Irigaray's call for a love that is carnal *and* spiritual and her proposition that we use language consciously to keep man and woman in relation and "in reciprocity" (2002, p.139). She suggests we can do this by keeping present the question "Who are you?": a question that maintains development and relation (2002, p. 139). It is a question that defends ambiguity and holds a space open for the one and the one to unfold, to become.

For Irigaray, resisting limiting cultural discourses involves imagining a God for oneself, a divine horizon towards which to unfold: "No task, no obligation burdens us except that one: become divine, become perfect, don't let any parts of us be amputated that could become expansive for us" (1986, p.9). Through Irigaray's lens I read the handless maiden's story as speaking to the common human experience of making such self-limiting choices, of letting "parts of us be amputated that could become expansive for us". And I understand the diva as an icon of claiming space and privileging desire through a focus on breath, stillness and silence, offering a path for the *reception* of self in time and space, in order for a woman to accomplish her unbounded feminine subjectivity.

In responding to Braidotti's call for a *merrier brand of idiosyncratic and hybrid thinking*, the diva has led me to straddle a suite of conflicting theoretical positions. In doing so I consider that while emulating diva discipline and rigour may eventuate in mastery of instrument and a real and/or metaphoric voice, her relationship to 'voice' is not a simply a matter of positive self-identification,

as silence and inarticulate sound must also be considered. Similarly her relationship to love, and particularly romantic love, requires deconstructing. Here the handless maiden enters into the dialogue in ways that pre-figure a revolution in speaking and loving. And the diva's relationship to desire and the feminine divine is seen to suggest her usefulness in representing that force within a woman's subjectivity which motivates her towards her highest ideal. As we shall see in the Chapters Five and Six, the interviews conducted with three Australian 'divas' of contemporary investigative performance practice, and the process of deconstructing the diva in practice, complicate and nuance the unfolding discussion and lead to further key insights regarding the diva, desire and breath.

Chapter Five

Novel Apprehensions

Interviews with three senior Australian women practitioners

In this chapter, novel apprehensions of the diva's usefulness to feminist theatre praxis emerge from interviews and engagement with three Australian 'divas'. Alongside the literature/contextual review (Chapter Three) and the practice itself (Chapter Six), the interviews comprise the third leg of the methodological framework for this study, and enhance and nuance the diva portrait painted at Chapter Three. Two rounds of semi-structured interviews with Annette Tesoriero (NSW), Margaret Cameron (VIC) and Nikki Heywood (NSW) were conducted between 2008 and early 2010. These senior Australian women theatre-makers also constituted a professional peer panel, and were shown the first sketches of performative materials in June 2008, after the first round of interviews were conducted. Cameron witnessed a second showing of materials at the 2009 international Transit Festival, Odin Theatre, Denmark, and both Cameron and Heywood were present at the third work-in-progress showing during the Magdalena Perth Workshop Festival, Blue Room Theatre, February, 2010. Insights from the 2009 and 2010 showings are discussed in Chapters Six and Eight. In the following section, however, I focus on the questions, insights and themes emerging from each of the first interviews before summarizing the group's feedback from the work-in-progress showing in Sydney. I then précis the second interviews, taken in December 2009 and January 2010. In analyzing their ideas, which both echo and depart from dominant diva readings, I begin to apply and develop resistant and more productive readings of the diva icon, such as 'diva dramaturgy', informed by the dramaturgy of the breath, pulling meaning through sound, privileging desire, and acts of reception. These novel apprehensions of the diva icon provoke an articulation of a key finding of the study: the *diva voce*, or the coincidence of material and metaphoric voice and I conclude this chapter with a discussion of the importance of speech and sound not only in responding to one's inner voice (of reason), but in providing the material conditions for *receiving* it.

5.1 First Interviews: definitions, descriptions, references

In the first round of semi-structured interviews in 2008 the conversations organically revolved around the following key questions: 1) *What is your definition of, or perception of, a diva?* 2) *What conduct do you associate with the diva?* 3) *How have you referenced the diva icon in your own work?* 4) *What was your intention in referencing the diva icon?* All three artists reference the diva icon directly or obliquely and subversively play with the common associations outlined at Chapter Three. With wicked humour, mezzosoprano Tessoriero boldly plays with both ‘mouths’ as she physically turns opera on its head. Poet-philosopher-performer Cameron employs wry humour as she utilises the diva as a strategy to unearth and release the poetic. Movement and improvisational master Heywood engages with diva scale, power, isolation and interiority as she explores the containment of larger-than-life women.

Annette Tessoriero: Striving for ‘the gold’

Tessoriero defines diva as a “woman striving for godliness, for the *gold*”. She links Italian word *diva* (goddess) with the Indian word *devi* which means the shining one, or the one who illuminates (Tessoriero, October 2007 interview transcript, p.1).¹ She observes that striving “for the gold” can lead a diva towards a self-obsession lacking in empathy. Diva insistence on perfection leads to a frustration with human limitation – her own and the limitations of those around her, who may not hold the same standards or beliefs (2007 interview transcript, p.1). Tessoriero suggests that ‘diva fits of rage’ originate in this striving for the gold, but over time this raging has devolved into an assumed right; an assumption that she will be pardoned for disregarding the feelings of others simply because she is *la prima donna* (Tessoriero, 2008, Appendix 1.1.2, p 8, lines 172 – 194). Tessoriero also suggests a diva is intensely involved in her own pleasure (lines 165 - 167); is responsible for her artistic (and other choices); and is an artist in her prime. In answer to my question about diva conduct she says: “Divas insist on taking control” (2007 interview transcript, p.1), they are trained to take up space (aurally, physically, intimately) (Appendix 1.1.2, pp 7-8, lines 93 – 118; 149 - 167), assume entitlement, are good negotiators and can be emotionally manipulative (lines 71 - 75). She places this conduct within the context of an industry she describes as vicious (2008 Transcript, p.16), where one is expected to succeed by the age of thirty or not at all (Appendix 1.1.2, pp 8-9, lines 197 - 207). Much of what she says echoes definitions and behaviours outlined at Chapter

¹ In this chapter I make reference to a number of interview transcripts. Most, but not all, can be found at the appendices. For ease of reading, where an appendix reference is the same as the previous one I have given only the relevant line number. Where a line number is not given, the quote is part of an unpublished transcript. Full interview transcripts can be made available upon request.

Three, but is nuanced by her personal training in classical voice, and her choice to use that voice outside traditional opera arenas. I am particularly struck by her suggestion that divas are trained to make decisions millisecond by millisecond, “if you’re indecisive you have accidents...so there’s a lot of training to be thorough, to be committed, to be opinionated” (lines 172 - 175). Divas are trained to be ready to take up space centre-stage at any moment, “How you take the space is not just about the gesture but your posture...And your feet need to be rooted to the ground but with a little bit of a heel because...there’s no such thing as a dowdy diva” (lines 138 - 140).

With good humour Tesoriero remarks that aging divas know the value of having one devoted fan (line 75). And humour is a key strategy in her feminist approach to the diva icon as evidenced in *Choux Choux Baguette Remembers* (The opera Project Inc, 1993), *Don Juan* (Sydney Front, 1991), *Cheesecake Cabaletta* (with Deb Hart on French horn and Graham Jacups on viola, Art Gallery of NSW, 1994), and *Song Cycle with a Cement Mixer* (Performance Space, 1995). In *Choux Choux Baguette*, Tesoriero parodies the diva and plays with themes of self-obsession, appetite, entitlement and aging. As she juxtapositions arias with torch songs, *Choux Choux* evidences complete self-obsession, and in a direct reference to Clément’s study, dies by her own hand again and again. Her lack of empathy is comically drawn through her relationship with her beleaguered accompanist (Nigel Kellaway in drag, in the original production). *Choux Choux* herself is almost a drag queen, matronly and over-the-top (2007 Transcript, p.1). In Sydney Front’s production *Don Juan*, Tesoriero participates in a transgressive diva scene: the diva, escorted by two naked men with bows on their penises, is turned upside down (physically) as she sings the male part (turning opera upside-down). She is a Queen Bee, serviced by her two drones, her wobbly bottom referencing the wobble in the diva’s throat (2007 interview transcript, p.1; Appendix 1.1.2, p 6, lines 19 - 42). In *Cheesecake Cabaletta* images of the diva are interspersed with pornographic images as she explores oral eroticism (2007 Transcript, p.1); and in *The Cement Mixer* the diva is presented as kewpie doll: a bare-breasted carnivalesque image that, with balloons on strings tied to her nipples, draws attention to the diva’s body and breasts (Appendix 1.1.2, p 6, lines 49 - 67).

Tesoriero’s intentions in working with the diva icon are multiple and subversive, but one key intention is both to remember the diva and to change our memory of her (lines 7 - 8). In both *Don Juan* and *The Cement Mixer* she aims to retrieve the diva’s body from the fetishists – on reading Koestenbaum she says she reached for her genitals (2007 interview transcript, p.1)! In *Cheesecake Cabaletta* she makes this reclamation by “reinscribing the cunt on the body”, taking the diva’s body back from the boy’s club, “even the marginalized boys club – gays” (2007 interview

transcript, p.1). In *Choux Choux* she aims to “pull apart the diva in all her shiningness” revealing the nasty vengeful diva who wants to die by her own hand (Appendix 1.1.2, p 6, line 6). She describes being locked into the diva fate (death) as limiting, but diva as goddess is beyond death (lines 5 - 6). According to Tesoriero, opera as high art pushes the populace away and pushes the diva (goddess) away from the populace. In the production of *Don Juan* high art is brought low as the diva invites everyone to join her on the pedestal; “she has cellulite – she’s one of us!” (2008 interview transcript, p.2). In *Song Cycle with a Cement Mixer* Tesoriero collaborates with a writer to explore the sound of silence and the squashing down of sound – “what you’re allowed to say and what you’re not allowed to say – what sound can come out and what can’t come out.” (Appendix 1.1.2, p 6, lines 6 - 7).

Taking up the theme of diva interiority, Tesoriero describes the way in which divas take up space internally, suggesting an eroticism of voice that is more concerned with the diva’s own pleasure than the pleasure of her audience:

[W]ell taking space internally is another thing altogether ... you’re always opening your throat, opening your throat, so allowing the space inside to be as big as possible. So you know, opening your ribs, allowing a feeling of opening and openness in your abdomen, in your bowel, breathing really low in your body so that you get a real sense of opening up inside. And to me, again, that’s allowing yourself to feel those really intimate sensations of what’s inside your body...Oozing, spreading...Female-like, oozing, isn’t it. And that whole thing of supporting your voice... years and years and years of just trial and error: what feels right in your body and what the balance is. Between opening and pressure and where you put the pressure, you know, the pressure on the larynx and in the larynx and the sub-cortal pressure and all these different places that you can apply muscular pressure...and it’s all just experimenting with what makes the ‘bright’ feel, you know? When you’re making a sound. What is the most effortless and pleasurable. And I think the whole thing of singing is so much about pleasure, you know? It’s such an erotic thing, being able to do this ‘stuff’, inside your body, you know, great!

(laughter)

Maybe that’s what’s so – looking at singers who are really into it and really enjoying it and you go “why are they having so much fun?” It’s like watching someone who is intensely involved in their own pleasure. (Tesoriero, April 2008, Appendix 1.1.2, p 8, lines 149 - 173)

Tesoriero's picture of a woman intensely involved in her own pleasure underscores my own proposition that the diva icon is useful in *privileging desire*.

Margaret Cameron: Ironic husks

Cameron's definitions and descriptions of the diva icon are specific and succinct. According to Cameron the diva is an ironic husk, a social construct, enabling the artist to give high status to low and to talk about something domestic and make it epic. The diva is epic. The diva is an hysteric. The diva is grand. The diva is indomitable (Cameron, 2008).

In *Things Calypso Wanted to Say!* (1998), Cameron references the diva by allowing a character to take on a European accent to talk about water gurgling down a sink. Cameron claims this 1) makes her more interesting; 2) enables her to sit in a place of high status with the most fragile of reasons for having high status (single mother, immigrant, sexually frustrated); and 3) enables her to say "I exist and this is what I observe" (Cameron, 2008, Appendix 1.1.1, p 3, lines 55 - 86). According to Cameron the diva is an antidote to muteness and to feeling small (lines 138 - 144). She also allows amplification (e.g. of hysteria) and at the same time is "really smart": "Why are you calling me hysterical? I'm only telling you I love you! What's wrong with you?" (lines 123 - 133). In this way she provides a lever for prising open a space between the label of hysteria and 'it' (lines 126-7), between lived experience and cultural overlay or inscription. As we shall see in the next chapter, Chapter Six, Cameron's practice can be seen to respond to Grosz's questions of *how one acts, what enables one to do this, what acts in one when one acts* by claiming the value of her subjective point-of-view, describing accurately what she experiences and observes, opening space and delaying (defying) closure.

In *Knowledge and Melancholy* (1997) the diva references are less direct, but are born out by the music (epic), the duration (her long drunken fighting entrance on the diagonal), the assumption of a point-of-view, the classical references, and the poetry. Cameron believes in the diva as a strategy to "unearth and release the poetic", but, "I don't believe in her personality" (line 160). Nevertheless, the diva lends courage, "Courage to speak. Courage to tell. Courage to delight... to be excessive...to break the bonds of limitation, self-imposed limitation or culturally imposed limitation" (2008 Transcript, p.8). In discussing the genesis of *Knowledge and Melancholy* Cameron makes a proposition: that the way for women to become the philosophical subject rests in the ability to accept one's point of view. She goes on to explain:

[W]hat I'm trying to say really awkwardly is that: By accepting one's own point of view, no matter what, no matter what, it is possible to begin to speak. And at a certain point if one has a feeling that it is not okay to speak, or that it's not appropriate to speak, or what one is going to say is going to be either embarrassing or any other thing that is going to stop you from speaking...if you stay fidelius to the place that you have a small point of view then you can start asking really crucial questions like – I remember those questions were really important: Why can't I go on stage and say "O my Heart?" Why can't I? Why do I have a feeling that's not appropriate. Why isn't it appropriate? What's not appropriate about grief? Why is there a time limit if people are unhappy? *You should be over it by now.* What is going on culturally that would deny looking at that? But I followed a series of questions that took me to a place where I could say that the culture valued winning more than losing, that there was an emphasis on victory and winning and that to talk about loss was not really appropriate. It was not comfortable to talk about loss. Not that I want to be serious, but somehow talking about loss – that took me to the classical themes where it is possible to talk about loss. Classical poetry and whole streams and threads of poetics in literature where loss is the very thing they are talking about when they are talking about knowledge and they're talking about beauty and [///]. It seems to have a place to play in deepening what I would have to say is the soul experience of the world. If you meet someone who has suffered loss, truly, most likely you are meeting a profound person because they have somehow tempered everything around that. They have a humility, they are not an elephant, you know, they are a mouse.¹ They know their limitations, they know their boundaries. They have a deep respect for their own boundaries because they have had to hold a point of view. They have had to hold a place to be. (Cameron, 2008, Appendix 1.1.1, p 3, lines 27 - 50)

Cameron's approach to limitation, loss, humility and female philosophical subjectivity, and her suggestion that classical themes allow one to speak into cultural silences, offers another perspective on muteness: that in my silence there is something to be understood as much about my culture as about my personal psychology. Why does it feel inappropriate to speak of one's personal participation in abuse or oppression? Why would it feel inappropriate as a white, western, educated middle-class woman to admit to voicelessness? Furthermore, her assertion

¹ Reference to a joke Cameron heard in Berlin about an elephant and a mouse, recounted earlier in the interview. This joke can be found at Appendix 1.1.1 p.3.

that she does not believe in the diva's *personality* echoes Pope and Leonardi's suggestion that the diva be considered as a strategy or concept. I begin to theorise the diva's usefulness to feminist theatre practice is both related to and lies beyond Mastery of Instrument or virtuosity. The diva icon's usefulness lies in the articulation of a point of view, in the relationship between female philosophical subjectivity and the divine.

Nikki Heywood: Residing in power

Heywood's definitions and descriptions see that the diva is larger than life, powerful, alone. It is only in retrospect that this artist can say she has referenced the diva icon, and for Heywood it is a question of scale: an exploration of larger-than-life women. Heywood's interest lies in the way she sees larger-than-life women contained by cultural discourse, describing them as positioned or ensnared "for the use of others" (Heywood, April 2008 Interview Transcript, p.5). She investigates the role of the feminine at the centre of creativity, and also its shadow side – the monstrous and destructive. In *Creatures Ourselves* (1995) Heywood takes this exploration of scale into the costuming, creating a larger-than-life Queen Termite. The upper part of her body is padded and bound and she wears a huge golden skirt, referencing Queen Elizabeth I. Like Tesoriero's Queen Bee, the Queen Termite has drones in attendance, but unlike Tesoriero's, Heywood's Queen is elevated, isolated and alone:

She sat on a chair ... there was no-one around her... And she opened her mouth. And it was a moment that I played with a lot: How wide can my mouth be? Can I make my mouth signify the biggest black hole you could ever find? And staying with that idea, with that image, what sound would come out of that mouth? ... she screams, she moans, but it's beyond that, too. It's a sounding that's almost like a foghorn. Like this big [///] BAAAAAH. (laughter). And it's quite a dark image, it's quite threatening and it's about that thing of playing with the boundaries, somehow of the infinite interior and the infinite, sort of, grief and experience that the mouth can open onto...The single-pointedness of this place that she's occupying which is at once powerful but also very alone. (Heywood, 2008, Appendix 1.1.3, p 11, lines 68 - 79)

Pursuing the question, what lies beneath the 'larger than life' exteriority of the diva (lines 107 - 111), this first interview with Heywood moves backward and forward between articulations of diva exteriority and what might be considered diva interiority. Heywood asks as many questions as she answers and I experience her questions landing like small kineasthetic explosions in my

body. Towards the end of the interview the personal and professional boundaries blur as we seek a common language to articulate something shared/sensed/felt. We arrive at a re-definition of *diva power* as the possibility of residing in a place of knowing, of confidently speaking one's mind/experience/knowledge:

DA: ... when you talk about 'what is beyond everyday' and 'what is that life force personified', 'what is elemental'... I feel it *in me*... And yet, so often, I don't give permission for those forces to manifest or carry me.

NH: "[T]hey're two different things aren't they? The manifestation or the residing within, you know; if you're able to reside in that place maybe what you manifest is a part of that, whereas – I think a lot of that diva consciousness is actually about manifesting something because of a *lack of residence*. (Heywood, April 2008, Appendix 1.1.3, p 11, lines 124 – 132, Italics added)

While all three artists clearly engage with common associations of the diva, it is this concept of *lack of residence*, Cameron's articulation of the diva icon as *strategy* (for unearthing and releasing the poetic), and Tesoriero's question of interiority - what one is (not) allowed to say - and of the diva's involvement in physical pleasure that begin to suggest deeper possibilities for the diva's usefulness to feminist theatre praxis. Further, there is resonance between the ideas of *residence*, *assuming a point of view* and *interiority*. These questions and concepts call to mind Leonardi and Pope's definition of the diva as a "position, condition, situation" (1996, p.9), and their observation that women writers (artists) are more concerned with what the diva's voice does *for women* (than to men). At this time in my journal I record that I am, figuratively speaking, falling out of love with the diva. Writing now with hindsight I would say that I was falling *into* the diva, through her mouth, down her throat, spreading (oozing) and taking up space/intimate residence.

5.2 First work-in-progress showing

The first of my work-in-progress showings takes place in June 2008 in Rex Cramphorn Studio at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. The aim of the presentation is to enable an amplification of my own capacity to *hear myself hearing* (a perceptual practice) and I expect the live dramaturgical feedback and the ensuing discussion to offer directions for further exploration and research. This

first showing combines the elements of projection, pear writings, an actual pear, red electrical tape used to create a 'frame', diva shapes and gestures (physical and vocal), and song. At a point more than half-way through presenting the materials, however, I suddenly register extreme exhaustion. *Listening to and playing out this feedback* (another perceptual practice) I depart from my physical score, sit down, and continue to read:

[H]ere, I'll just have another weep, bathe the wound. I have cried so often in the last three months there are salt crystals gathering in the fine lines around my eyes and mouth. In the crepey folds of my neck. I glitter, salty, in the sun. Preservation. Tasty morsel, salty plum. My twelve unborn daughters whisper and giggle under an umbrella on the beach of my interior ocean. Twelve little mermaids with no interest in self-mutilation. They sing to me of desert wildflowers. (Appendix 1.2.1, p 16)

My voice halts at "My twelve unborn daughters" and it is several beats before I am able to continue this sentence. It is a moment of self-reception, amplified by my audience. It is bare. Simple.

The first and strongest response in the conversation that follows comes from Cameron, whose familiarity with my previous work enables her to identify a new poetic direction in my writing. At the same time she is able to reflect that my performing self does not trust this new direction and so, in a sense, the performer is 'sending up' the writer:

I found this in your bag, just now, and it encapsulates what I think I just heard (sound of gasp – Dawn reads "I crave poetry"²)... I heard it, I heard it, Dawn. The writing is really great. It's poetry, you know, that's what I felt. Once I heard that I had a different way of seeing you. You were there between two worlds – of yourself, in a way – yourself as a performer, and yourself as a poet. And in some way the performer was sending up the poet...And I don't mean any of that as a criticism. I'm just saying that is absolutely – that is exactly what we do, when we don't want to hear the plain-ness and the extent of the poetic voice. It's quite another thing to allow oneself to speak one's poetry, and not to enact it. Because in the listening of one's own poetry, all of the enactment occurs, you know, in so many ways. [Unintelligible] the language. And I felt like you had - feel like you already know that. Part of what you were communicating

² *In a moment of synchronicity the scrap of paper I had first pulled from the pile in my generative exercise on the studio floor, had somehow, months later, and without my knowing, found its way into the bag I took from Perth to Sydney.*

to me then was your lack of confidence in what you're starting to really love. Something you're really starting to love. And you're expressing a certain lack of confidence in that. (Cameron in *Interview Transcription*, July 2008, Appendix 1.3.1, p 19, lines 2 - 13)

An emerging academic voice and an emerging poetic voice are perceived, at this time, as being at odds with each other, and my performer voice (my performance persona) is identified as inclined to send them both up. The relationship between these voices continues as a source of creative conflict throughout the study until the work is remounted in 2011 for the Magdalena@25 Festival in Cardiff, Wales.

Tesoriero makes pragmatic suggestions towards a voice dramaturgy: keep the body stiller; allow simplicity; foreground the voice (Appendix 1.3.1, p 19, lines 29 – 30). She also encourages “generosity of time” (line 44), which I take to mean allowing the audience space and time to take in an image, a gesture, a thought. All three share other images that occur to them as they are audiencing – Cameron sees two pears instead of hands (line 21), Heywood sees dancing feet (lines 48 - 49), and Tesoriero experiences mushy moist pear flesh (line 41). These images have made their way into the fabric of the performance, but it is the identification of the poetic voice, and the classical genre it suggests, that is the key outcome of this presentation.

5.3 Second interviews – ‘heart’, ‘core’ and ‘practice’

In 2009 I observe an interesting phenomena in my yoga practice: the body has many ‘tricks’ to avoid *actually* strengthening the core. These ‘tricks’ require other, often peripheral, parts of the body to do the work that would be more effectively managed by core strength.³ This observation of physical deflection from the core to the peripheral, invites me to reflect on whether and how this occurs in my artistic practice. Together with my interest in the threshold images emerging, this becomes the springboard for the second round of semi-structured interviews. Returning to Tesoriero, I ask: 1) *What is core to (at the heart of) your practice?* 2) *Do you experience moments of avoiding it?* 3) *What feels edgy to you as an artist?* 4) *What thresholds have you crossed?*

Enacting avoidance herself, Tesoriero at first parries my questions with questions of her own, before admitting that calling oneself an artist, when one inhabits multiple other roles/selves, feels

³ *Arms and hands might turn a millimeter out from the body in order to avoid using core strength to lift oneself off the floor. Or arms might swing like windmills creating enough momentum to lift a body out of a back bend into a standing position, instead of contracting the core abdominal and lower abdominal muscles to gently rise.*

edgy: “It does take a fair amount of sense of entitlement to say: first and foremost I am an artist” (Tesoriero, 2009, Appendix 3.1.1, p 49, lines 121-125). At the heart of Tesoriero’s practice is the relationship between voice and language: “I like to pull meaning through the sound of the word itself” (line 33). But whereas she can point to models for motherhood and for other roles/selves she inhabits, she marks the absence of a model for the “female investigative artist.”⁴ Tesoriero has nonetheless forged a career as a contemporary vocal performer, turning things upside down conceptually and physically in order to create new aural and visual pictures. I would suggest that with or without their own local (Australian) role models, artists such as Annette Tesoriero, Margaret Cameron, and Nikki Heywood – among many others including Tess de Quincy, Alice Cummins, and Jenny Kemp – represent a generation of theatre-makers in which a particular kind of Australian female investigative performance artist has emerged.

In conversation with Tesoriero I identify a personal edge of practice when I hear myself say: Language and voice...that’s where I get stuck and fearful. So language is an edge and I feel like my mouth is a threshold” (Tesoriero, Interview transcript, 2009, p.7). The very next day I experience a breakthrough experience of *really hearing myself* as I work with Judith Wright’s poem *Egrets*.⁵ The paradox of the breakthrough is that I have an experience of really hearing myself as though for the first time, while simultaneously experiencing myself at the edge of myself, and not knowing any longer who ‘I’ am.

This recognition of language as an edge, together with the breakthrough in practice, frames my second conversation with Cameron, conducted the next afternoon. This is a pivotal discussion for my practice and philosophy as Cameron begins to articulate *speaking as choreography of breath* and to enunciate the difference between offering and receiving language.⁶ She responds to my paradoxical experience by pointing towards the intimacy of the voice, and suggests it has been educated *out* of freedom, by which I understand her to mean the many ways in which we are educated to speak ‘properly’ where this propriety does not necessarily match, or meet, our *need* to speak. In recounting her own ‘voice’ journey she elaborates:

4 By this I take her to mean the kind of theatre or performance artist that independently investigates her own pressing questions and pursues a strong line of enquiry. In doing so often breaks with traditional forms and creates new possibilities of being and performing.

5 This occurred during *Falling LAB 4*, a *Falling Like A Bird* residency supported by Hothouse Theatre’s ‘A Month In The Country’ program, Australia Council for the Arts New Music Theatre initiative, Arts QLD and WA Department of Culture and the Arts. The experience, and its philosophical implications will be unpacked in Chapter Six.

6 The phrase *choreography of breath* arises from Cameron’s dialogue about practice with Helen Sharp.

My journey in voice has been an agony. Because at nine years old I was educated in elocution and given a voice that wasn't my own. And so, 'til twenty-four, you know, even longer, I had this voice that made people dislike me, made me dislike myself, you know, but also, it had inside it, just because I'd been asked to speak poetry aloud...something about the cadences of poetry, I was, feeling, them. And I was copying intonation. But...it wasn't until I started writing my own poetry, that I really felt that I wanted to try to speak that. Then the first time I ever read a poem out loud, of mine, was in the country in Castlemaine. Yeah. Because that, because the two things came together then, not just the speaking out loud but I had to – I gave up acting because I couldn't speak other people's words, because I'd gone too far down the track of an education with my voice it was all too confusing. So I think that journey of *writing* is really, really close to the journey of speaking. And then the path to hear your own writing...you're actually writing it, inscribing it, in time and space. So I understand, I hear, I understand what you're saying because of that accuracy and that weird feeling of not existing because one's displaced one's – something that was holding you to some identity, because in a way, it's like making love in – publicly – it's like, you know, it's like...it's like singing, I suppose... (Cameron, 2009, Appendix 3.1.2, p 50, lines 54 - 77)

Cameron understands the voice as completely colonized by what one is expected to do and be in the world; by what one *has* to do to be in the world. The act of speaking one's writing aloud is understood as a move to receive one's own voice: "The speaking aloud engages the choreography of the breath"(Cameron, 2009, p.7). It is an act of reception. Rigorously attending towards this act of reception, Cameron locates *being articulated* at the centre of her practice: "To be in the *word* and in the *world* without being pronounced by it and to discover language in this context is also to recover it" (Cameron, 2010, italics added). I am inspired by Cameron to take up this challenge of being in the *word* and in the *world* without being pronounced by it. I understand this as both movement and resistance: *movement* between a place of fidelity to my own point of view and a place of engagement with dominant cultural inscriptions when they contradict lived bodily experience. This returns me to Grosz's framework in which the "interior dimensions of subjectivity" move with and against "surface corporeal exposures...to social inscription and training" (1994, p.188). I am thinking of her question: *what acts in me when I act?* (2011). If, as Cameron suggests, we are completely colonized by what we are expected to do and be in the world, *what acts in me* is relational to those social inscriptions I have most consciously and unconsciously internalized and been inscribed by, by what (and by whom) I have been colonized. The act of speaking then, as a move to receive one's own voice, is deeply politicized. I consider the centrality of poetry and

reception to my own performance practice. This line of enquiry opens onto further considerations of female philosophical subjectivity in *practice* unfolded at Chapter Six.

When I interview Heywood a second time she is in a place of transitioning from facilitating and collaborating on the work of others, to once again *dreaming through* her own work in order to bring it to fruition (Heywood, 2010, p.8). What is central to her in this moment is the question of whether the things she has said she is interested in exploring are still important to her, whether “the thing that I’m trying to bite off is still the thing that I am interested in chewing on” (Appendix 3.1.3, p 53, line 37-38). With hindsight today I delight in her mouthy references to biting and chewing, and note that just as I am identifying a lack of breath in my work and critical thinking, Heywood is contemplating the task of *breathing into* the cultural corpus. “[P]oetry doesn’t exist unless we speak it...we need to keep breathing *air* into, into the body of culture. We need to keep reviving it or resuscitating it in some way” (lines 5-7). What Heywood finds most interesting in performance is when people are committing themselves to a task, letting the *task* carry meaning, “just doing the thing they need to do...to get to the next moment. Or, to be in the moment.” (lines 17-23). In considering the discrete tasks of my performative material Heywood suggests I explore stillness in task-based activities, which leads us back to breath and consciousness of being:

“[I]t’s such a fabulous concept and it’s almost sort of zen-like because it is about registering that in each moment, in each breath that we take we’re constantly on the edge of the unknown...there are constantly waves breaking so there is always the edge of another wave...And I think in performance that’s the sort of consciousness that is achievable – not easy, but achievable” (Heywood, 2010, Appendix 3.1.3, p 53, lines 73 - 80) ⁷

Heywood’s articulation of consciousness as an edge reminds me of Cixous’ invitation for us to dive right down to the bottom of our abysses. Its implications for performance practice leads her back to Cameron’s choreography of breath:

[I]n a way that’s what we’re talking about – improvising to the point where you can create a choreography that you can repeat, and you can speak into that shape or choreography of breath.⁸ And of course, you know, every time you’re doing it afresh – you have to find it again. And it goes right back to what we were talking about in the beginning: Breathing life into the corpse of the Culture you have to...invest the energy in it you have to find the pathway to it. (Heywood, 2010, Appendix 3.1.3, p 54, lines 96 - 102)

⁷ Heywood’s reference to consciousness as breaking waves is a direct reference to Brian Masumi’s paper “The Strange Intruder: Towards a Politics of Pure Feeling”, presented at the 2009 time . transcendence . performance Conference, at Monash University, (1-3 October 2009).

⁸ Like myself, Heywood is exposed to Cameron’s thinking around choreography of breath at *Falling LAB 4*, a *Falling Like A Bird* residency.

Heywood's impulse to breathe life into the cultural corpus, and her imperative to allow the *task* to carry the meaning, reflect her distinctly corporeal approach to language and meaning. The impact of our conversation will later manifest in my own practice as *breath tasks*. These specific tasks affect the breath of the performer and enable her (me) to be in each moment of *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* (July, 2011) and to arrive at the next. This, in turn, leads me to begin to articulate a *dramaturgy of breath*, which I will discuss further at Chapter Eight.⁹ Considerations of the body, breath, and the move to receive one's own voice lead me now to a key finding of the study: the *Diva Voce*, or, the *coincidence* of the material and the metaphoric voice of the subject. Here I describe how the diva as a strategy for unearthing the poetic and as a concept for countering a lack of residence in one's own subjectivity provides the material and figurative ground for receiving oneself simultaneously in corporeality and divinity.

5.4 Diva Voce: Material and Figurative Voices Coincide

I have spent the past two-and-a-half years of studio practice attempting to engage with a sense of being divested of cultural artefacts in order to attempt to arrive at a point of conception, as close as possible, to the Diva as unbounded, authentic, feminist performer. (Albinger, 2010, Appendix 3.2.3, p 58)

I coined the term *diva voce* after reading Lacanian theorist of the voice Mladen Dolar. In *A Voice and Nothing More* (2006), he sketches a history of the ethics of voice from Socrates to Heidegger, concluding “[w]hat all this tradition has in common is that the voice comes from the Other, but this is the Other within” (Dolar, 2006, p.102). He is referring specifically to the acousmatic voice of reason (a sound whose source cannot be identified), “which sustains moral law” and which has been called “divine” (2006, p.102). His reading of Western philosophy positions this voice of reason as both transcendent and yet located within the philosophical subject as an “intimate kernel” (2006, p.102). Dolar is pursuing a theory of voice, an “object voice”, the “lever of thought” (2006, p.11), and in doing so he does not discount the material voice, but understands it as offering a *surplus* of meaning, bearing what cannot be expressed in words (2006, p.30). For Dolar the unintelligible voice “outside of speech” (2006, p.23) can “ultimately decide the sense” of an entire passage of speech (2006, p. 26). He locates this (material, surplus) voice *between* body and language, referring to it as pre-linguistic (e.g. babble, hiccups) and post-linguistic (e.g. song, laughter).¹⁰

⁹ As I write this sentence two butcher birds land on the gate just beyond my door and begin singing their hearts out.

¹⁰ Interestingly, Dolar hears laughter as the one human sound that moves in two directions simultaneously, pre- and post-linguistic. 2006, p. 29

The object voice that Dolar pursues, however, is heard between the subject and the Other, and is a call, after Heidegger, to radical alterity, an opening to Being (2006, p.96). Human speech and sound are positioned as *responses* to this voice.

For me, this figurative voice is experienced fleetingly as a non-gendered awareness, and touched only in the briefest of moments. It is “heard” *between* the acts of resisting, *and* positioning myself within, dominant discourses. It is heard between multiple narratives of self and in recognizing such stories as stories. It offers a state of consciousness conducive to feeling connected to something bigger than myself. Like Dolar, I experience it as *both* “intimate kernel” and as Opening. However, something is missed by positioning human speech and sound as only *responding* to this acousmatic voice of reason. My practice leads me to suggest that at times speech and sound are the very mechanism for *receiving* it. And in the coincidence of physical and figurative voices, it is not always evident that the *acousmatic* precedes the *embodied* voice.

It is this *coincidence* of metaphoric and material voice that I refer to as the *diva voce*. Simultaneously divine *and* corporeal, figurative *and* physical, it is located [heard] in the infinite moment between an out-breath and the returning in-breath, inhalation, inspiration, vibration. It is here that the female philosophical subject receives herself, divested (as much as possible) of cultural stigmata, and once received, there exists a possibility of *loving ourselves with respect and in reciprocity*; there exists, as Irigaray proposes, the possibility of a feminine divine.

While my proposition offers the possibility of a positive self-identification with the diva icon, it is also vulnerable to the criticism that to equate voice with agency denies the materiality of the voice and runs the risk of essentialising women’s experience. In her article, ‘Do Voices Matter? Vocality, Materiality, Gender Performativity’ (2011), Annette Schlichter refers to this as “feminist phonocentrism,” and finds it resonating in texts that:

... construct ‘the female voice’ as the representation of an authentic female self, while that self-representation is also contrasted with patriarchal misrepresentations of women, which it supposedly corrects. The phonocentric project assumes a ‘natural’ relationship of the voice, the female body and female identity as the truth of the woman’s self. Ironically, the material voice is banned from such arguments. Instead, a great number of feminist critiques of representation equate ‘speech’ and ‘voice’ as metaphors of agency and self-representation, which also reads as self-presence. These function as tropes of gendered power and its absence, suggesting that in the tradition of Western thinking, woman is

dispossessed of the voice, which is simultaneously the voice of reason and the voice of power/authority. By working towards creating spaces for self-representations through women's authentic voices, feminism aims at giving women that metaphorical voice-as-agency, thereby allowing for an authentic self-presence. In other words, feminist critiques of representation tend both to participate in the tradition of western phonocentrism and are simultaneously phonophobic in the sense that they speak of the voice only figuratively. (Schlichter, 2011, pp 37-38)

In my view what Schlichter misses, or ignores, are those spaces in which material and metaphysical voices coincide, for example, the theatre, and more specifically, the theatre of the articulate and critically self-reflexive feminist performer. My own experience of profound self-reception, of *really hearing myself hear*, is described in detail in the next chapter (Chapter Six). In brief, a studio exploration of a Judith Wright poem leads me to I hear my own speaking voice as though it is not-me, and at the same time recognize this material voice as profoundly my own. In this dislocating experience lie the seeds for understanding the *acousmatic* voice of reason as the *diva voce*: physical *and* figurative; corporeal *and* divine.

The practitioner interviews and work-in-progress showings described here in Chapter Five facilitate a shift in my thinking about the diva as an icon or personality. The contextual review at Chapter Three revealed her usefulness in a *mastery of instrument*, and *permission to embody range*, while at the same time raising questions for a feminist practitioner about too-muchness, desire, and resisting romantic love. Here, however, I begin to understand her as a *strategy* for unearthing the poetic, and as a *concept* for countering a lack of residence in one's own subjectivity. Through developing embodied breath tasks and resisting the impulse to 'send-up' my own emerging poetic voice, I assume a *diva position* (of mastery), while thinking of the diva as a *movement* creates space between acts of resistance and reception: resisting the clown, receiving my own *diva voce*. Resistance is crucial to my capacity for *receiving* my poetic voice and poses questions to my practice and to my critical thinking about self, voice, authenticity and subjectivity. I begin to resist the personality the diva and instead embrace her as strategy for privileging desire through resistance, reception and articulation. I recognize the diva as interdependent and in dialogue with her community of minds and of practice. As such she begins to reflect an unbounded female philosophical subjectivity. These themes are further unfolded in Chapters Seven and Eight, but now I turn in Chapter Six to describing the process of creating *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*: the process of deconstructing the diva in practice.

Chapter Six

Deconstructing the Diva in Practice

The creative process of making

No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation

The process of making *No Door on Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* introduces the handless maiden as a counterpoint to the diva icon, and links them as two aspects within a single femininity, as internal forces/energies for the feminist performer's palette. One way for me to describe the process retrospectively is to see that the diva entered the studio only to find it already occupied. The conversation that begins to emerge between these two aspects or energies (handless maiden and diva) reflects the autobiographical source material in tension with the propositions arising from the practice itself. As such, this chapter contains some deeply personal revelations and questions. Weaving poetic and narrative writing styles and foregrounding the actual practice, it also elucidates the key devising strategies and processes engaged throughout the research-based study: Perceptual Practice, Yoga, Authentic Movement, Perceptual Breath and multiple forms of writing. In describing these perceptual, somatic and writing practices, I take rehearsal fragments that reveal tensions, insights, and discussions onto which the practice opens, such as ways to hear oneself hearing, ways to open conceptual space, ways to dialogue with an internal diva, and ways to privilege the breath and ultimately one's own desire. I conclude Chapter Six with a discussion of the key moments of disintegration and self-reception that finally loosed the performance from its autobiographical core, effecting change at the level of the personal and, through the practice, inviting the audience to imagine new ways of being, doing and loving.

6.1 Perceptual Practice

One question in practice that has carried me forward from the beginning of the study is this: *How I can explore the idea of holding inconsistencies, contradictions, paradox, physically and vocally? To give the audience an experience of being in not-knowing with loyalty and disinterest* (Albinger, 2008 Unpublished journal 2, p.12). This question arises from my engagement with a series of propositions that are *levers to create space between an experience and its cultural labels* (Cameron, personal communication, 2011), making it possible to tell something exactly (Hay, 2000; Cameron, 2008). In the case of making *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*,

the first of Hay's propositions I engage with, and one I return to frequently, is: *what if where I am is what I need?* (Hay, 2000, p.2). Hay often begins her propositions with 'what if', a manoeuvre that Cameron says *resists closure and opens possibility* (Cameron, personal communication, Sept, 2008). Cameron, who has been in a practice dialogue with Hay for more than a decade, introduced me to the proposition *what if where I am is what I need* when we first came together to work on my previous solo *heroin(e)*. It has since become a 'first principle' in my own practice, a question I ask and attempt to answer repeatedly. Attending to this question in 2007 reveals that *where I am* is in a space of contradiction and paradox. Various chapters throughout this thesis make apparent that I am between things: between practice and theory; between the diva and the handless maiden; between my life on the east and west coasts of Australia; between attachment and detachment.¹ As I will attempt to explain, the propositions are a perceptual practice: they open conceptual space and give me something to attend towards.

The term *perceptual practice* originates with US choreographer Deborah Hay and is elaborated on in her book *My Body, the Buddhist* (2000). As the title suggests, Hay's choreographic practice is influenced by her Buddhist practice, leading her to create propositions for herself and her dancers that are like koans. These propositions are not intended to be answered rationally, but a simultaneous embodied and intellectual engagement with each one *generates possibility and delays closure* (2008).² There is no 'right' way to *do* each proposition, there is *no way it should look, or sound*, but with repeated practice, the practitioner (dancer, artist, performer) becomes more adept at *hearing herself hear, seeing herself see, and feeling herself feel*. I understand this now as an act of reception, and in the moment of receiving, the performer will *play out the feedback*, moving always between the proposition and what is received *with loyalty and disinterest*. This has become, for me, both a devising tool and a performance practice. In some ways the practice deconstructs the border zone between making and performing. Discovery is not limited to the studio.

Needless to say perceptual practice is impossible: In it, I am constantly challenging myself to *undo my knowing* and at the same time to *tell something exactly*. In the attempt I begin to lever space between *myself* and a personal experience. To tell something *exactly* does not mean using language to tell a literal story, but using all the languages available to me as a performer – physical

¹ I am indebted to Helena Graham who, noting this 'between-ness' at my proposal seminar, suggested I explore the space of the hyphen in poststructural thinking.

² My use of italics in the next two paragraphs indicates the voice of Margaret Cameron who has adapted Hay's perceptual practices to her own process of creating poetic and philosophical performances. I have been in dialogue with Cameron since 2004 and both *heroin(e)* and *No Door On Her Mouth* reflect this dialogue and my engagement with *Perceptual Practice*.

action, gesture, breath, sound and spoken text – to articulate something *exactly*, so the sense of it is *received* by the audience as much as it is understood; so that the performance has a literality that has nothing to do with naturalism. Making performative works in order to apprehend oneself through practice, one comes face to face with the limits of representation. It can be extremely uncomfortable. As my conversations with Cameron reveal, she understands this discomfort as the result of placing one's body where the mind is, and experiencing all the confusion of cultural representation. The perceptual practice becomes a path through the discomfort. Attending to the myriad impulses of the body and breath (including thought), *amplifying* and *playing out the feedback* in each moment, with *loyalty and disinterest*, are concrete tasks that, when I commit to them, disrupt logic and help hear what I am (not) saying. My engagement with these practices leads me to embrace the movement between daily experience and studio exploration; between reading theoretical texts, having incidental conversations, noticing seemingly unrelated events, and keeping a personal/practice journal. The work is always being made. I am *always already doing it*.

Hay says, "What if there is no space between where I am and what I need? 'Where I am is where I am' is reasonable, but less enjoyable than 'where I am is what I need'." (Hay, 2000 p.2). In my journal I have written, "I'm not happy" (2007 Unpublished journal, p.1). On the studio floor I find myself mute. Taking *What if where I am is what I need* as a first principle, the admission *I'm not happy*, is experienced, not as a narrative problem to be (re)solved, but rather as a ground for practical exploration of what *is*. If I am *not happy* then I work from this *not happy* space, I observe what *not happy* does. What physical gestures does *not happy* make? What sounds, what thoughts, what articulated thoughts? Slowly I begin to notice what I am *actually* doing. I notice what I do *between* hollow and half-hearted physical/vocal explorations of diva codes of conduct. What I notice is that *not happy* sits very still for very long periods of time and drinks cup after cup of tea. The shape of *not happy* is deflated. There is little breath. There is a stark contrast between my portrait of diva attributes and what is actually emerging from practice. The handless maiden is making her presence *felt*.

6.2 The Handless Maiden

As my diva research is repeatedly *undone* by a quietly disruptive handless maiden, it becomes imperative to offer my own brief sketch of this eleventh century European myth. I have created

this condensed version from numerous other retellings, primarily those of Robert Johnson (1993), Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) and Rebecca Pottenger (2011). I will take up their Jungian and feminist post-Jungian readings of the myth in Chapter Seven where I discuss the diva and romantic love, agency and alienation. Here the story is offered as a point of reference as the practice leads the diva and the handless maiden to enter into a dialogue.

In the medieval 'descent' myth known as *The Handless Maiden*, a miller makes a deal with the devil, trading what stands behind his mill for untold wealth. The miller believes he is trading a fruit tree, but at the moment the deal is made his daughter stands behind the mill, sweeping. In the short version, the devil orders the miller to chop off the girl's hands, which the devil takes as his 'prize'. The wounded woman binds her stumps and leaves her familial home. Endlessly weeping she wanders through a wild wood until she comes to an ordered pear orchard, surrounded by a moat. With the help of spirits she enters the orchard and the trees bend down their boughs and offer her their fruit. In the orchard, which belongs to a King, she is discovered. The King falls in love with her, marries her and has silver hands made for her. These are elegant, but useless. The King goes to war, and the Maiden, now Queen, gives birth to a son. Through a series of miscommunications the young Queen is forced to once more return to the wild, this time taking her infant son, whom she has named Sorrow. The pair are taken in by simple wood-folk, and after seven years of menial labour her hands grow back, first as little girl hands, then as young woman hands, then as grown woman hands. Finally Queen and son are reunited with the King, who has endured his own seven-year journey, searching for them.

6.3 Somatic practices

Yoga

At the beginning of the doctoral journey I engage in a daily astanga yoga practice, which continues for two years. Turning up at six a.m. to a tiny studio, where I am often the only student, this practice offers a deeply somatic experience of presence, of being, of breath. I learn to observe pain without panic, and to notice habitual responses to challenge, change, fear and failure. Through practice and research I understand my body as a threshold to subtleties within, and as a nexus of relationships with other humans. Michael Stone describes yoga as "the science of studying the way we perceive and construct our experience in order to bring about a fundamental shift in perception" (Stone, 2008, p.127), and his observation that "what is closest to us is what we have

the hardest time noticing" (2008, p 133), resonates with my creative impulse to shift perspective and uncover inherent assumptions. Cameron (in Fenton, Mercer and Robson, 2012) refers to this as the "Question of 'It'": finding the right question in order to shift one's perspective. Yoga becomes part of my writing and performance practice. Reflecting on numerous failed attempts to bunny-hop into a handstand I write, "*I am afraid of falling flat on my face...I think my arms will collapse... Perhaps there is something there as well about not being strong enough to support myself...*" (2007 Unpublished journal, November 3).

When I say out loud *I am afraid of falling flat on my face*, I hear myself hearing. I understand that I am literally afraid to support myself in case my arms give way and I fall and hurt my nose. I also understand that I am deeply afraid to be alone and reliant on myself for home, hearth, health, and livelihood. I am afraid of falling in life, of failing in life. The energy required for suppressing this fear keeps me literally 'off-balance'. Until confronted with the challenge of a handstand I am unconscious of my own fear of falling, of failure. When I first say out-loud *I am afraid of falling flat on my face* I promptly burst into tears. It is a moment of self-reception. Then I bunny-hop into a handstand. Ongoing yoga practice has taught me that it is not always such a swift transition from *reception to agency* (or action/change), but once an unconscious pattern of thought is raised to a level where it can be consciously heard, seen, felt, and received, possibilities open. Conceptual space opens. In this way my yoga practice supports the perceptual practices with which I am working.

After my insight regarding the handstand I begin to make connections between handstands and handless maidens. When I first encounter the myth I experience simultaneous attraction and repulsion: a strong personal charge. Intellectually I have no desire to stage a retelling of the story, yet elements of the myth are constantly embodied in my practice.

A year later, at a 2009 international women-in-theatre gathering, German actress and colleague Gilla Cremer advises me never to use personal material until it is at least seven years past. Using her personal *fundhus* (storehouse, biography) as a starting point Cremer makes solo performances about historical figures. The thinking behind her advice is that seven years allows time for personal integration of experience, mitigating against one's art becoming 'therapy'. At the same gathering, Cameron counters this proposition with another: performance-making can be therapeutic but is

not to be confused with therapy; besides, if we healed there would be no Art.³ At the time I find I cannot wait the seven years proscribed by Gilla Cremer. If I am going to make any work at all I need to shift something inside myself, create a space, in order to be able to go on, to function, to get a handle or perspective on something, even to breathe. My yoga practice has revealed a profound lack of self-trust (I do not trust my arms to support me as my world is turned upside down). At the same time a naturopath links unhealthy cells in my cervix with a lack of oxygen, and an osteopath alerts me to my habit of holding my breath out at the end of an exhalation (2008 Unpublished journal pp 31-32). Working with *what if where I am is what I need*, I notice I am braced, holding, and refusing to breathe. In the fight/flight/freeze mode of response to perceived danger, I am frozen – I may have moved an entire continent away from a difficult situation, but I have not changed – the part of me that was willing to *participate* in that difficult situation has come all the way with me. In questioning my own willingness to participate in abuse, in considering the maiden's mute surrender to her father's axe, and in noticing the information arising from the practice, a broader, contemporary, social question emerges: Why (how) do some women participate in their own abuse (oppression, voicelessness)?

Authentic Movement

Since 2000 I have employed a somatic process called Authentic Movement when devising performance.⁴ Authentic Movement aims for rigorous attention to sensation without judgment. Developed as a therapeutic tool by Mary Starks Whitehouse, strongly influenced by Jungian psychology, and with roots in dance, healing practices and mysticism (Adler, 2002), Authentic Movement functions as a spiritual practice for some and a tool of personal expression for others. In one of her early articulations Whitehouse (1956) described it thus:

[T]here is a tendency to think that being creative is limited to 'producing' something. I would suggest to you that the basic creativity of the human being consists in his [sic] working towards his own fullest development, the realizing of his own potentials, the allowing himself to grow. What we create first is ourselves and it is out of ourselves that the producing comes. (Whitehouse in Whitehouse, Adler and Chodorow, 1999, p.40)

³ See Appendices 2.2.3 for notes taken during the *Transit 6* workshop, "Life Stories", led by Cremer and Cameron.

⁴ The term 'authentic movement' was first coined by dance critic and essayist John Martin in speaking of the dance of Mary Wigman in 1933 (Adler, 2002, p. xv)

A movement is considered authentic when impulse is freely expressed without cognitive decision-making directives. This seemingly simple description is incredibly difficult to execute and presents a paradox if one accepts that all 'thinking' and 'doing' is a dynamic interaction between body, mind, spirit and emotion. At the core of Authentic Movement is the sensation of moving and being moved. But who is being moved and who is doing the moving?

In *Offering from the Conscious Body* (inner Tradition, Vermont, 2002) Adler describes how the discipline of Authentic Movement emerged from an immersion in studio work that "relentlessly pushed towards the edges of that which we could not yet know" (2002, p.xvi). The opening towards form that resulted is reiterated in my own studio practice as I respond to calls made directly from my body, and in dialogue with my inner witness. In the process of making *No Door On Her Mouth - a lyrical amputation*, I use Authentic Movement as both a method of warming up and tuning into my body, and as a devising process. Traditionally, Authentic Movement is practiced in dyads and triads: there is usually at least one witness to the mover. Without a witness, I consider filming my improvisations, but choose instead to sharpen my own capacity for *hearing myself hear, seeing myself see, feeling myself feel*. I become my own witness, often using my journaling practice to sense the emerging material and themes. I work like this for a long time before some material begins to 'stick', by which I mean I have heard something that surprises; I have followed an impulse and let go of sense and have caught the scent of something. It is intuitive, informed by the diva research and the handless maiden myth. In April 2008, immersed in the exploration of codes of diva conduct, I make the action of fanning myself furiously. A version of this movement persists through all my various 'showings'. In the final performance text it becomes the wild flapping of the flightless woman, framed by the arch of antlers. In a 2009 showing, and with a head full of medieval myth, I hold up my stumps and cry brightly "Look mum, no hands!" A wordless trace of this moment remains as I raise my cardigan bound 'stumps' in performance. During one authentic movement improvisation I stop in the middle of the room and raise my arms wide. A thought drops into my mind: *It takes courage to accept the adoration of a stadium full of faces*. Then I reach before me, offering my hands, palm upwards and it occurs to me that *It takes courage to offer parts of oneself up for amputation; to agree to become less-than-whole* (2008 Unpublished studio journal p.3). The diva and the handless maiden are beginning an embodied dialogue.

With Authentic Movement as my basis for improvisation I conduct related explorations around the words *shame, courage, responsibility, respect, love, pain, fear, and gratitude*. These words

are chosen from intimate journal entries. On the studio floor, I mark a number of impulses. During a physical exploration of *shame* I stuff my entire fist into my mouth until I gag, and then try to wedge myself into a doorframe. Exploring *courage* I overcome my fear of executing handstands, headstands and backdrops on a concrete studio floor, and finally find myself literally climbing several metres up the wall: standing on a chair, gaining a toe-hold on the door frame, finding a hand-hold where the wall stops short of reaching the ceiling. It is not an extraordinary feat of physical prowess, yet it requires me to work at the limit of my own physical ability. Returning to ground I walk through the space, experiencing an acute physical sensation of openness. Other actions which emerge from this practice and 'stick' include: falling to the floor, raising my fists, turning one way and then the other so fast my arms fly out and slap me in the face, sitting quietly, sitting with a cup of tea, panting through my nose (disrupting my breath), looking for a way to leave, singing, sweeping, and weeping. These actions and gestures all exist in the final performance text; some recognizable, many transformed.

The embodied practice of Authentic Movement, with its emphasis on letting go of conscious directives in order to let the body lead, compliments the perceptual practices which aim to disrupt logical or rational thinking. In the movement between perceptual practice, authentic movement, yoga, and journal reflections, a conceptual space begins to open. My journal entries in the first eighteen months reflect a desire to talk about an experience of abuse without resorting to clichés, but even in the privacy of my own thoughts there is no space to approach this question. In one entry from early 2008 I leapfrog from describing someone else's abuse, to my fear of falling, to an image of the handless maiden learning to stand on her own two hands. I am circling around the core of things – the personal experience that is giving rise to this performance. In the space *between* my questions, the images arising, and the unarticulated experience, some *thing* begins to emerge. I notice an emphasis in early journal entries on acoustics and listening. What am I listening for? Today I can say I was attempting to receive myself during an experience of extreme dislocation – something that was propelling me to the very limit of who I thought I was; something that revealed me, despite my claims otherwise, as clinging to an essentialist notion of self.

Perceptible Breath

I sat down for a moment on the 'throne' and everything was quiet. I took another deep, calm breath and then a thought landed, or erupted (I wanted to say 'it hit me' because my body reacted – I sat suddenly straighter, with a sharp intake of breath, my eyes widened – but it came bursting from within, not without): "It's about claiming space," I said. "When I allow the breath in, it claims space in my body, my body claims more space – inside and out..."

In the very early stages of this study my definition of a diva was "a woman who claims space, centre stage" ...I now have a very concrete personal experience of the absolute necessity of claiming one's space, inside and out, by first allowing the breath. What flows in, what this woman opens up to, what she takes in first and foremost, is breath: In order to claim space; In order to swallow life whole. (2010 Unpublished journal, p.5)

Perceptible Breath is a key dramaturgical component in *No Door On Her Mouth* – a lyrical amputation. It is a practice I am introduced to through my extra-curricular activity on an ensemble devised work *Falling Like A Bird*,⁵ and Helen Sharp's *Perceptible Breath* workshop,⁶ which I attend at a women-in-theatre workshop festival in February 2010. I make the connection described above between the physiological habit of 'holding my breath' and the diva attribute of 'claiming space', all of which coincide with a point of frustration in the creation process: the performance material does not breathe, nor is there any breath in my critical thinking. The opportunity to engage in a 'breath dialogue' with Helen Sharp lasts only four days, but it has an enormous impact on my practice and my performance; one that I am still processing.

In Helen Sharp's workshop, we meet over four mornings for three hours at a time. Sitting on low stools, feet firmly planted on the ground, we are invited to perceive our breath. Emerging from the Middendorf system, and with grounding in various acting systems (particularly that of Michael Chekhov), Sharp's approach is to make conceptual offers and to show simple formal gestures that invite the perception of breath. I am not surprised to find that at the end of a movement or gesture I am holding my breath, bracing my body. In response to my observation that 'I' am holding 'my' breath, Sharp's provocation is; "Am 'I' the holding in my belly?" This resonates with Stone's proposition that "practice shows us over and over again that what seems like an

⁵ *Falling Like A Bird* is a transnational new music theatre project in development since late 2008. The 2009 residency (*Falling LAB 2*) took place in Albury, NSW, with the support of Hothouse Theatre's *A Month in the Country* program, Arts Queensland and West Australia's Department of Culture and the Arts.

⁶ *Magdalena Perth Workshop Festival, Blue Room Theatre, February 9 – 15, 2010.*

experience belonging to 'me' is simply the contact of perception and stimulus" (Stone, 2008, p.112). Stone is referring to yoga practice, but both Stone and Sharp are inviting an attitude of *attending towards*, both are inviting perception, and, more specifically the invitation to perceive breath. Stone makes a clear distinction between concept and embodiment (Stone, 2008, p.133). While Sharp distinguishes between the perceptual and anatomical body, she proposes that the physiological space is the conceptual space:

The perceptual body is not the anatomical body. A fusing of perception and matter leads not simply to a malleability of form but to the possibility that the familiar edges of my form are dissolved. My very composition is altered. Breath finds its own shapes in this altered substance. This is not an experience I 'observe', as if from a distance, but a breath by breath becoming that subsumes the mental into the polyphony of perception, the micro detail of subtle breath sensation fluxing in the breath cycle. It flows through to my vision and tactility. I occupy the world in different density, relationship....Each breath cycle is a threshold, an opening to possibility, inhalation, exhalation, pause, the transitions. (Sharp, 2011, p.8)

And the touchstone question she returns to again and again is this: "*Is it pleasurable? Would I like to do it again?*" I find this proposition liberating: this privileging of pleasure, this refusal that there is a particular desirable outcome other than that which is pleasurable for the breathing subject. As a breathing body taking time to observe the breath, I feel released from the mind-body dichotomy and the kind of binary thinking that leads to privileging one thing over another, either implicitly or explicitly. Yet of course I am privileging the time required to perceive my own breath, and in asking *would I like to do it again*, I begin to privilege my own desire.

6.4 Writing Practices

Creative writing, journaling, & poetry

No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation is born of an attempt to articulate an experience that is deeply private, desperate and humiliating. In this attempt all my usual storytelling, clowning ways abandon me, or are abandoned by me. Like autoethnographer Tammy Spry, I know that "[w]henever my work messes with my mind, I suppose that I am on to something, some truth among many, that others may also find useful" (Spry, 2001, p. 725). In the effort to speak the unspeakable,

and to integrate my own capacity for violence, I need to amplify my own hearing.⁷ In my journal I write: *The orchard is where the integration takes place* (2010 Unpublished journal, p. 44).

There is an almost tidal movement between the different ways I 'write'. The writing that is most consistently engaged in is my personal journaling – an almost daily practice that reflects my engagement with various theorists, recounts dreams and conversations, and reveals struggles both private and professional in nature. Here, in my journals, there is no distinction between 'inside' and 'outside' and I change styles with abandon, and without warning, from poetic writing, to stream-of-consciousness, to linear styles. It is one way that I 'think', and these journals are returned to again and again for raw material to bring to the studio floor, where other kinds of embodied writing take place. For example, in the first year of research, the studio praxis is comprised of many generative exercises focused on exploring diva performativity. These exercises are performed side by side with the yoga practice and Authentic Movement improvisations. However, working from the outside in, and starting with the obvious, I find that my attempts to *don the diva* by assuming high status, wearing a fabulous frock, exploring diva gestures, postures, shapes, and voice, fall uniformly flat. That is to say, any attempt to imitate diva behaviour, or codes of conduct, seems to close rather than open possibilities. In attempting to represent the diva, and confronted with my own voicelessness, I am experiencing cultural confusion and limits of representation. I am about to encounter, through Cixous' reading of Lispector, the notion of keeping *the space of waiting open in order to see before sight or hear before comprehension* (Cixous, 1991, p.62), and this is precisely what I am doing: waiting, with *loyalty and disinterest*. I am not yet hearing or seeing anything in the studio that offers the lever I need to create a space, between the labels of my experience and 'it' (although writing today I can see the levers were presenting themselves before I was able to perceive them). I resolve, instead, to do a straight writing exercise, pen on paper. Aware of my fascination with the mediaeval myth, creative colleague and supervisor Robson suggests I write to a pear. Placing a golden brown Bosc pear on a blue china plate I write each day for seven days (September 20 – 26, 2007):

You have skin wrinkling along your neck. We have that in common...A still firm fruit, but perhaps not for long... Summer seems so long ago. It has been winter now for years.
(Pear writings, September 20, 2007)

⁷ 'Speaking the unspeakable' is a term coined by Cameron to describe the work we both produce. Building on this concept, we titled a 2008 co-facilitated workshop: *Using the Unusable* (King St Studios, Perth).

Over the course of that September week thematic threads of aging, wounding and weeping emerge.

Early on in my devising process, in an adaptation of a Jenny Kemp generative writing exercise, I create five piles, each containing five pieces of paper.⁸ The first scrap of paper drawn reads: *I crave poetry*. (2008 Unpublished studio journal, p.6). It's true: I have developed a practice of reading a poem every day. It sustains me. Desire for poetry becomes central to both form and thematic as the work develops, but this is not fully realized until 2010, when Cameron offers the provocation that I return to the original 'pear writings' of late 2007, and write seven poems and seven wordless songs. At this point in the process I have engaged Cameron as dramaturgical and directorial consultant. I have told her I want to make something beautiful that I can *hear*. I am very close, but I need help to bridle my natural capacity for clowning, that has so far prevented me from getting to the core (couer, heart) of things.

We develop a process where I write poems and email them to Cameron, who then reads them back to me over skype. She strips them bare, reading only the parts she feels she can say, by which I mean she deletes any language that fixes the text to a specific time, location, story. We are developing a shared language and her gentle re-readings allow me to receive myself. It is as though my skin is delicately removed and bare flesh and bone revealed. I experience myself as tender.

During this process with Cameron I continue to write my journal, read poems and engage with various theorists. I am moved by a Chase Twichell poem called 'Inland', which I find acoustically and visually fascinating as she draws on the sights and sounds of external landscape to speak of interiority.⁹ Her poem provides an eloquent example of a woman engaged in self-reception and gives me a sense of time collapsing. At the same time I am suddenly struck by the relationship between my first solo, *the chrysalid* (1997) and Irigaray's question of how to say 'I love you' differently, without it meaning *I wonder if I am loved*. It occurs to me that this question is the theme of this earlier performance poem cycle, in which all the poems are addressed to a distant lover. At the heart of *the chrysalid* is a manifesto that begins: *Where's the simplicity? Where's the simple heartfelt response?* Exploring another creative approach of the diva's usefulness, I begin to write

⁸ I participated in a generative writing workshop with Jenny Kemp in Brisbane at Metro Arts, early 1999. The material I produced in her workshop became the basis of my solo *ruthless*, and I have continued to use and adapt her exercises to my own ends.

⁹ <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/21425> accessed October 5, 2011

letter-poems explicitly responding to the questions posed by what I perceived as my nascent diva, my younger artist self:

dear one, I will answer your question even though my feet are cold. Where is the simplicity, you ask. I have some in my breast pocket. It was hard won and cost me some pride and three assumptions. My (tea)cup is empty now. I will write more soon.

*dear one,
where is the heartfelt response?
good. you are waking up.
(2010 Unpublished journal, pp 40 – 45)*

I quickly pen several more, all beginning “Dear one”. The last, which has become part of the performance text, feels like a poem of integration. From this point *integration* is identified as a driving thematic of the work. ‘She’ (the woman in the performing space) is attempting to integrate an experience that has seemed unspeakable. The ‘dear one’ of the poems has become the constant refrain of ‘my dear’ in performance. ‘My Dear’ refers to the ‘many me’s’ of the performer’s contradictory non-homogenised self, reflected in each face in the audience, and in every pear.¹⁰ The editing process, driven by the thematic of integration, involves shifting object/subject – ‘she’ becomes ‘you’ becomes ‘I’ becomes ‘She’. Following on from the skype sessions with Cameron, it also involves a stripping back and stripping bare the language. I take out anything that locates the work in specific time and place. So in performance “It has cost me some pride and three assumptions” becomes “It cost me”. The ‘cost’ is the ability to recognize and articulate desire. And so “cost me” in performance is de-voiced, hoarsely pronounced ‘off vibration’. It is disempowerment embodied.

Writing in Performance

There is another kind of writing that occurs in my practice. It occurs when I place the materials I have been constructing in front of an audience and *invite being seen practicing*. Things will happen with witnesses that do not happen when I practice alone. In front of an audience my capacity for *hearing myself hear* is amplified by an audience of many ‘me’s’. Conceiving of an audience as ‘many-me’s’ highlights my sense of connection to my community, and in particular my

¹⁰ As Margaret Cameron prepared to present *Knowledge and Melancholy* at the 2003 Magdalena Australia Festival, she says it occurred to her that for the first time she would be performing in front of an audience of predominantly women. Thinking of the audience as ‘many me’s’ affected her capacity to receive her own work. See Cameron, 2003, pp 71-73.

critical and practice community when presenting work in the context of the Magdalena Project. Key insights have arisen from this aspect of my practice. Here are three examples: 1) In 2008 I identify a tendency, in performance, to 'send-up' my poetic writing. Put another way, my desire to please an other, or an audience, results in my 'clowning around' on stage to get a laugh, which prevents me from hearing what it is I am actually saying. 2) In 2009 I put together a 'performative paper' articulating the diva's usefulness in resisting romantic love, which helps me understand the power in placing seemingly unrelated materials next to each other without explanation, allowing resonance to occur in the space between. 3) In a February 2010 work-in-progress showing my hearing is acutely amplified when I hear myself pause, mid-soliloquy, just long enough to consider a possibility that has never occurred to me before. In the pause an audience member laughs – she has heard it, too – and the longer I pause, the more the audience giggles and gasps. In the pause between an out-breath and the returning in-breath, conceptual space opens, and something that has been so close I could not see it, is revealed. Ten months after this February 2010 showing, *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* premieres at Perth's Blue Room Theatre. The work has found its form, but something in the way I have conceptualized it does not satisfy. The clown is severely bridled, but I discover, with my audience, that the work is not breathing as easily as I feel it should.

Six months after the official premiere, I am rehearsing to remount the show for an audience in Wales when I discover the key that has been missing: *dramaturgy of the breath*. Robson, fresh from another breath dialogue with Sharp, joins me in the studio. For two days she helps me identify and articulate new and existing breath and voice tasks that strengthen and underpin my entire performance. I have returned to a seminal idea: that the performance might be a concert. This idea links back to the first six months of the study when I considered that the practice might lead to a cabaret comprised of some of the thirty-eight songs I composed in 2005-2007. Rejecting the songs as being too specific to a particular time and place however, and also finding myself braced and breathless and mute, I quickly abandoned the concert /cabaret form. But during the remount rehearsal, six months after its initial Blue Room season, I ask myself *what is this thing I have made?* And I am surprised and delighted to discover that it is, indeed, a most unconventional concert. I am finally released from the personal narrative at the heart of the work. The work is full of breath and it flies.

In August 2011, *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* is well received at the Magdalena@25 Festival in Cardiff; received by the audience in ways I did not experience in the first Blue Room season. I identify a direct relationship between my diva-inspired breath dramaturgy, self-reception and the audience being able to receive the work. In the Cardiff performance the clown re-emerges and I allow her to hover, but her desire to please is re-focused into a desire to execute well the tasks I have created for myself as performer. I recognize that I have entered another stage of writing. It is the stage that for some kinds of theatre-makers can only occur in performance. As Cameron says, it took five years for her to find the ending to her performance *Knowledge and Melancholy*; for her to find the final beat (personal communication, August 29, 2011). And in those five years she was constructing *in performance*. The performance in Cardiff has been a joyful reassurance that the form is holding and detail is now occurring. Afterwards I reflect in my journal:

My diva is an expert listener. She is expert in the art of active listening and waiting in readiness. My diva has completely surrendered to grief. She is expert in surrender. She has resisted the narrative of romantic love. She is expert in resistance. My diva resists undermining her desire through humour. She demonstrates expert care. My diva enacts agency through conscious choosing. She is an expert agent. And courageous. My diva endures ambiguity. My diva is funny. She is an expert clown. My diva is present to her breath, her desire, to herself, to her audience and to her task. (Albinger, 2011 Unpublished journal, p.14)

The process of making *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* is characterized by a deep tension between assumptions of the diva's usefulness in claiming space, 'having a voice', and telling a story, and a practice that reveals the artist as mute, sad, and breathless. In a sense I could say the diva entered the studio only to find the space already inhabited by the handless maiden. The tension created by the encounter raises questions about female agency and subjectivity, perception and meaning. For a long time in the process I try to make narrative 'sense' of the material arising, until 'sensible' – something that is received and interpreted by the senses – emerges as another kind of performance logic.¹¹ The process offers insights regarding the usefulness of *resisting* humour, as well as the usefulness of the clown in bringing breath (laughter) into performance. The importance of breath to privileging desire, and to the dramaturgy of performance, is a key insight arising

¹¹ I am indebted to Margaret Cameron for this articulation of 'sensible' as a performance logic.

from every aspect of the practice. Resisting romantic love, previously proposed as a diva survival strategy, is ultimately abandoned as a narrative thread. Though it occupies the autobiographical heart of the work, the performance has effected a poetic transformation.

6.5 Disintegration and profound self-reception

Falling Apart

“...falling apart is a necessary part of the journey...an inevitable part of entering through the gate into the larger being...a deeply somatic experience...What falls apart is not our body...The only thing that falls apart is our mind or, more specifically, what we typically think about everything, all our concepts of “me” and “the world”. (Ray, 2008, p. 187)

It took me three years to claim *falling apart* as a key theme of the performance *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*. On reflection, I see my initial resistance to this thematic thread reflects a cultural suspicion of disintegration, linking it with strong and un-manageable emotion or with apathy and despair. As Cameron reflects, her practice involves excavating value from her own experience, “And in trying to do that I actually have to come up against where things have been devalued.” (Cameron, 2008, Appendix 1.1.1, p 5, line 154). Similarly, my aim in creating solo work has also been to excavate value from my own experience. In exploring the spaces between intellectual position and lived experience, alone in the studio and in front of an audience, I discover my internalization of a cultural de-valuing of a particular phenomenon: falling apart. This clashes dramatically with my consciously articulated intellectual position that I embrace messy corporeality. It is now more than thirty years since Cixous wrote her seminal essay *On Coming to Writing*, but I have found in her *dare to follow terror* a point of reference for theorizing this personal experience. I have dared the terror of disintegration that ensues when falling into the abyss between an intellectual position and lived experience with its physiological inscriptions. Though my falling could not be described as a graceful dive, I have heeded Cixous’ invitation to dive to bottom of one’s abysses, and allowed my body to unfurl its *hitherto silent legends*.

In June 2009, I ‘fell apart’ during a conversation that hovered around notions of de-centering self. I began to weep and could not stop. Weeping without surcease feels like disintegration. I had been clinging to a personal narrative of abuse, desperately wanting to make meaning of the experience. I was clinging to the notion that the diva’s usefulness to the handless maiden lay in her capacity to

make a choice: to choose to leave an oppressive situation. And I had strongly linked 'choice' with 'breath', theorizing that recognizing and making a choice is not possible if one is holding one's breath. In my journal I wrote: "*I have been hanging on to 'choice' with both hands, hanging on for grim death. It is my Great (personal) Discovery: that I was choosing diminishment; and that I could and did choose to leave.*" (Albinger, Unpublished journal 2009, Appendix 2.3.1, p.43). What I was also clinging to was my sense of *self* or identity, bolstered by a belief in my own agency, my capacity to choose what is best for me (leaving the oppressive situation). The more I resisted the experience of falling apart, the more terrified I became of falling, and the more desperately I held to who and what I thought I was. Despite my clinging, however, I fell into a yawning chasm.

The intellectual position was this: when one is faced with a choice one will choose the most liberating option, the option, as Irigaray would say, of expansion. *Especially* if one has the intellectual equipment and privilege to make the expansive choice – white, western, middle-class, educated, and *feminist*. This intellectual position revealed itself twice over as an assumption, when lived experience revealed otherwise.

The first revelation occurred as I reflected on the experience of falling apart. At the same time I was also theorizing the red-taped doorway in the studio practice as a threshold space. This led me to consider thresholds specific to myself, which further led me to consider menopause as a threshold specific to women. I suddenly realized I was terrified of growing old, which I associated with a loss of currency. I fell into the gap between my intellectual position of valuing older women as a rich resource, and the physiological inscriptions my body has received that tell me my culture feels otherwise. Our culture does not value older women. And for a biological woman menopause is not a 'choice'.

The second revelation occurred in early 2010 (described at Chapter Five) when the practice revealed that despite my privilege and intellectual-political position, I had for three years chosen to stay in oppressive circumstances. At first I thought *falling apart* was simply the aftermath of making the difficult decision to finally leave the awful situation. I expected to get over it and articulate some golden message of meaning about how and why some women make self-limiting choices. Writing today I understand that *falling apart* was the very thing that was insisting on expression. It is implicit in the entire performance as it is now written, and referenced directly in Song #3 – Note of Alarm Song:

Instruction to performer: Brace and Splat. Sound an impossibly high note with ease (no alarm, not forced) Over-articulate and control air pressure on the plosives (especially 'p' and 't'). It does not need to be emphatic because it IS emphatic.

Woman :

AaaaH!

Things are falling apart

First the teapot

Then the wineglass

Then the casserole dish as it came out of the oven

All hot tomato and spitting oil

Things are falling apart.

(Albinger, No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation, Chapter one, p.14)

My practice has shown that when dominant cultural discourse intersects with an individual's braced and breathless inability to attend towards and receive her specific experiences and embodied knowledges, a sense of displacement, or falling apart, occurs. What falls apart is the sense of a unified self. Here Grosz's shift from asking *who am I* to asking *how do I act* is useful. How do I act? I cling and I fall apart. I attend to my clinging and falling. As I attend in particular to the experience of disintegration – its shapes, its sounds, its feelings – *falling apart* becomes a navigable threshold into a larger being (Ray, 2008, p.187), a greater self-presence. Cameron refers to this in practice as finding the portal (an opening) *through* the dilemma (personal communication, October 24, 2011). In yoga it is understood as a moment of suffering becoming a path out of suffering (Stone, 2008, p.80). Attending to *falling apart* leads me back to my body and its cultural inscriptions. I discover an assumption: that my privilege – white, western, middle-class, educated, feminist – will protect me from making self-limiting choices. Taking Grosz's question of *what acts in me when I act* I begin to theorise that what acts in my clinging is this cultural assumption that education and privilege will automatically lead one to make the most expansive choice. What acts in me in my falling apart is an opening to another experience of being/is-ness.

During the June 2009 supervision session, Lekkie Hopkins opened the discussion towards *desire* as a more useful word than *choice* to link with breath. She proposed that *breath* and *desire* exist in the semiotic, pre-linguistic world, and choice is of the world of the signed, of language, of logos. I began to understand the Orchard as a liminal space, outside real time/place, and to

consider that making the performance somehow involved reframing notions of 'juiciness'. This de-centering conversation, and my messy non-rational physiological response, opened up material and metaphoric spaces in which I would later *really hear myself*.

Receiving Self: hearing diva voce

Listen. This is important. I heard myself today. Really heard myself. In a way that made me think I had never, actually, heard myself before. Who is that woman, I asked, speaking, like that? Attending to microbreaths without understanding what a microbreath might be. Suffering the breath. B[e]aring the poem. It was bare. I was bare. "It cost me to bear the poem. It cost the poet who bore it before me, translating the landscape through the mesh of her humanity." (Cameron, personal communication, December 2009). Attending to microbreaths I heard a woman I did not recognise speak. Opening and closing my body, moving towards and away from; risking the breath in every phrase. What does it mean to risk the breath? To suffer the breath? To bear language? To lay oneself bare like that? Flayed upon a breath, a gesture, a phrase. A word. It is possible to go through one's entire life and never, really, hear one's own voice. I thought I needed to become louder, stronger, in order to be heard. But it is the opposite. Today I understand it is the opposite. I do not need to be heard; I need only to hear myself. Really hear myself. And to do this requires a tender attention. A tender attending to microbreaths. Allowing the instrument to play without playing it. Receiving each breath and then letting it go. Receiving each word, caressing it, and then tenderly letting it go. Even to write these words lifts the edges of the experience and my eyes fill with water. Today I crossed a threshold. It is important."

(Albinger, December, 2009 Unpublished journal, p.71)

This profound experience of *really hearing myself* continues to resonate through my act/s of thinking and through the objects thus created: my articulated thoughts. The more I allow my physiology to inform the practice, the deeper I am led into places of stillness and silence. This once-strong body registers injury and aging, loss, abandonment, and vulnerability. The increasing stillness and silence of the studio and yoga praxes brings me to a tender attending to breath that prepares me to hear. In discussing this experience with Cameron she suggests that such hearing is made possible because I "agreed to receive, at the very moment, as Cixous would say, at the very moment of enunciation" (Cameron, 2009, Appendix 3.1.2, p. 50, line 13). Stillness and silence are springboards for simultaneous enunciation/reception, but it would be a mistake to understand

these as passive states. It is in the act of breathing, in the act of perceiving the breath, in the act of speaking, and in the play between these three, that I receive an experience of self that expands my awareness of my own self-presence. It is the *material* voice that is received and that so profoundly moves me.

The experience of profound self-reception described above occurred in the space between a physical task (moving towards and away from), a perceptual task (attending to the microbreaths), and a vocal task (speaking the Judith Wright poem, *Egrets*). In creating the final draft of *No Door On Her Mouth* for the Magdalena@25 Festival in 2011, I used this 2009 insight as a touchstone for creating the tasks and perceptual practices that now underpin the performance. This was achieved in collaboration with colleague and supervisor Robson, who had just returned from an intensive five-day 'breath encounter' with Helen Sharp. Together we developed a strategy to continually return the performer to the corporeal by returning to an awareness of the breath. Here is an example:

Instructions to performer: Notice the breath. Place your hands where you feel your breath, or where it is pleasurable to do so. When speaking, pause after one, then two, then three (etcetera) words. Deliberately pitch above and below beginning 'note'. Play the game lightly, privately (resist 'song', 'significance', and becoming too disjointed).

(Albinger, 'No#1: Breath and Caress Song, *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*, Chapter one, p.10)

After Cameron, I choose to call the individual breath tasks of each song "choreographies of breath" (Cameron, 2009 interview transcript, Appendix 3.1.2, p. 50, line 10). And after Sharp, I refer to the collected breath tasks of the work as *the dramaturgy of the breath*.

Nuancing conceptions of the diva by linking the *diva voce* with Dolar's acousmatic voice of reason, Cixous' breath that desires form, and Irigaray's divine horizon – all simultaneously transcendent and corporeal – can be useful for the feminist performance-maker and biological female philosophical subject. Hearing one's *diva voce* occurs in fleeting moments during experiences of self that seem non-conceptual and un-fixed. Such moments may invoke a feeling of being connected to something beyond ourselves. Even fleeting non-conceptual and non-gendered awareness allows for a maturing of relationships between self and Self, self and Other. When the woman who has had this experience of *diva voce* returns to the daily interactions with her world, it is possible for

her to engage more consciously – and potentially more lightly, more playfully – with the cultural discourses that play a part in constructing her identity. In the daily world a woman is confronted again and again by the fact that the identity she co-creates is female, but in the space of self that is core and non-conceptual she does not know herself as woman or man. As a woman-identified biological female, recognizing and participating in this perpetual dance between the semiotic and symbolic ‘unfixes’ self-identification with specific narratives, creating a breathing space between an experience and what one ‘thinks’ it ‘is’; offering new possibilities of being and doing in the world.

What I move towards then, philosophically, performatively, and physically, is strength: the strength and ability to navigate those thresholds that open up as one goes into the exploration of breath: resisting closure, opening possibility, revealing personal ‘blind-pots’ and divesting oneself of cultural ‘labels’. Strength emerges because of enduring ambiguity AND through making choices. In the end, attending to breath and privileging desire supports a self-reception that makes the inaudible audible, the invisible visible. This is the ideal, the divine horizon, towards which I unfold. In practicing *what if where I am is what I need* I attend to what *is*, to being with *is-ness*, and I ask *what is here?* My task as performance-maker is to describe it, accurately. This requires working with time and space to make the immaterial material; working with messy corporeality, engaging with my personal biology, language, geography and culture. This is the art of the actor, or at least of the kind of actor I am constituted to be. And as I dive into the abyss between intellectual understanding and lived experience, as I expand towards the divine horizons of what I am constituted to be/come, I enact the dance of the female philosophical subject in *practice*. This double movement (diving in and expanding; being and becoming) now leads me to the autobiographical core of the performance and to an investigation of its intersecting themes of myth, romance, alienation and resistance. The diva and the handless maiden deepen their dialogue, as these themes intersect with the maiden’s mute surrender and with the diva attribute of losing herself, and sometimes her life, in love.

Chapter Seven

Core/Couer/Heart

When the Diva encounters The Handless Maiden and resists Romantic Love

Revealing the autobiographical kernel of the performance, this chapter affords an opportunity to delve more closely into the story of the handless maiden and understand its link with the diva and the concept of resisting romantic love. *Resistance* was initially posed in Chapter Three as a diva survival strategy. Given that resistance was a key strategy of 'second wave' feminism in the 1970s, the theme demands a closer look. This chapter also illuminates an important step in the journey of understanding the emerging performance, and locating it in the terrain of agency and resistance. At the same time it presents a conundrum, for linking handless-ness with loss of agency begs the question: what can a handless maiden do? I have divided this chapter into two parts. In *Part One* I consider Jungian and feminist post-Jungian readings of 'handlessness', along with feminist thinking that links low self-esteem with violence and alienation. Here, *resistance* is identified as continuing to have value in combating alienation and oppression. In *Part Two* I consider some historical, psychological and physiological factors at play when we fall in love, and follow sociologist Stevi Jackson (1993, 2004) through to one conclusion of resisting romance: radical non-monogamy. Unable to commit to Jackson's conclusions myself, I seek other strategies of resistance. As I discuss the diva and the maiden as inner archetypal forces/selves their dialogue deepens, suggesting new possibilities: *embracing disintegration and reimagining the feminine divine*.

7.1 Encountering the Handless Maiden

i.

once upon a time a miller made a deal with the devil. He traded what stood behind his mill for untold wealth, "O Husband what have you done!" The miller thought he traded a fruit tree, but at the precise moment the deal was struck his daughter stood behind the mill, sweeping. When the devil came to collect his due he was offered a pear/pair...of hands. (Albinger, Handless Maiden Tales i, 2009)

When I first encounter the eleventh century European myth that is variously known as *The Handless Maiden*, *Silverhands* and *The Orchard*, I am immediately struck by the image of the central character's mute submission to the loss of her hands, her subsequent tearful wandering through a wild wood, and her sojourn in the King's Orchard where pear trees bend their boughs to offer her their fruit. As we saw at Chapter Six, the story continues past this nourishing moment in the orchard, and cycles through several layers of death, descent, and rebirth, until the maiden's hands grow back:

*First as little girl hands, then as grown woman hands,
And they're the hands of a woman who knows
How to hold love, and more importantly,
When to let go.
(Albinger, The Gratitude Song, 2008 Unpublished journal, p.41)*

Working with the story in the studio, however, I stall. I am unable to progress beyond entering the Orchard. Each time I reach this narrative point in improvisation I begin to weep, make cups of tea, or croon myself a comforting tune. In my investigations the handless maiden seems at first to be a counterpoint, or antithesis, to the diva icon's unbridled expressivity. If, as suggested at Chapter Three, the diva is useful as a condition of *permission to embody range* (of emotion), the handless maiden – mutilated, mute, tearful – appears to occupy one extreme end of the emotional spectrum.

I am not the first Australian artist to find herself in thrall to *The Handless Maiden* tale and engaging with its archetypal themes. Jane Campion's 1993 film *The Piano* directly references the myth through its central figure of a mute woman who loses her finger and her ability to nourish her soul through playing music. Also, Drusilla Modjeska's 1995 novel *The Orchard* has the myth at its core. The myth itself is articulated once in the book with poetic brevity (p.93), yet themes of agency, art and nourishment weave throughout this delicate and poetic exploration of the lives and intergenerational relationships of a group of four women. In the earliest iterations of her 1989 solo performance *Things Calypso Wanted To SAY!* Margaret Cameron projected the text of the myth onto the back wall of the space without comment or reference, but counterpointing her refusal to be muted, and referring to a kind of wounded-ness (2008 interview, appendix 1.1.1). My personal encounter with the myth, however, begins with Robert Johnson's Jungian analysis *The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden: Understanding the wounded feeling function in masculine and feminine*

psychology (1993). I randomly picked up Johnson's book when I was a guest in someone's house, and was immediately struck by this story and its themes of wounding, loss, and regeneration.

A Jungian Analysis – loss of agency

Myth and legend, with their archetypal content and powerful metaphors, have long been used by Jungian therapists "for the psychological process of self-actualisation known as individuation" (Golden, 2000, p.209). Many have deconstructed the myth of the Handless Maiden (Pinkola Estes, 1992; Johnson, 1993; Snyder, 1995; Golden, 2000; Pottenger, 2011) linking handlessness with loss of agency, an inability to do (Johnson, 1993; Pinkola Estes, 1992), which in turn is linked, most notably with women, to loss and lack of self-esteem. Although most recent studies recognize the process of individuation is not gender linked, Golden tells us "it is usually represented this way in fairy tales" (2000, p.211). In order to enact personal transformation and growth the heroine must overcome passivity and silence "and find her *true voice*" (2000, p.211, italics added). In all variations of the Handless Maiden myth the protagonist does not object to the amputation of her own hands (Johnson, 1993, p.59), and the brutal amputation is sometimes linked with rape or incest (Golden, 2000; Snyder, 1995). The handless maiden's literal wound may be read as metaphor for psychic, spiritual, emotional and/or physical wounding, and a Jungian lens reads her retreat into solitude as "the feminine equivalent of masculine heroic action" (Johnson, 1993, p.79).

Feminist post-Jungian readings

Feminist Jungian analyst and storyteller Pinkola Estés celebrates this choice of solitude. She describes it as a descent into *la selva subterranea*, the underground forest (Pinkola Estés, 1992, p. 405), and reads the entire myth as a cycle of feminine psychic development: the hands that cling (to something poisonous, to the deal with the devil) must be 'pruned' in order to promote growth. Rebecca Pottenger interprets this 'deal with the devil' as a force present within a woman's psyche, offering *the riches of love* in exchange for her self-interested instincts (Pottenger, 20011, p. 55). In reading the myth as a cycle of feminine development, Pinkola Estés identifies that the choice to give up something important – one's self interested instincts – in order to keep the status quo – a relationship, the riches of love – is akin to giving up one's 'hands'. Rebecca Pottenger aligns with Estés in reading the removal of the maiden's hands as symbolic of the need to surrender the ego's hands, and the world as known, to regain the wild senses of the feminine. Individual choices that result in the symbolic removal of hands are not judged; instead, the resulting experiences are seen as opportunities for personal transformation and growth,

There is something useful in the Jungian imperative to learn from one's choices. I am particularly interested in the experience of *surrendering the world as known*, which I understand as the falling apart that can occur when one's ideas and assumptions about oneself and the world are fundamentally challenged. I align myself with Sue Monk Kidd (2002) who asserts that at such a time a myth can motivate a woman to confront the faces of the feminine she has adopted "to understand what [has] motivated them, and to begin to break their patterns, not just by giving some intellectual assent . . . but by living out the struggle" (2002, p. 110). One does not need to embrace essentialist notions of femininity to accept Monk Kidd's point. Some faces of femininity are fatally constructed, and when unconsciously adopted, work against a woman's self-interested instincts. How then does one confront that which is unconsciously adopted? In the Jungian therapeutic paradigm, personal retellings of cultural myths work to leverage enough space to enable a shift in perspective. This manoeuvre, without being biographically explicit, also operates in the creative works of Campion, Cameron and Modjeska, cited above. In my own retellings of the myth a small space is levered between an experience of oppression and its cultural labels: domestic violence, intimate partner violence, psychological abuse.

ii.

Once upon a time a girl lost her hands because her dad made a deal with the devil. Handless, she lost her agency, lost her grip on things, and she wandered into the forest.

She stayed in the forest for two years. Her friends were concerned, then alarmed. The friends made countless visits, each time bringing a red thread, so the girl could find her way back out of the wild wood.

One day, when she was tired of weeping, she opened her eyes to see her situation in a new light. She had been living in the bush with a man, but now she could see he was a bear. She looked down at her stumps and saw tiny little baby fingers pushing out and with these she picked up the freshest red thread and let it lead her all the way across the country to the far side of the continent.

There, between the Indian Ocean and the desert, she found an orchard. The orchard was filled with women's laughter. Intrigued she found them sitting in the dappled light, eating pears, drinking wine and speaking philosophy.

The girl, who was now a woman, sat down to rest, and the next time she looked down at her stumps she saw that she had grown little girl hands. And she smiled. (Albinger, Handless Maiden Tales ii, 2009)

In the original myth, the maiden enters the King's Orchard, where pear trees bend down their boughs. The pear is a feminine symbol: in solitude the maid is nourished from within. But there is no 'happy ending.' As Pinkola Estés points out, the inner nourishment (pear) "does not solve suffering, but rather nourishes when nothing else is forthcoming...It quells the hunger so that we can go on. And that is the whole point...to go on. To go on toward our knowing destiny." (1992, p. 415). The question can be posed: What is this pear of inner nourishment? Is it the "true voice" that a Jungian process of individuation would lead us to hear, to articulate? It is seductive to think that hearing and articulating one's "true voice" can be an antidote to participation in oppression. But what does "true voice" mean when one accepts multiple narratives of self and discovers internalized societal views at work within oneself? As discussed at Chapter Five, moments of self-reception, when the physical and figurative voices coincide, provide nourishment when *nothing else is forthcoming* and support an unfolding *towards our knowing destiny*. I turn now to consider the ways in which this inner nourishment is intimately linked with our capacity to articulate desire, and the implications of this for being and doing in the world.

Handlessness and Alienation

Some feminist theorists, such as Rich (1980), Lorde (1984) and Hall (2005), understand inner nourishment as a form of *eros*, where *eros* is understood as an intimate connection to desires and feeling life. This feminist discourse reads violence and alienation as power over and power under, with men statistically more likely to enact violence, and women statistically more likely to experience alienation. Cheryl Hall, in *The Trouble With Passion* (2005), asserts that when the connection to our feeling life is lost or denigrated

[W]e become isolated, apathetic, self-negating. We lose any sense of joy in living...we have no self-knowledge, or knowledge of others, without access to the erotic...we do not have a sense of what we need and want, of what we care about and what matters to us in the world, or of how other people are important to us. We are left without direction, and, as a result, without control of our own destinies. (Hall, 2005, p.105)

She also describes masochism as a “*swallowing of violence* that projects outwards” (2005, p.107, italics added), a description that collides with the title of my performance *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*, and one of its key theatrical images: a woman swallowing her entire fist. This reminds me of Anne Carson’s essay in which Echo’s door-less mouth is a pathway between the interior and exterior; a pathway to another kind of knowing and power. This swallowing of violence that projects outwards can then be framed as a perversion – a turning away from itself – of productive passion and love. The handless maiden’s wound of amputation can be understood as an alienation that “engenders depression, despair, resignation, numbness and hopelessness” (Hall, 2005, p. 10), inducing docility and obedience and leading (some) women to collude in their own oppression. If two people in an intimate relationship have lost connection to their inner life and desires, and one enacts violence while the other experiences alienation, the stage is set for an abusive relationship.

iii.

I could speak of the ill-treatment she received, the insulting language she endured, the injurious treatment, the controlling behaviour. The truth is that she stayed. She chose to stay. She chose to constrain herself. Containment. She changed the way she dressed, gave up work, stopped visiting friends. She gave up all her male friends completely.

What are you trying to do?

Where did you go today?

Who did you see?

What were you wearing?

Were you wearing that?

What are you trying to do?

It’s pretty weird, don’t you think? (Albinger, *Handless Maiden Tales ii*, 2009)

The usefulness of resistance as an act of agency.

While an investigation of abusive relationships is outside the parameters of this study, Valli Rajah’s conception of *resistance as edgework* (2007) offers a dramaturgical entry point for the diva and the handless maiden to engage with each other. In short, “edgework” describes voluntary behaviour undertaken in a highly controlled manner with an observable threat to personal safety. Originally coined to describe the preparation involved in high risk sports such as rock-climbing and base-jumping, Rajah’s thesis is that for women in intimate relationships marked by abuse, edgework

represents “a mode of resistance to patriarchal privilege and control” (Rajah, 2007, p.201). Individuals consciously depart from a zone of safety when they defy a violent partner’s wishes. This requires “context-specific expertise, born of intense participation”, hallmarks of the edge-worker, who “transforms a clear line between safety and danger into a risk-filled but survivable border zone” (Milavonic in Rajah, 2007, p 201). Could the diva, with her context-specific expertise (her unbridled tongue, permission to embody range, capacity to claim space), offer the handless maiden the possibility of resistance? What, exactly, should the diva and the handless maiden resist? What does this resistance look, feel, *sound* like?

7.2 Resisting Romantic Love

As we saw at Chapter Three, one answer is suggested by the stories opera tells of women loving and losing their lives, a pattern echoed in the biographies of real-life divas. *Resisting romantic love* is a useful feminist strategy for combating the alienation and despair that occur when one surrenders one’s self-interested instincts, losing connections to one’s inner life and desires. But can resisting romance really cultivate positive self-worth and agency? In this section I explore historical, psychological and physiological understandings of romantic love and I follow feminist sociologist Stevie Jackson through to one conclusion of resisting the western myth.

Falling in Love – An historical frame

While love and romance have been literary and philosophical themes since Socrates and Sappho, the historical view is that romantic love, as we experience it in western culture today, grows out of the tradition of courtly love which began in the relative political stability of early twelfth-century France. At this time the troubadours (travelling poet-musician-songwriters) turned from celebrating war to singing songs of love, songs that idealized and idolized the beloved, usually the wife of the troubadour’s patron (Hopkins, A. 1994, pp10-12). The love articulated could never be physically consummated and from this, the tradition of courtly love evolved into a distinctly sophisticated and codified system in which the object of desire came to represent the ineffable, the divine, the unreachable. The legacy of this tradition is a pervading belief in western culture that romantic love, with its emphasis on emotion, intensity of feeling, jealousy, suffering and sacrifice, is the ultimate goal of union with another human being and, as such, it becomes the basis of many marriages and ‘love’ relationships (Johnson, 1983, p. xi).¹

¹ For explicit “Rules of Love” see Andreas Capellanus’ *De Arte Honesti Amandi*, as quoted in Hopkins 6–8.

Falling in Love – A physiological frame

There are also physiological reasons for the feelings and choices associated with the human experience of falling in love. When a person falls in love the firing threshold for the appetitive pleasure system is lowered, making romantic love a powerful catalyst for plastic change in the brain (Doidge, 2008, p.115). As well as taking more pleasure in the world, the firing of this system makes it harder to experience displeasure or aversion (2008, p. 114). Hence the saying 'love is blind'. Oxytocin, another chemical produced in our brains when we have intercourse, has been called the amnesic or bonding hormone because it melts down the neuronal connections that underlie existing attachments so new attachments can be formed (2008, p.120). Doidge's image of melting neurons may be overstated, but the point is that oxytocin lowers our guard and induces a warm mood of tenderness and attachment. Walter J Freeman, Professor of Neuroscience at Berkley, was the first to make the connection between romantic love and the massive un-learning that occurs in the brain due to oxytocin. His theory helps explain why so many of us are vulnerable in love: self-image can be improved by an adoring partner, or lost if we fall in love with a devaluing one (2008, p.121).

Falling in Love – psychological frame

The Jungian frame overlaps the historical and physiological aspects of falling in love. In the Jungian frame, consumers of the myth of romance are predisposed to expect incredibly intense emotional 'highs' and 'lows'; to value emotional storming as 'proof' of love's veracity; to de-value love in any other form. These beliefs and projections lead individuals to defend their lovers and their love, even if the reality of their situation does not match the myth. Here, as we saw earlier, the legacy of romantic love encourages some women to make bad deals with the devil. Reading mythic characters as internal archetypes, the inner handless maiden becomes a force that leads a person to give up her hands, her agency and, often, her voice in exchange for the *riches of love*.

In the context of intimate relationship I thought at first that the handless maiden's wound was obvious. I read the loss of her hands as her willing sacrifice to the ideal of romantic love: she would rather give up a piece of herself – her hands, her ability 'to do', her agency – than lose the beloved, lose everything she knows. This is one way to understand the secret of her wound: a willing whittling away of the self in order both to fit the picture of divinity that is being projected onto her, and to maintain the illusion of her lover's perfection. Unwilling to upset the status quo, she constrains and contains herself; she gives up her hands, she keeps 'mum', not a peep! However

I want to claim some agency for the maid in her willing amputation: agency can feel like wielding the axe oneself, sometimes on oneself: Pausing on the threshold of interiority and exteriority, the diva and the handless maiden are deep in conversation. "Let's cut off our hands! We're holding on to something that is killing us!" cries the handless maid. The diva smiles, and with inner authority and expert self-mastery she hands the axe to her companion. "Breathe," she says. Each is offering the other the power to act differently, to love differently, transforming acts of love into something other than self-immolation.

Falling in Love – narrative construction and modes of resistance

The act of resisting romantic love is taken to one possible conclusion in Stevi Jackson's call for radical non-monogamy (1993, 2004). Jackson has been theorising and practicing non-monogamy since the 'second-wave' feminism of the 1970s. She argues that social and cultural constructions of romantic love precede the psychological and physiological. Examining the narrative construction of emotion through love stories she claims:

We create for ourselves a sense of what our emotions are, of what being 'in love' is... by participating in sets of meanings constructed, interpreted, propagated and deployed throughout our culture, through learning scripts, positioning ourselves within discourses, constructing narratives of self. We make sense of feelings and relationships in terms of love because a set of discourses around love pre-exists us as individuals and through these we have learnt what love means. (Jackson, 2004, p. 212)

These narratives construct gender-specific experiences of love. Western masculinity is asserted through sexual bravado rather than romance, and men are not encouraged to develop competencies around a discourse of emotions (2004, p.214). Women are acculturated into a certain form of emotional literacy that positions men as emotionally illiterate, but with a 'softer side' under their hard exterior (2004, p.216). Jackson reads these narratives as bound up with material realities of gender: men rely on women, rather than each other, for nurturance (2004, p. 216); women's material powerlessness allows them to read romance as 'power over' a man driven mad by his desire for her (2004, p. 217). Referencing Radway (1989) she reads the narrative structure of romance and eroticisation of male power as offering a way for women to overcome their anxiety about masculinity, "explaining its negative consequences for them, without fundamentally challenging it" (2004, p.217). Rape, in the narratives of romance, is not read as violence, but as the result of overwhelming desire.

Jackson responds to the discourse of romance with the theory and practice of non-monogamy, pursued as a challenge to oppressive heterosexual relationships (2004 p.151). She observes that while feminist critique of monogamy in the 1970s was closely linked with its critique of marriage, more recently the critique of monogamy is barely audible (2004, p.151). She understands this 'muting' as an unwillingness to read emotions as socially constructed:

[A]lthough the idea that sexuality is socially constructed has gained wide academic currency, our emotions are frequently treated as if insulated from the social, leading to a failure to question the 'naturalness' of jealousy and sexual exclusivity. In this respect feminist thinking seems to have gone backwards since the 1970s, with less expectation that we should critically examine the social conditions through which our emotions were forged. (Jackson, 2004, p.154)

For Jackson, the practice of monogamy results in individual circumscription by negative emotions: jealousy, possessiveness and insecurity. She claims that monogamy is fuelled by a fear of loss, and mistakenly linked with a security that is based on forbidding certain behavior, and then trusting one's partner to comply (2004, p. 156). She further argues that the threat of these negative emotions are more likely to be experienced in a monogamous relationship with its threat that at any moment one could be replaced by a new model (2004, p.153).

To summarise: the western myth of romantic love links romance with the unreachable and ineffable *divine*, and links *jealousy* and *emotional storming* with proof of love's veracity; our hormone production and brain plasticity lower our guard; and our gender-specific experiences of romance encourage women to eroticise male power and re-read violence as desire. Jackson's move to radical non-monogamy, refusing to commit to one partner, is a strategy of resisting jealousy, possessiveness, insecurity and violence. It is a strategy that aims to resist tying one's psychic, emotional, intellectual and creative energy into the private sphere alone. I am not convinced, however, that monogamy *inevitably* leads to circumscription by negative emotions, nor that these negative emotions are more likely to be experienced in monogamous, than in poly-amorous, relationships. Where I do agree with Jackson is that fear of loss can lead to an asphyxiating grip on one's lover, family, and circumstance: a holding on that squeezes the breath out of desire and the life out of love. Such braced and breathless fear can keep one's intellectual and creative energy from flourishing in the public domain.

While Jackson's position and practice of non-monogamy can be read as one path of resistance, it is not the only path, nor is it mine. My personal reframing of love is made in recognition of, and resistance to, the dominant cultural narratives of romance described above. It is informed by my recent research on love, but even more so by life experience. It is underpinned by the body-based praxes that involve my carnal, corporeal, breathing and sounding body in the process of meaning-making. For me, love is a principle of growth, an understanding of the entire universe as something moving towards consciousness or recognition of itself. I am most in love when I recognise myself in this flow. For me, being 'in love' is no longer dependent upon another person, upon a narrative that projects the ineffable onto another human being, nor on one that excuses violence as unbridled desire. Being 'in love' depends on a practice of being with things as they are, even when things seem to be falling apart.

7.3 A Breakthrough in Practice

iv.

The deal is this: give yourself to the devil or risk losing everything and everyone. Give yourself to the devil or lose the man you love, the home you live in, the life you thought you were working towards. Give yourself to the devil or lose the high dream.

What happens is this: you start crying, and you say, well, I was planning to quit that job anyway. Eventually. May as well be now.

What happens is this: you tell your friends in the city it's too far to drive and when they invite you stay the night you say you are too busy.

What happens is this: you defend your choice of bra and knickers vehemently. You defend the way you dress vehemently. And then you stop buying lingerie and start wearing crew neck t-shirts. It's not worth the argey-bargey.

What happens is this: You tell yourself he loves you but he's been wounded in the past and he just needs time to see you're not like all the other two-faced slut bitch women he has been with.

What happens is this: he finally asks you to give up your very soul. You bargain and plead. He is immovable. It's me or your soul, he says, Choose..
[...]

...] And so you choose your own soul. You choose life. He has asked for the one thing you cannot give without losing yourself completely.
And so you lose the man you love. You lose the house you live in, and you lose the life you thought you were working towards.

You are left with yourself.

*And now begins the loveliest romance of all. (Albinger, *Handless Maiden Tales iv*, 2009)*

In 2010, at a work-in-progress showing during the Magdalena Perth Workshop Festival, a breakthrough in performance revealed a gap between intellectual understanding and lived experience. When faced with a question to which the answer seems obvious: *"It's me or your soul, he says, Choose* – I hesitated, enacting a consideration that there may be another answer to the question other than *'choosing my own soul'*. I understand the word *'soul'* in this context as describing an awareness core or central to my sense of *being*. To name something as core is to risk essentialising it, yet in the personal situation that gave rise to this theatrical expression, what was under threat was my very sense of being. The deepest part of me had resisted this. The part of me that chooses life over death felt that to stay would be a kind of suicide. Certainly in order to stay I would be required to choose a limited expression of *self*.

The breakthrough in *performance* occurred when, as my lungs filled with breath after posing the question, my mind filled with the comprehension that I had, in fact, hesitated, in order to consider an answer other than *"my own soul"*. And in order to consider that there might be another answer, I had had to tell myself a lie: *I don't really know what I want*. This is the lie a person tells herself

when she believes her desire is inadmissible, unacceptable, dangerous, and disruptive. In the imperceptible shift from inhalation to exhalation, in the pause between asking and answering the question, intellectual understanding and lived experience came into alignment and I heard the gasp of recognition from someone in the front row. Just as a fear of falling on my face had kept me off-balance in my attempts to execute a handstand, the inability to articulate and privilege desire keeps one off-balance in relationship both to the Other and to one's Self. But in order to articulate and privilege desire, one first needs to be able to identify it. One needs to be able to receive it.

The breakthrough in practice described above suggests that in reframing notions of love it is not enough to intellectually grasp the Orchard as a space of inner nourishment: one must actually physiologically and physically inhabit it. One must *breathe* it. Here the diva comes to the fore, claiming internal space with the breath and asking, "Is it pleasurable? Would I like to do it again?" Breath opens the body, shakes things up, and in the space between an exhalation and returning inhalation, inspiration occurs, possibility opens. Allowing herself to be ruptured by breath, the diva creates the space in which desire can be received (heard). This is, in fact, the manoeuvre that finally liberates this (handless) performance-maker, from clinging to the biographical narrative of being in an unhealthy relationship (with another/with herself). From this point the work transforms to become the poetic articulation of disintegration and profound self-reception it is today.

Metaphorically swallowing the diva and the handless maiden, they become inner archetypal forces/selves and enter a critical dialogue. Moving between spaces of lived experience, intellectual engagement, and the practice itself, this dialogue within me deepens and reiterates that resisting the myth of romance, and reframing notions of love and romance, are effective feminist strategies for overcoming alienation and loss of agency. In the next chapter, as I (re)consider notions of female philosophical subjectivity and the female imaginary, I articulate a key thesis point in my definition of *diva voce*: that the coincidence of material and metaphoric voices reveals the diva as *interdependent* and in *dialogue*.

Chapter Eight

The Diva in Dialogue

The negotiation of agency and voice

Here, in the orchard, deeper dialogue is being held as the woman listens towards her selves and others, hearing and understanding her self through the challenge of articulation. She is thinking aloud, thinking through her bodies, thinking through time and space. She will ask "Are you lonely?" and "Have you cried, my dear?" She cannot un-know what she knows and what she knows has cost her some pride and three assumptions. (Albinger, 2010 Unpublished journal, p.45)

One personal assumption unearthed during the course of this project is that to receive one's *diva voce* is a selfish act. That this is also a *cultural* assumption is exposed in the cautionary warnings that to be a diva (self-serving implied) one risks isolation, solitude, and a lonely death. This warning is effective because humans, particularly women, are taught to fear solitude. But in facing off that fear, the myth that the diva dies alone is revealed as simply this: a myth. To receive one's voice is to find oneself in dialogue. Through the course of this research, and its articulation in works-in-progress, papers and performances, I am more than ever connected to my community of minds and of practice. For nothing useful has occurred in this project except through discussion: with my (embodied) self, my critical peers, the pool of theorists with whom I find myself swimming, my supervisors, and the audiences for my performances. In this final chapter I mix other voices with my own, tracing movements from alienation towards agency through the strategies of shedding myth, engaging in critical dialogue, and the practice of returning to the corporeal, the breathing body in performance.

8.1 Telling Tales

The myth that to be a diva condemns one to solitude and isolation finds both resonance and counterpoint in the Handless Maiden myth and is responded to in various ways by the interviewees, Cameron, Heywood and Tesoriero. Here the protagonist's wound leads her to journey alone into

unknown regions. As shown at Chapter Seven, in 2008 I wrote several Handless Maiden stories of my own, a strategy towards unearthing something poetic in the sands of my interior desert. Thinking through myth and fairytale is a feminist strategy in philosophy, psychology, literature and performance (Pinkola Estés, 1992; Aisenberg, 1994; Carson, 1995; Warner, 1996; Golden, 2000; Cameron, 1998, 2008, 2009, Robson, 2005): a manoeuvre towards “finding a liberated voice for more fully realized heroines” (Robson, 2005, p 111). In each short personal retelling I conflate the traditional story with personal imagery and experience. Several of the personal tales focus on the shift from wild wood to orchard, and the orchard is often filled with women, as we saw in *Handless Maiden (ii)*: *There, between the Indian Ocean and the desert, she found an orchard. The orchard was filled with women’s laughter. Intrigued she found them sitting in the dappled light, eating pears, drinking wine and speaking philosophy.*

Re-reading this personal version of the myth today, I am fascinated that I chose to populate the orchard, as Cameron might say, with “many-me’s”, that the first sound I describe is laughter, and that laughter and philosophical discourse are paired with nourishment. Cixous would say that I had “heard before comprehension” (Cixous, 1991, p.62). Writing today I say that what I heard was the call of my own *diva voce*. Each of us experiences desires, passions, and yearnings towards particular ways of being, expressed through career paths, relationships, lifestyle choices, and recreational activities. One’s *diva voce* may be submerged if these yearnings are at odds with our acculturation or with what our culture tells us is appropriate to our genre. The attempt to reflect these complexities and ambiguities of personal experience leads to dialogue with oneself at the very least, and beyond that, with one’s community, and with one’s world. In my multiple retelling of the tale I am “I-witnessing” my own reality constructions (Spry, 2001, p.727), dialoguing with myself as I attempt to reframe an experience of participating in my own oppression. And it is important to remember that a bodily experience of mute lassitude in the studio creates the conditions for the handless maiden to be folded into personal story. Autobiography is folded into both medieval myth and Anne Carson’s evocation of the goddess Echo, which in turn unfold into studio improvisations that result in imagistic ‘ah-hah!’ moments: the fist in the mouth; the flapping, flightless woman; the red-taped threshold. As Spry says, “The text and the body that generates it cannot be separated” (2001, p.726). If divas and maidens represent archetypal energies or qualities within a feminist performer’s palette, the handless maiden’s embodied experiences (wounds) are transformed by the diva’s capacity to breathe, receive, and respond in the worded philosophical space.

8.2 In Dialogue...

...With the Pool of Theorists

No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation is a multi-layered narrative because there are many ways to attribute meaning to experience. Our lives do not actually adhere to neat linear structures. And our ears are not deaf to implicit and explicit ideas, stereotypes and assumptions. This is reflected in the text of the performance, which is peppered with references, paraphrases, and direct quotes taken from texts of women theorists and conversations with women practitioners that have inspired and challenged me. In some cases, I have taken the words of others and repeated them in order to amplify my capacity to hear myself, and also as a way of telling what is left in me of the work of these (m)others. In performance, when I make explicit the act of choosing again and again and again and again and again, I recall Simone de Beauvoir: “I’m sick of it. Sick of it sick of it sick of it sick of it...” (Beauvoir, 1969, p.83). At the same time I am responding to Maria Tumarkin’s call to celebrate the kind of courage required in everyday life (2007, p.73). In the spaces between word, image and sound I am in conversation with Cixous and Clarice Lispector, as I “keep the space of waiting open” (Cixous, 1991, p.62). The very act of making the performance engages with Cixous’s observation that “It is more difficult to tell than to invent. Inventing is easy” (cited in Cameron, 2003, p.71). Anne Carson is present as I listen for echoes, and in the title itself: *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* (Carson, 1992, pp128 -132). There is the conversation with Irigaray as I keep present the question “who are you” (Irigaray, 2002, p.139) with respect to the subject and the Other, my audience and myself. Everytime I follow the performance instruction to return to the breath and to the self-caress, I echo her question of what it might mean to love ourselves with respect and in reciprocity in the here and now. And in a thirty-year old essay by Adrienne Rich I experience the shock of self-recognition and find a subjective answer to the question of how (some) women participate in their own oppression.

Rich is a theorist with whom I have engaged only marginally, but her 1977 essay on “Honour” (reprinted in Rich, 1980), has immediate personal impact. In it she proposes “[w]omen have been forced to lie, for survival” (Rich, 1980, p.189). My entanglement with an intimate other who accuses me of lying leaves me strung out with the exhaustion that accompanies having one’s every movement, word and breath scrutinized and called into question. When I read Rich’s words I am at my lowest ebb, defenses down. And it hits me: as sorrowfully wrong my partner is about many things, he is right about one: I have told a lie. Asking of the absent Other: *Who are you? How do you/can you think the way you do?* I discover the possibility of occupying a position I have

previously strenuously fought to deny. This is when real insight happens. My 2008 journal reflects the moment of self-identification I experience:

I am one such liar. Forgetting that I am lying I lie to myself. The lie such an ingrained self-defensive reflex. *The biggest lie that I tell myself is that I don't really know what I want. Settling for what I get, yet not really settling, something deep inside striving to live a larger life.* My body leads me five thousand kilometers to a strip of land between the desert and the sea, where I can do nothing except confront my lies in the words of the women who have advocated for thirty years that I take control of my body and my life...

I spent so many years fearing I would end up alone. Perhaps I knew this was the inevitable destination. Or that a period of conscious solitude is necessary in order to find my true mettle...

"Truthfulness anywhere means a heightened complexity. But it is a movement into evolution. Women are only beginning to uncover our own truths; many of us would be grateful for some rest in that struggle, would be glad just to lie down with the sherds we have painfully unearthed, and be satisfied with those. Often I feel this like an exhaustion in my body." (Rich, 1980, p.193) (Albinger, 2008 Unpublished journal, p.14, italics added)

I am paraphrasing Rich in the italicized parts of this journal entry. The impulse to take her words as my own reveals the depth of my identification. I am receiving the philosopher and myself in the same breath. I receive myself *through* her words. These words are very important to me. I want to understand, to remember. I take them with me into performance:

Have you have been forced to lie, my dear? For survival?

Forgetting is the danger.

Do you tell yourself you don't really know what you want?

Settling for what you get, yet, not really settling? Something inside striving to live a larger life.

Have you have spent

many years fearing solitude, my dear?

Do you feel this as an exhaustion in your body?

(Albinger, No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation, Extract of 'Song #8 – Crossing the Continent')

I have received Rich's words like a slap in the face; the kind of slap that restores one to oneself: *I am one such liar*. A 'slap' also emerges in improvisation. Taking, "My body leads me five thousand kilometers" I place myself in one location and begin to move towards another. I follow an impulse to turn back. I read into this impulse my own inability to make a clean break. I explore pace and dynamic and turning back violently I accidentally slap my own face. I am both victim of someone else's violence and enacting violence on myself. The recognition of self-violence and the capacity to perceive myself as a liar facilitate an important and liberating shift in self-perception, one that literally releases me from participating in my own abuse. No longer on the defensive (*Why won't X believe me? Trust me? Respect me?*) I become free to ask much more interesting questions: Why do I lie? Who do the lies serve? How do they serve *me*? What would I do if I trusted and respected myself? My engagement with these questions has sparked "a quiet, molecular, viral, and therefore unstoppable revolution" (Braidotti, 1994, p 56). It is a revolution that challenges my desire to please others at the expense, as Irigaray might say, of unfolding towards my fullest expression of self.

Pray with me

Not on your knees, my dear

Unless your desire is kneeling

(Albinger, No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation, Extract of 'Song #7 - Pray with Me Song', Chapter one, p.19)

Let me be clear: *Nothing* about the discovery of the self-lie excuses a partner's abusive behaviour. What is useful here is the apprehension that gaps occur between implicit processes at work within an individual, and explicit ideas and positions. One's considered intellectual, political and personal positions can be undermined by one's unconscious fears, desires and lived corporeal experience. The same is true at the level of society: there is a gap between implicit processes at work that encourage women to self-limit, and the commonly held idea that feminism has 'done its job'. This cultural 'blind-spot' helps create the conditions for individual women to participate in their own silencing.

Despite this, my personal experience encourages me to come down cautiously on the side of optimism. Crossing personal thresholds of fear and receiving my own *diva voce* has allowed me, like Spry, "to integrate my personal, professional and political voice" (Spry, 2001, p.721). This has released energy previously invested predominantly in the private sphere of intimate relationship. This release has fed into numerous academic and creative outputs: showings, performances,

articles, conference papers, book chapters, reviews, and grant applications. Alongside the research project I have co-created, co-produced (and perform in) a national collaborative new music theatre lullaby, *Falling Like A Bird* (2009 – present). I have participated in feminist and academic reading group *Magdalena Talks Back* (2008 – present), and co-produced the five-day Magdalena Perth Workshop Festival (2010). I have also become an Australian citizen and voted, for the first time in my life, in a federal election that delivered Australia its first female Prime Minister. My point in listing these activities and achievements is to illustrate that the second-wave feminist slogan, *the personal is the political*, still has currency. In responding to the question “what can a handless maiden do?” I argue that diva-inspired twin practices of self-reception (perceiving breath), and of privileging desire in the service of unfolding towards one’s fullest potential, culminate in the release of intellectual and creative energy into the public domain.

...With My Critical Peers

Critical peers have been invited to engage with *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* at every stage of its development from conception into performance. This has been crucial to developing my capacity for self-direction, to unearth the container for my content, for articulating the dramaturgy of the work. This process requires resilience for, like Cameron, “I hate feedback. One usually tries to avoid it (acoustically). It hurts.” (Cameron, 2003, p.71). This has led Cameron to find another way: “If I tell you what is left in me of your work, it will also be my work of description, a telling. It will be an artistic practice for me. An act of ‘fidelity’ (Cixous)” (Cameron, 2003, p.71). In her program note for the 2010 Blue Room season (Chapter One) she makes such an act of fidelity. It is both a description of our dialogue about practice in relation to my work, and an articulation of what that dialogue does. In it, the pears of self-nourishment become the *fruits of discourse* of the articulate practitioner:

... these fruits of words made of flesh are full of flesh for they are my being articulated. In listening that listens I bend toward an understanding of this—being articulated. To be in the word and in the world without being pronounced by it and to discover language in this context is also to recover it.

... But let us not forget that there are other sensibles, for if we do not understand our hearing, we may nose it and smell the smell of it. And let us not imagine that we need to understand that we are understanding. It is the procession of thinking that—in the procession of thinking—the fruits become what becomes and what becomes, becomes ripe in every sense that is not sensible but full of sense and becoming apparent it falls as insight. (Cameron, 2010)

When I read this note I hear the echoes of multiple conversations occurring in studios, on my back deck, at her kitchen table. I remember the first time she said *being articulated* – as I understand it, a play on being as both verb and noun: one that expands the practice of *thought becoming shape*. Although her language is dense, Cameron is precisely articulating an experience of *embodied knowledge*: The ‘fruits’ that ‘fall as insight’ are not always rational (sensible) and yet they are “full of sense”. I cannot talk about *being* or *self-reception* without acknowledging Cameron’s profound contribution to my work. And because I cannot *unhear our hearing*, the first line of her program note becomes the last line of text in the performance:

Woman: *Do you crave poetry my dear? **When all is said and done will you remain forever wanting what is readily yours?***

With the return of the breath she opens the drawer. (*Albinger, No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation, Song #10 – ‘Shooting star song’, Chapter one, p.25*)

If Rich has helped me to perceive a self-lie, the dialogue with Cameron has facilitated the poetic articulation of a profound self-reception. And if Cameron has helped me to receive my poetic voice, Robson has supported that voice to take flight in song: figuratively and physically.

I have been in dialogue about practice with Robson since the end of 1999 when she joined the recently formed *sacredCOW* theatre ensemble. We trained together eight to twelve hours per week from late 1999 until 2007, and over this time developed shared performance and theoretical languages, and a deep familiarity and respect for each other’s minds and talents. It is Robson who encouraged me to consider post-graduate study, her research into the deadliness of female vocality suggested my own research topic, and she has accompanied me on my postgraduate journey as principal supervisor. She has challenged and supported me vigorously as academic and professional colleague every step of the way. At the same time she has exercised enormous restraint, taking a very light approach and engaging more muscularly with the creative process only on invitation. Despite this restraint, the resonance of our intellectual and creative engagement echoes throughout this project, from my earliest task of writing to a pear, to performer instructions in the current version of the text. It is here, in the articulation of breath choreography in the text, that Robson’s voice is most explicitly heard.

8.3 Return to the Corporeal: The Breathing Body in Performance

When Robson and I engaged with Sharp's perceptible breath practice in 2010, she observed that the time and space to attend to the breath in this way seemed luxurious and radically political. She also said: "The experience of breath keeps returning me to myself." (Robson in Albinger, Appendix 3.2.2, p 57). The self that is returned to is changeable as the weather, but in the return, in the perception of the breath, the woman receives herself. I am reminded of Irigaray's invocation in *I Love To You* of both our cultural origins (Aphrodite as the first figure of love incarnated in human body) and the far eastern traditions, particularly the practice of yoga, which use breath and sound to cultivate a recharge, rather than a discharge, of energy (Irigaray, 1996, p.138). She invokes these origins in a quest to find a way to say *I love you* without it meaning *I wonder if I am loved*, without needing the unknowable Other to return one to oneself. Sharp's perceptible breath practice offers a concrete western framework for facilitating this return to self. Breath perception invites the practitioner to attend to what actually is; and in attending to what is, in attending to the perceptible breath, one receives all the information necessary for pleasure, for performance, for falling in love without loss of form or integrity. One receives oneself.

No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation takes place simultaneously in three spaces: The Dark Garden, The Crossing and The Orchard. These are interior spaces and have implications for the breath of the performer. In The Dark Garden the breath is variously shallow, disrupted, and held, as the body is braced, invaded and placed under enormous strain. In the Crossing, the breath is released and pressed into the service of the voice in flight. In the Orchard the breath supports laughter, and then finds a quiet ease. In performance the choreographies of breath for the Dark Garden have functioned from very early on. However, those for The Crossing and The Orchard have presented interesting challenges, and in the case of The Orchard, are not yet completely resolved. In the following I take a brief example from each space to show how a return to the breath moves the work, and the thinking, forward.

The Dark Garden

Instruction to performer: Voice is freed by connection to breath – Do not override the breath. Use the 'hah' to find the pitch. If it helps, lean over and place hands on knees. Pant it out. The task is to remain conscious of the need for air.

Woman : *Are you lonely, my dear?*
 Have you cried, my dear?

Do you miss hope, my dear?

(Albinger, No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation, Instructions to performer and 'Song #2 – Flapping Song')

This 'Flapping Song' occurs in the text just after the Woman has been flapping wildly contained in the projected image of the antlers arch. The challenge has been to find 'my' voice and 'sing' these three simple lines. More specifically, the challenge has been to articulate an instruction precise enough to release my voice and rediscover the functionality of the moment after the passage of time. A 2011 session with Robson helped identify what was most useful: *The task is to remain conscious of the need for air.* The body placed under physical strain with the long sequence of flapping results in ragged breathing. By trying to 'control the breath' the voice becomes 'caged'. Letting go of the need to control the breath allows the ragged breathing to disrupt the social and the controlled voice. Ideas of a beautiful and cultured voice are abandoned. The messy, material voice emerges. The possibility of receiving one's *diva voce* begins here.

The Crossing

[B]egin with a light and easy lullaby. Change the melody from Persiani so it is an easeful and clear tone. Avoid gravitas with text. Begin with a sense of pace and ease to keep the sense. Then slower; as a prayer. Sing the final 'Lasciatemi aprire' as long as you like as long as you are enjoying it, taking the breath needed. There is no forced effort at this point.

(Albinger, No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation, Instructions to performer at 'Song #8 – Crossing the Continent', Chapter one, p 23)

The cry "*lascietemi aprire*" (let me open) functions in the performance as *The Crossing*. The cry is an expression of breaking apart and after the cry everything is different. For a long time this cry did not fulfill its dramaturgical function because I could not find enough breath to support and sustain it. In re-rehearsing the work in 2011, however, Robson made a suggestion that transformed it completely: *There is no forced effort at this point.*

Following this instruction exactly, *Lascietemi aprire* (let me open) becomes a breath-filled song. After the fact I theorise that there is no forced effort because the fear of being alone has been faced. That particular threshold has been crossed and in the crossing the *diva voce* has been received. The breath is crucial to this passage. The body braced in pain and fear does not breathe deeply.

In the return to the breath, to the breathing body, the diva breaks open, blossoms, becomes an icon of liberation – liberation from the stories and associations that undermine female power and authority. With its seeds in despair, the anguished cry becomes the song of flight, and in that moment the diva, like the goddess Athene, is woman unto herself. And, as I have written, “now begins the loveliest romance of all”.

The Orchard

She walks to the table. She lifts the lid from the box. She removes a sheet of tissue paper that she lets fall. She begins an excavation of breath. She removes another sheet of tissue paper. She takes two large (fake) pears from the box and explores laughter breath. Round cheeks, round mouth. ‘Hey hey hey’, ‘ho, ho’ ‘haha’ ‘hehehehe’. She turns upstage. With her back to the audience she slips the pears onto her hands. She turns to face front, revealing pear hands. She concludes her breath excavation with her arms in the air.

(Albinger, No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation, Wordless Song #8 – Silver Hands (Ridiculous Pears), Chapter one, p 24)

In *The Orchard* the woman receives the gifts of the outlandishly large pears and proceeds to place them over her own hands as she explores laughter breath. Performatively speaking, it is a moment that sometimes functions and sometimes does not. This tells me it is a moment still to be understood by me. I have called this wordless song *Silver Hands*, a reference to the maiden’s marriage to the King, and the subsequent gift of silver hands that are beautiful but useless. New York director and professional colleague Vanessa Gilbert has suggested I try unsuccessfully to eat the large pears, as though unable to reach them even though they are on the ends of my arms. It is an interesting provocation, foreshadowing as it does the last line of text: *When all is said and done will you remain forever wanting what is readily yours?* I suspect it is one part of the solution. The other part(s) will be discovered when I am once more on the floor in rehearsal, inhabiting my breathing body.

Embodied knowledge

My expectation, after Robson (2003), Cameron (2008, 2009), Clément (1999), and Leonardi and Pope (1996), was that I would find the diva useful as an icon in claiming space and giving material and metaphoric voice to aspects of social life usually devalued by dominant discourse or inaccessible to everyday observation. This has been borne out by my identification of ‘falling apart’ as a condition or process that is feared at the personal and cultural level. However the theme of

disintegration did not come from theorizing about the diva but from my experiences in the studio. Similarly, the *practice* has returned me again and again to the breath. A moment of *hearing* myself (differently) on the studio floor, through intense focus on a 'breath task', resulted in a theorization of *diva voce* and profound self-reception. My encounter with Helen Sharp's *perceptible breath* practice is folded back into the practice via the articulation of breath choreographies in the written text of the performance. Taking the time required to perceive one's breath is to privilege pleasure and to cultivate an awareness of one's fleshy, corporeal being. Following the breath moves one's perception into and out of the body. The return from these dual trajectories further locates diva usefulness in *language*. For me, the diva icon becomes useful as an icon of the articulate practitioner, committed to interrogating and articulating embodied knowledge through various linear, poetic and performative languages as she "attempt[s] to reflexively map multiple discourses that occur in a given social space" (Denzin, 1997, p.xvii). This is my knowledge in action, in movement and in community: this is my form of feminist theatre praxis.

8.4 In Dialogue...

...With my Audience

Every cell in my body has the potential to perceive Now Is Here. Now is personal. Now is past, present, and future acknowledged together as it unfolds each moment. Here is locating my changing presence in the physical space where I am dancing, including my relationship to audience. (Hay, 2000, p.13)

Like Spry, I find that audience engagement and response to my work is variously personal, diverse and substantial (Spry, 2001, p.718). I have described at Chapter Six the way an audience can provide live dramaturgical feedback, amplifying my capacity to hear myself hear, see myself see, feel myself feel. Audiences also dialogue with me after the performance, through face-to-face encounters, social media, and in the form of reviews.¹ At Chapter One I included Midalia's review for the way it describes what is left of my work in her, and also because this 'act of fidelity' helps me to receive my own work. To take an example, her observation that *ambivalence* informs

¹ The reader can find a small selection of text messages, notes and emails received from audience members after various showings in the Appendix.

the performance encourages me to *theorise* ambivalence more consciously at Chapter Six. Her observation that “the performance is unsettling precisely because it refuses the audience the comfort of distinct categories” reflects and reinforces my attention to the spaces *between* things. And, reading into the work “the gift of self-reflection, the opportunity to project our own inner dramas onto the canvas of her body and, later, to consider their possible meanings”, she affirms that the experience of audiencing *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation* can offer the spectator her own subjective experience of disintegration and self-reception.

It is true, as I said at the end of Chapter One, I do not offer a happy ending and Midalia is right to infer I am not so complacent. In my multiple retellings of the tale I project into the future a woman able to relax within her multifaceted and poly-vocal self; a woman happy as she watches her hands re-grow. Yet this woman is just as likely, at some future point, to find herself once again wandering in the wild wood, wounded and alone. There is a certain human inevitability to stumbling and losing one’s way. Self-reception does not protect one from loss or outrageous fortune. Nevertheless, it can afford one a place to *be*. And like Cameron, I am compelled to stay fidelius to this place of *being*, of residence in oneself, and attempt to describe it *exactly*. Doing this I establish, as Cixous suggests, a contract with time. Adding my subjective voice to the rich western tradition of philosophical discourse, I offer a specifically female and feminist perspective on the experience of being human and falling apart. Receiving my own *diva voce*, I unfold towards my personal divine, the richest possible expression of my multifaceted, contradictory, poetic and polyphonous self.

Handless Maiden Tales (vi)

Once upon a time a bad deal was struck and a woman gave up her hands to keep the status quo. She was afraid of losing Every Thing She Knew; she was not able to look life in the face. But it hurt to lose her hands and she wept. And then she left her life as she had known it and found a quiet place in the country. There she met a man who seemed like a King. He loved her Spirit. And he gave her Silver Hands. She was exhausted and accepted his gift thinking *Maybe Life Doesn't Have To Be So Hard*. But the man who seemed like a King wanted her to live in a cage, was caged himself. There they were, side by side, in the beautiful bush, each in their own cage. Each with the key around their neck. One day she received news that her grandmother had died and she began to weep. Her grandmother's spirit passed through the bush, slipped into her cage, whispered in her ear: *Look At This*. And with eyes washed clear by tears she saw the cage, saw the key around her neck, spied a red thread leading out of the forest. Her Man Who Would Be King watched with pleading eyes. She pointed to the key around his own neck but he would not understand. His face grew dark and he said "If you leave do not come back. There will be nothing to come home to."

Once again she faced *Losing Every Thing She Knew* and her heart quailed to look life in the face. She feared death, loss, separation. But inside, deep inside, deeper than the part of her that was kicking and screaming in protest, deep in the bottom of her internal abyss a wise old whistling woman was skipping stones on a pond and holding the red thread. The uncaged woman reached out with her agile toes and plucked the red thread from the old woman's light grasp, brought the thread to her mouth, took it between her teeth, and with the grip of an angry jaw she hauled herself to a faraway country on the far side of the continent. There she found an orchard full of laughing women eating pears and blue cheese and drinking wine. She sat down to rest and was fortified by the food, the laughter and the conversation, which revolved around women and philosophy. Her hands began to grow back and after seven months she had grown woman hands and had fallen in love with life...

[D]aring heartbreak, she looked life in the face without fear of dying. She discovered not only her hands had grown, but roots had taken hold in the fertile soil of her interior garden and everywhere she was budding and blooming. A Rose.

(Albinger, *Handless Maiden Tales vi*, 2009)

Conclusion

New ways of being/is-ness

Diva (n): [from the Italian for *divine*] 1. Unbounded feminist performer and (female) philosophical subject.

Throughout this exegesis I have used the first-person possessive to refer to 'my' study, 'my' practice, 'my' process. Here, in my concluding comments, I make a shift to the impersonal as I consider the implications of the study for the discipline of Creative Research.

This practice-led contemporary performance study has investigated and invigorated the diva icon's usefulness to feminist theatre praxis. Resisting the *personality* or the *narrative* of the diva icon has led to a feminist re-conceptualization of diva as *concept, strategy, movement, and position*. Understood in this way her capacity for:

- Agency/subjectivity (diva as concept for countering a lack of residence in one's own subjectivity)
- Poetry (diva as strategy for unearthing the poetic)
- Divinity (diva as movement or energy between semiotic and symbolic)
- Mastery (diva as position – the position of the expert and articulate practitioner)

Enable her to:

- Resist (romantic love, narrative, the clown)
- Embrace (ambivalence and disintegration, ambiguity, lyricism, desire, sensible intelligence)
- Receive (her 'self', her breath, her voice, her space)

Offering new possibilities of:

- Being/Is-ness (transcendence)

These key findings of the study were arrived at through the interweaving of contextual review, devising processes, practitioner interviews, solo performance, and critical, collegial dialogue.

The **contextual review** revealed that the diva icon is of practical use to feminist theatre praxis in her *mastery of instrument*, and *permission to embody range*. In playing a warning or cautionary role that to be a diva one risks isolation and loneliness, she invites the feminist practitioner to question why a woman alone is considered either dangerous or an object of pity. The 'diva alone' is consistently rendered in popular media as the result of her size (too big), her mouth (too opinionated), and her mastery (too brilliant). This cultural perception of 'too-muchness' is linked with privileging one's desire to move towards any ideal other than mother, partner or a (fatally constructed) ideal of feminine beauty. This cultural perception continues to undermine ambition and has the potential to discourage some women from unfolding towards their fullest expression of self. The literature review also introduced the deadliness of romantic love through countless stories of diva characters who have loved *too much* or *too transgressively* and payed the ultimate price with their lives.

The **devising process of making a performance** opened onto themes of silence and muteness, the space of the hyphen, breath and desire, and the enduring myth of romantic love in western culture. This process revealed deep tensions between assumptions of the diva's usefulness in claiming space, 'having a voice', and telling a story; and a practice that revealed the artist mute, sad, and breathless. The diva as an icon of fidelity to one's practice and to one's point of view, offered insights regarding the usefulness of *both* resisting humour *and* bringing laughter and breath into performance. The importance of breath to privileging desire, and to the dramaturgy of performance, was a key insight arising from every aspect of praxis. The process of making the performance introduced the handless maiden as a counterpoint to the diva icon, and linked them as two aspects within a single femininity, and/or as internal forces/energies for the feminist performer's palette. Engagement with the handless maiden also led me to examine the relationship between agency and alienation. Asking *what can a handless maiden do* I have theorised the usefulness of resisting the western myth of romantic love and redefining ways of loving and being in the world.

The **practitioner interviews** inspired a re-conceptualisation of diva as a *strategy* for unearthing the poetic, a *concept* of countering a lack of residence in one's own subjectivity, and a *movement or energy* between one's semiotic interior core and a symbolic and transcendent horizon. These novel apprehensions of the diva icon provoked a discussion of female philosophical subjectivity and an articulation of the *diva voce*. This conception of the coinciding material and metaphoric voice in feminist theatre practice is a key finding of the study and has implications for the personal (unfolding towards one's fullest expression), the professional (diva dramaturgy) and the political

(collaborative knowledge-making) voice. The interviews influenced the conceptualization of the interdependent diva: the diva in dialogue; and *breath tasks* and *pulling meaning through sound* were understood as practical approaches to diva dramaturgy.

The solo performance *No Door On Her Mouth – a lyrical amputation*, as an expression of ambivalence, of letting go/disintegration, hesitation, AND of reception, desire, and subjectivity, prompted questions regarding the female philosophical subject in relation to the divine, where the divine is understood as an ideal towards which a woman can unfold. Working with messy corporeality, the feminist practitioner is aided by the diva icon to move towards strength through enduring ambiguity and making choices. The performance breathes life into the worded philosophical space and feminist performer becomes female philosophical subject in practice.

The **critical dialogue** that informed every stage of this study reveals the complex nature of collaborative exchange in performance and knowledge making. 'Dialogue' emerges as one key methodological strategy for a contemporary feminist performance-maker, and it is one that requires expert practice to be able to notice its occurrence, allow its resonance, and examine its 'fruits'. It is a methodological strategy that could remain invisible, or veiled, to the expert spectator, and so, in this study, I have committed to making it as explicit as possible. It is my *act of fidelity* to those with whom I have engaged, marking what is left in me of our encounters. It is a triple *act of courage*: first in its refusal to say of an idea: *this is mine alone*; second, by saying: *yet this is my unique perspective on it*; and thirdly, by asking of another: *who are you and how can you think that way?* The task of answering this third question can be the greatest of challenges, and also the place where real insight occurs. Finally, the dialogue constitutes an *act of love*, or of reciprocity. As in Irigaray's reimagining of the pleasurable encounter between reader and text, throughout this study I have asked my community of minds and of practice: *Who are you?* and they have responded generously: *And who are you? Can we meet? Talk? Love? Create something together?* What has been created is a generous expansion of what it means to be a diva: one that, when embraced by individuals, has the potential to create a dynamic release of energy into the public domain.

Coda: Being A Diva (Being A Somebody)

I recently attended Joanna Murray Smith's *Songs for Nobodies* at the Brisbane Powerhouse (November, 2011). It is a work that relies entirely on popular conceptions of the diva icon: diva as talented, larger than life, a shining star, a fallen one, and ultimately a tragic and lonely figure. The show is a series of narratives told by five 'nobodies' who each encounter a star and live to tell

the tale. The 'nobodies' are women in positions of service (a cloakroom attendant, an usherette), traditionally 'feminised' careers (a librarian, a nanny) and one career-girl (a journalist trying to break out of the fashion pages). The 'somebodies' are all recognised western divas: Judy Garland, Patsy Cline, Edith Piaf, Billie Holliday and Maria Callas. Entertaining, and a tour de force by Bernadette Robinson (who plays all ten women, and competently mimicks each diva), the work is asking questions about what it means to be happy. One of the 'nobodies' garners a big chuckle from the audience when she spouts a piece of home-spun wisdom: *as we grow older we realise that "living the dream" is actually "adjusting the dream"*. Apparently achieving 'happiness' requires us to mute our desires. And we are reassured that for those who don't, the *somebodies* of the performance, happiness is not guaranteed; is, in fact, even more elusive. So even though the diva will "clip the wings" of any ordinary woman's fantasies *the moment she opens her mouth*, it is better to 'adjust the dream' than to be a diva and attempt to unfold towards one's highest ideal.

Songs for Nobodies is precisely the kind of cabaret performance I initially imagined making when embarking on this study. In a sense I am relieved that someone else has made it, and I appreciate Murray Smith's artistry in drawing her characters and posing her questions regarding happiness. Nevertheless, the entire show is premised on dominant cultural perceptions of the diva, and much of its humour and pathos relies on western fascination with, and ultimate rejection of, a female capacity for the divine. Countering common cultural perception, my study has re-read and revitalised the diva icon's usefulness to the development and integration of the personal, professional and political voice of feminist theatre practitioner. This has been achieved through the privileging of breath, pleasure and desire, and the time required to perceive and receive them. It has occurred through a practice of resisting the western myth of romantic love and redefining ways of being and loving in the world that do not rely on an other to return one to oneself, but rather privilege the unfolding towards a feminine divine. The diva as feminist performer and unbounded female philosophical subject, unfolding towards her fullest expression of herself, gives voice to the female imaginary and the experience of being human and falling apart. The diva is most useful when understood as an icon for the richest possible expression of one's multifaceted, contradictory, poetic and polyphonous self in critical dialogue with her self, her community and her world.

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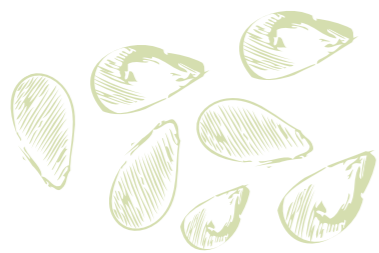
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Appendices

Introduction

These appendices contain documents pertaining to the practice-led doctoral thesis *Diva Voce: Reimagining the diva in contemporary feminist performance*, which consists of a written exegesis and a fifty minute performance titled *No Door On Her Mouth - a lyrical amputation*.

The appendices serve two functions. The first is to preserve a record of interviews conducted with three senior Australian women theatre-makers and performers: Margaret Cameron, Nikki Heywood, and Annette Tesoriero. The second is to provide traces of a creative development journey that cannot be fully documented in either the performance or the written exegesis. Taking my lead from Julie Robson's thesis and its documentation approach (2005), these traces evidence the research journey, rather than attempt to replicate or critique it. They include creative writing experiments, photographs, drawings, journal entries, work-in-progress texts, images and DVDs. The text, as it was most recently performed in 2011, represents a significant evolution in the dramaturgy of *No Door On Her Mouth - a lyrical amputation*, and is included at Chapter One.

Borrowing from The Orchard, the central performance metaphor of *No Door On Her Mouth*, these appendices have been laid out in four main sections:

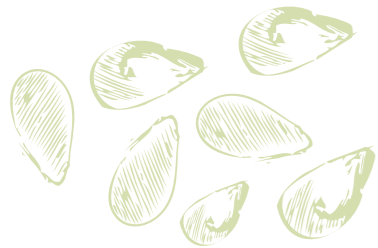
1. Seeds
 - a. *Referencing the Diva*: First Interviews 2008
 - b. *Writing to A Pear*: First Creative writing experiment 2007
 - c. *Craving Poetry*: First work-in-progress showing 2008
 - d. Selected Journal entries 2007-2008
2. Buds
 - a. *Handless Maiden Tales*: Creative-writing experiment 2009
 - b. *Fundhus & Eloquence*: Transit 6 Festival and second work-in-progress showing 2009
 - c. *Resisting Romantic Love*: Selected Journal entries 2009
3. Blossoms
 - a. *The Heart of Practice*: Second interviews 2009/2010
 - b. *Ruptured by Breath*: Magdalena Perth Workshop Festival and third work-in-progress showing 2010
 - c. *Falling Apart*: Selected Journal entries 2010
4. Fruit
 - a. *No Door On Her Mouth* First season, Perth Blue Room, 2010
 - b. *Lascietemi Aprire (let me open)*: *No Door On Her Mouth*, Magdalena@25 Festival, 2011

Asking how (or whether) the diva icon can usefully inform a feminist theatre praxis, and how do (some) women collude in their own oppression; participate in their voice and voicelessness, these appendices provide traces of the journey from an unexamined belief in the diva as an icon of empowered, independent and expressive womanhood to a more nuanced conception of the diva as boundless feminist performer and philosophical subject. . While roughly chronological, this story-ing of trace materials is not a step-by-step guide to the performer's process. Instead it is a document to evidence the "enthusiasm of practice" (Haseman 2011), which, together with the research questions, has driven the project.

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Robson, Julie. (2005). *Songs of Knowledge: Sirens in Theory and Practice*. Brisbane, Queensland University of Technology. Unpublished PhD thesis

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4. Fruit

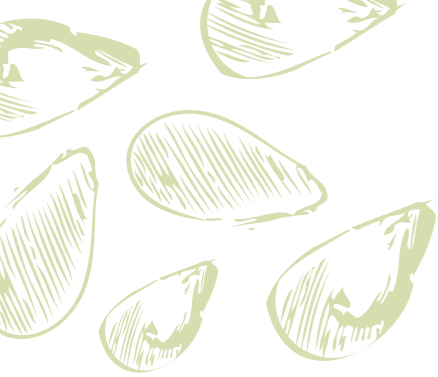
4.1	No Door On Her Mouth First season, Perth Blue Room 2010	64
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1. Seeds

1.1 Referencing the Diva:

First Organic Interviews 2008



Ironic Husks:
First Interview with
Margaret Cameron,
March 2008

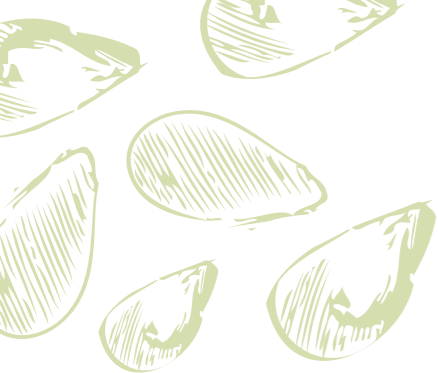
In early 2008 I conducted the first interviews with Margaret Cameron, Annette Tesoriero and Nikki Heywood. I began by asking each artist how and why she had referenced the diva icon in her own work. Please note, the following are excerpts only. Full transcripts can be made available upon request.

1. *The Elephant and The Mouse – a story about subjectivity*
- 2.
3. **MC:** ... when I got back from Berlin, in what, '95 or something, I felt, after a collaboration which
4. had left me, I think, had left me mute – and I would use that word – I had to find a way to speak.
5. And *Knowledge and Melancholy* was – I took myself to the most subjective place that I could
6. possibly take myself. And I remember being in Berlin knowing that it was an experimental place,
7. in some way, you know in a deep dark European winter, 20° below, working by candlelight, to *find*
8. a voice. And it was only when I heard that joke at the bar, this was a Berlin joke – the elephant
9. said to the mouse 'you're very small,' the mouse said to the elephant 'I have been sick' – and
10. went home and working by candlelight while it was snowing, wrote the dénouement to that...
- 11.
12. The elephant said to the mouse, "you're very small", the mouse said to the elephant, "I have
13. been sick, do not expect me to be cheerful I am fighting for my life", etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.
14. Whether it reveals, you know, the elephant in all his bigness – I haven't got the text with me –
15. but the elephant, could the elephant in his bigness imagine how a tiny creature could have such
16. feelings? So it was a – I obviously, being mute I felt as small as the mouse. So I needed a way to
17. shift the power to understand that the small point of view was discreet to itself. The mouse, in all
18. simplicity, says, "I'm small because I have been sick!" He doesn't know he's small!
- 19.
20. (laughter)
- 21.
22. Only the elephant knows he's small. Has a completely different perspective to the mouse. So the
23. mouse – the understanding of perspective somewhere helped me to work with abjectness and
24. brokenness and what was essentially a taboo, really. I *thought* it was a taboo to weep endlessly,
25. on stage, but taking to my pocket the mouse, I tried to stay with the mouse all the time. I said to
26. myself, as the mouse might say to itself: Why can't I say *O my heart* for an hour and a half?
27. Why can't I? I have a heart! The elephant might think it's not appropriate, but what I'm trying to
28. say really awkwardly is that: By accepting one's own point of view, no matter what, no matter
29. what, it is possible to begin to speak. And at a certain point if one has a feeling that it is not
30. okay to speak, or that it's not appropriate to speak, or what one is going to say is going to be
31. either embarrassing or any other thing that is going to stop you from speaking...if you stay
32. fidelius to the place that you have a small point of view then you can start asking really crucial
33. questions like –
- 34.
35. I remember those questions were really important: Why can't I go on stage and say *O my Heart*?
36. Why can't I? Why do I have a feeling that's not appropriate. Why isn't it appropriate? What's not
37. appropriate about grief? Why is there a time limit if people are unhappy? *You should be over it*
38. *by now*. What is going on culturally that would deny looking at that? But I followed a series of
39. questions that took me to a place where I could say that the culture valued winning more than
40. losing, that there was an emphasis on victory and winning and that to talk about loss was not

1.1.1 Ironic Husk – Margaret Cameron

41. really appropriate. It was not comfortable to talk about loss. Not that I want to be serious, but
42. somehow talking about loss – that took me to the classical themes where it *is* possible to talk
43. about loss. Classical poetry and whole streams and threads of poetics in literature where loss is
44. the very thing they are talking about when they are talking about knowledge and they're talking
45. about beauty and [unintelligible]. It seems to have a place to play in deepening what I would
46. have to say is the soul experience of the world. If you meet someone who has suffered loss, truly,
47. most likely you are meeting a profound person because they have somehow tempered everything
48. around that. They have a humility, they are not an elephant, you know, they are a mouse. They
49. know their limitations; they know their boundaries. They have a deep respect for their own
50. boundaries because they have had to hold a point of view. They have had to hold a place to be...
- 51.
- 52.
53. *Using the Diva to Transform the Domestic*
- 54.
55. **DA:** ...to ask you about the Diva in *Things Calypso Wanted To SAY*...The conversation we had
56. last year you said something about, the Diva was for you an ironic husk, a social construct, that
57. enabled you to give high status to low status and to be able to talk about something domestic
58. and make it epic, if I remember it was something to do with the washing machine - I think that
59. was the specific reference that you were talking about.
- 60.
61. **MC:** Ah! That was in *Calypso*: that was the reference to transforming the domestic. Yeah there was
62. a Diva in *Calypso* who could talk about the washing machine in a deep European accent and all of
63. sudden it was much more interesting, she was a much, much more interesting person.
- 64.
65. **DA:** Because she had a European accent?
- 66.
67. **MC:** Absolutely.
- 68.
69. **DA:** And were there other qualities of a Diva, apart from having an interesting accent?
- 70.
71. **MC:** The word I used was legitimate. It made her *legitimate*. (Adopting the deep European
72. accent) *Legitimate*, it made her *legitimate*.
- 73.
74. (Laughter)

(continued next page)



1.1.1 Ironic Husk – Margaret Cameron

75. So there is an irony in there because she was constantly admitting that she was sexually
76. frustrated, that she was lonely, that she only had one child and the woman up the road had two
77. children so the woman up the road didn't need her – I mean she was revealing all these things
78. about herself which were far from – she was someone – the accent enabled her to sit in a place
79. of high status with the most fragile reasons for having high status. She had next to no reasons
80. to be high status. So it was a husk, it had irony, that's why it was funny. And that's why people
81. recognised something. Or the reason why it's funny is people were recognising the flimsiness
82. of the protection of the high status, right, nevertheless it was admirable. It had another kernel,
83. which was: *I exist*. I do exist and this is what I observe (adopting deep European accent)
84. *The washing machine is emptying the water, gushing down the sink*. Things that would normally
85. be meaningless she makes full of meaning. And she does it by a magic trick: pretending to
86. be interesting.

87.
88. (Laughter)

89.
90.

91. *The Diva as a Frame*

92.

93. **MC:** Well, in *Knowledge and Melancholy* she was, and I quote, "*I'm not a very comfortable*
94. *actress*". So once again she is a broken Diva, but she's smart so she manages to – what the
95. intention is for that Diva in *Knowledge and Melancholy* is to be abject and to flip that. I do take
96. the frame of the Diva in *Knowledge and Melancholy* but as a way to try to – she says in the end
97. that she personifies Beauty. She's trying to culturally reflect – so she's playing the abject face
98. of the culture. She's playing the abject woman, the abject – but then she does this thing where
99. she says: look at me I'm poor. She uses classical themes to sort of flip it around so she ends
100. personifying beauty, classicism, poverty, truth, *poverty and truth*. So the poor or abject becomes
101. some essential component in human experience, something that should be valued and protected
102. and basically says in her dying moments: If you do not perceive me I will cease to exist. She's
103. saying: I am the poor face of Beauty. And she's turning it on the audience; she's done another
104. sleight of hand. By sleight of hand she's tricked the audience, she's tried to anyway she's tried to
105. say: I'm not me, I'm you...

106.

107. ...She was very useful in...because...both those Divas in *Calypso* and *Knowledge and Melancholy*
108. are ironic and admitting and confessing their own inability to play the role. And therefore kind
109. of admitting they're very human. So she's kind of like a jaguar, you know? Kind of like, get in a
110. jaguar in your ordinary clothes, or something. But she can't play the role. But because there's the
111. possibility of epicism in the Diva –

112. ...Being epic, working with epic themes. That was a door way for me in *Knowledge and*
113. *Melancholy* to achieve an epic end. The full on, you know, to die, saying now I am Beauty, capital
114. B, and you know it becomes a Greek drama. So there's something useful, I mean, in Greek drama
115. would we call her a Diva? Would we call Medea a Diva or would we call her a hero? Or a, you
116. know, maybe there's a little, where did the Diva? Say Callas, Maria Callas, she's the classic Diva, so
117. she's allowed to be hysterical. So *Knowledge and Melancholy* is also deeply commenting on that.
118. She's saying, "OK, I am the hysteric, because I need your love."

119.

120. **DA:** So it's about – that's something about permission. Allowing. I'm allowed to be an hysteric
121. because I'm a Diva, I'm allowed to be hysterical about the absence of your love –

122.

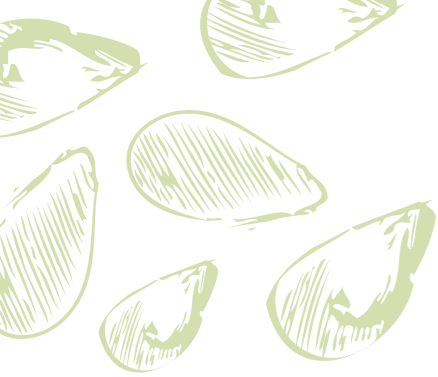
123. **MC:** But it's not enough. That, what I – It's not enough, because there needs to be another step,
124. which I think I was trying to make in *Knowledge and Melancholy*. Anyway why am I being called
125. hysterical? I'm only feeling! Why is this feeling being labelled? If we could just prise open a space
126. where it wouldn't be labelled for a while, you know, maybe we'd find something else about it,
127. because you know Hysteria is a classical feminine symptom for seeking love, seeking approval.

128. So my Diva in *Knowledge and Melancholy* amplified that: OK I'll seek approval, I'll go hysterical,
129. watch, watch, watch. Can you handle it, can you handle it, where am I going? Can you handle it?
130. Whoops! Actually I'm not hysterical I'm really smart. I'm reflecting back: why are you calling me
131. hysterical? I'm only telling you I love you! You know? What's wrong with you? You know, using it
132. to kick back. I have a question there about why - that the Diva – is a bit, it's been cheapened, it's
133. cheap...

134.

135. (PAUSE – tape is turned off at Cameron's request).

(continued next page)



1.1.1 Ironic Husk – Margaret Cameron



Margaret Cameron
Photographer: Sarah Matray
Bang! A critical fiction by Margaret Cameron
La Mama Theatre, Melbourne. 2000

136. *The Diva as an Antidote to Muteness*

137.

138. **MC:** So we were just discussing a sort of a cringe feeling about the Diva. And I said to Dawn well
139. I have to admit that I did use Diva, as a strategy in *Calypso* and as a strategy in *Knowledge and*
140. *Melancholy*. And I can see them as antidotes to muteness.

141.

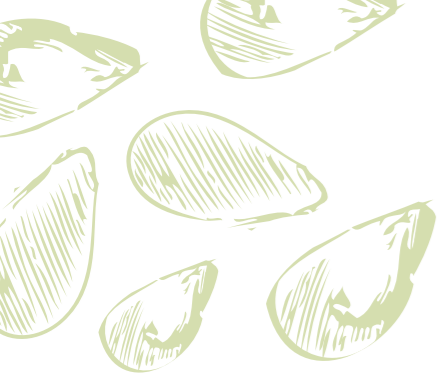
142. **DA:** And to feeling small.

143.

144. **MC:** And to feeling small. And antidotes to...If that feeling small is related to esteem, self esteem,
145. or the value of one's contribution, then the Diva is a husk that for me I've worn with irony
146. because I can't quite pull it off, you know. And so I think there's a bit of a cringe feeling about
147. the Diva. But maybe if we look at the pure form of the Diva as the divine or a channel of a very
148. – possibility of a soaring poetic that releases itself from the chains of domesticity and romantic
149. love and viability even...because the Diva and the divine and I'm not even sure what I mean by
150. the Divine but I get a sense of poetics there is a possibility in poetry of opening. Not breaking
151. but opening the bonds of all kinds of frames that devalue value. That what's trying to be affirmed
152. in the divine is some kind of value. And I can see that in both *Knowledge and Melancholy* and
153. *Calypso* – that I'm trying to open up value, excavate value from my own experience, you know?
154. And in trying to do that I actually have to come up against where things have been devalued.
155. Not – my own existence or my own point of view on my own existence may be devaluing all kinds
156. of phenomena and experience that have more thought or recognition in them than what one
157. normally experiences.

158.

159. So if we need the Diva to unearth and release the poetic I can accept that I do that, that I need
160. her as a strategy. I don't believe in her personality. ●



Striving for 'the gold':
First Interview with
Annette Tessoriero,
April 2008

1.1.2 Striving for 'the gold' – Annette Teoriero

1. *The Shining One* [From notes]

2.

3. I began by asking Annette how she has referenced the Diva in her own work in general and in particular in her solo show *Choux Choux Baguette Remembers*. Tessoriero responded by saying

4. she was interested in pulling apart the Diva in all her shiningness, revealing a nasty, vengeful

5. Diva who wants to die by her own hand. She made reference to Catherine Clément's observation

6. that the Diva must always die, and said that the character Choux Choux was a parody:

7. remembering and changing the memory. Locked into the Diva fate (death) is a limitation, but

8. the Diva as goddess is beyond death. Here Tessoriero referenced two twentieth century Divas:

9. Callas and Sutherland. Callas is known as La Divina (the divine) and Sutherland as La Stupenda

10. (extraordinary, beyond categorisation; a different breed of cow).

11.

12. The arias that Choux Choux performs are from Carmen, Tosca, Madame Butterfly, in which the

13. heroines are all killed. She juxtaposes these arias with songs from Piaf and Kurt Weill; torch songs.

14.

15.

16. *The Diva Upside-down* [Recording begins]:

17.

18. **AT:** Well, yes, in *Don Juan* there was the turning the diva upside down, turning the goddess

19. upside down and this notion of serving the queen – the Queen Bee needing to be served by

20. the drones. And also trying to put the...some embodiment back into the voice. You know, so I

21. think the stuff with Sydney Front ¹ is very much about the position of the body on stage and the

22. notion of embodying the theatrical text. So the role of the singer in *Don Juan* was an interesting

23. one because "oh, gosh, she can sing!" She's a singer, she does opera stuff, there's this big sound,

24. and yet, at the same time I do dreadful things to myself on stage and people go "ooh, that's

25. not –!" And I guess it plays with people's perceptions. I guess whenever it was, fifteen, more,

26. years ago, people thought it was a bit...naughty. Because opera's high art, elite art, and bringing

27. it down into this almost circus arena. And using the references to the High Art. Often you see,

28. I don't know, a couple of times I've seen quite nice circuses and they use opera singers in it, or

29. traditionally the Ringmaster might be a singer, and so using that voice as a master of ceremonies

30. is interesting. And in *Don Juan* the whole carnival kind of notion of turning things upside down

31. – you know the high should be low, and the whole notion of taking the bottom part of the body

32. and bringing it to the forefront is a carnivalesque kind of notion and I think doing that with opera

33. is interesting and I'm, I think Mozart's a good person to do it with, I guess, because things like

34. the Magic Flute were aimed a very popular audience. I think people tend to forget and I think the

35. Diva gets tied into this notion of High Art and that it's away from the population, away from the

36. populace and it's pushing the Diva away, pushing the goddess even further away. You know, if we

37. call some one a Diva then they're up on a pedestal. So then a Diva of the people is someone who

38. can come off the – no. she doesn't come off the pedestal but she can welcome everyone up onto

39. the pedestal...

40.

41. And you see all the wobble on her bottom! I think the wobble – well usually you think of the

42. wobble in her voice but in that case it was the cellulite on her bum!

43.

44. (LAUGHTER)

45.

46.

47. *The Diva and Silence*

48.

49. **AT:** Silence, yeah, yeah – I don't know whether we talked about this last time but there's the one

50. called the *Cement Mixer*? ...Ok so that was a small piece I made and it really was looking at the

51. smothering of sound and of silence and basically I'm on stage, and I'm in a huge crinoline but

52. I'm bare breasted and there's a cement mixer on stage – not a truck one but one of those electric

53. cement mixers. And basically the sound – it's got a big pile of sand and gravel in front of it and it's

54. just going, and on my breasts are two helium balloons, so when the lights come up you get the

55. image of this woman bare-breasted but with these two helium balloons and at some point – oh

56. it's hard to explain – but anyway the whole thing is about sound and smothering sound and the

57. whole notion of what the mixer sounds like and then sounds like when you put the gravel in and

58. then when you put the sand in and this whole notion of shovelling sand...but it's also this whole

59. notion of the breasts and as I start to sing I let the balloons go, and the balloons are on very long

60. strings but they're tied onto my nipples. So that, as I'm singing – about breath and sound and all

61. the rest of it – people can see the balloons moving. And they're moving because of my breathing

62. and stuff. And so again it's a very carnivalesque notion: the singer is a kind of kewpie doll. But

63. also those dolls with their mouths open where you put the balls in – it's certainly an image of

64. that, that carnivalesque that sideshow: the Diva as a side show entertainment comes in but the

65. undercurrent is this sound of silence and squashing sound down. The text was by a writer that I

66. work with and it's very much about what you're allowed to say and what you're not allowed to say

67. – what sound can come out and what can't come out...

68.

69. **DA:** Does a Diva ever compromise?

70.

71. **AT:** Well, I think if she knows what's good for her she [unintelligible]. She knows how to recognise

72. the Diva code. She knows how to regulate Diva behaviour. And then maybe subverts them into

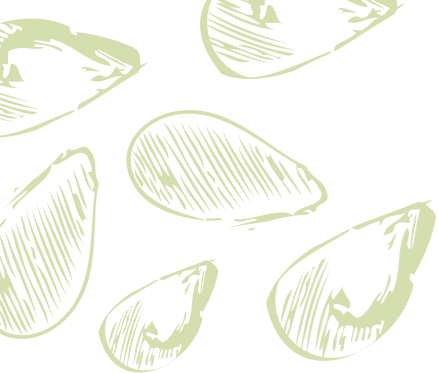
73. something else. Divas are good negotiators as well, I think. Because ultimately they're a bit

74. manipulative – they're emotional manipulators. They also know what feels good and so – and I

75. think as Divas get older they realise there's a certain comfort in having one adoring fan around.

(continued next page)

¹ Contemporary performance group Sydney Front, 1986 - 1993



1.1.2 Striving for 'the gold' – Annette Teoriero

76. ...So for the male to fall in love with the Diva, you know, does he have, certainly if he wants to
77. stay sane there is a huge amount of give and take required. But taking these notions of diva-hood
78. and transporting them into a personal relationship is very interesting because it's like in the end
79. the diva – it doesn't matter what sort of plane she's on...it becomes so ridiculous really because
80. you talk about it in the third person –the diva this and the diva that – when it fact it's just me.
81. And in a general sense what I am onstage is a bit like what I am in real life. Especially if you make
82. your own work. Because you're putting all that stuff out there and you're being informed by your
83. likes and culture and what you've brought in from your singing and your own readings etc, etc
84. and your own life. But it's also, you know, the same person that [X] has to live with so how that
85. is negotiated and how it manifests itself during your everyday existence is quite interesting, you
86. know. So we often laughingly talk about [X] being the Diva's consort, doing things that have to
87. be done because they're out of the Diva's realm, so it's referencing the diva even in personal life,
88. which is quite funny, I think...

89.
90.

91. *Entitlement and Space*

92.

93. **AT:** ...And so that becomes very much part of your stock-in-trade, so to speak: your ability to
94. take space. And...because you have to take the space with your voice. Projecting your voice and
95. singing out and all the rest of it takes up a lot of space, aural space, and I think the feedback that
96. you get from that is that this is good, and taking space is good and I am singer and therefore
97. now I am entitled to take space. Because I have earned the right to take space because I can take
98. space, aural space, in a way that people think is a good thing.

99.

100. **DA:** And then is one entitled to take space in other ways also? More than just with the voice. Is
101. that what is implied?

102.

103. **AT:** It kind of follows on, really, in...well old-fashioned singing teachers are very much about,
104. mmm, claiming your space. You certainly have to claim your space on stage, but just claiming
105. your own space and being confident. You have to take responsibility for the decisions you
106. make in your singing as far as the sort of sound you make and how you go about making it and
107. the whole notion of pitch and stuff so you are taught as a singer to know what you're doing,
108. be confident and – take the space? – Take the moment. Take that moment to do what you're
109. meant to be doing. Because if you don't take it, it passes you by – if we take it at a micro level,
110. if you don't take it, it passes you by and you've missed a moment you've missed a bar-line or
111. whatever...so a lot of it is the micro level of committing yourself to being present. And that
112. presence is often translated as your right to be in the space. So that's how I see that. And then
113. the persona, often the persona of the singer is – going back to this old thing of singing teachers
114. – is...how you look. And there were teachers who: you have to look like a singer. And looking
115. like a singer means you have to be dressed up and you have to be prepared at any moment to

116. take centre stage. You're always meant to be made-up and you're always meant to have great
117. comportment, to be able to take centre stage at any moment. So there is certainly an old-
118. fashioned thing of what a singer is meant to look like on stage.

119.

120. **DA:** so the off-stage persona – you're talking about the off-stage persona –

121.

122. **AT:** yeah –

123.

124. **DA:** is meant to be made-up and dressed up and ready to step into the light at any moment.

125.

126. **AT:** At any moment, yes. There was a singing teacher at the conservatorium many years ago who
127. was a real dragon, a total dragon, and she had bosoms, and her hair was always unbelievably,
128. immaculately coiffed and she was always impeccably dressed in a forthright, feminine, business
129. sort of way and she expected her singers, especially her female singers, to come to lessons, you
130. know, appropriately attired...for singing, you know. It's a bit like power-dressing for singers.

131.

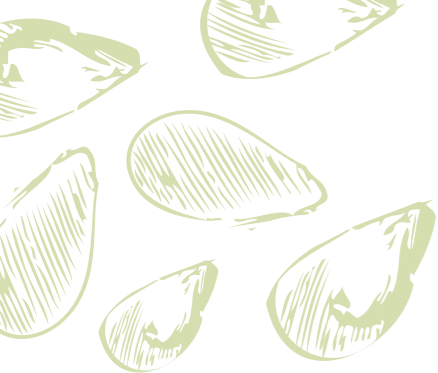
132. **DA:** (laughing) Power dressing for singers! So did the – so give me an idea of what that looks like.

133. Does that mean like a twin set and pearls?

134.

135. **AT** (laughing) No, no, it's more like... reasonably solid but good shoes. You need good shoes
136. because your feet and posture is very important for singers and by extension you could say it's
137. even more important for divas, you know this notion that, how you take the space is not just
138. about your gesture but your posture. And how upright you are. And your feet need to be really
139. rooted to the ground but with a little bit of a heel because – you don't look dowdy. You must
140. never look dowdy. There's no such thing as a dowdy diva. And she used to insist that her female
141. singers wear a – what was it called – a singing girdle. So that you had to wear a corset thing
142. around – you know like a panty girdle – so that you'd have something to push against. What sort
143. of bra you should wear, what sort of underwear – so it's really carried over from other times –

(continued next page)



1.1.2 Striving for 'the gold' – Annette Teoriero

144. *Claiming Internal Space*

145.

146. **DA:** And is there – that's taking the space externally of the body – is there also an internal taking
147. of space?

148.

149. **AT:** Well taking space internally is another thing altogether. It's like, finding where the sound is
150. inside your body, and allowing the space – exploring all those spaces inside your body. And what
151. sound does within your body as far as your sensation of space within your body – so there's this –
152. you have a thing of taking the space outside but there's also this thing of taking the space inside
153. you know so it's allowing your internal being to have space as well so that you're always opening
154. your throat, opening your throat, so allowing the space inside to be as big as possible. So you
155. know, opening your ribs, allowing a feeling of opening and openness in your abdomen, in your
156. bowel, breathing really low in your body so that you get a real sense of opening up inside. And
157. to me, again, that's allowing yourself to feel those really intimate sensations of what's inside your
158. body... Oozing, spreading – it's that thing of spreading. I don't know why I said oozing...yeah,
159. things are soft and oozing and you can say they go in other places. Female-like, oozing, isn't it?
160. And that whole thing of supporting your voice. You can say well, what do you mean and it's the
161. whole thing, well, you know it's just years and years and years of just trial and error: what feels
162. right in your body and what the balance is. Between opening and pressure and where you put
163. the pressure, you know, the pressure on the larynx and in the larynx and the sub-cortal pressure
164. and all these different places that you can apply muscular pressure...and it's all just experimenting
165. with what makes the 'bright' feel, you know? When you're making a sound. What is the most
166. effortless and pleasurable. And I think the whole thing of singing is so much about pleasure, you
167. know? It's such an erotic thing, being able to do this 'stuff', inside your body, you know, great!

168.

169. (laughter)

170.

171. Maybe that's what's so – looking at singers who are really into it and really enjoying it and you go,
172. "why are they having so much fun?" It's like watching someone who is intensely involved in their
173. own pleasure.

174. *Diva Tantrums*

175.

176. **AT:** ...I was just thinking about driving – if you're indecisive you have accidents, but, I guess
177. when you're up on stage in front of everyone there's a lot of pressure, so there's a lot of training
178. to be thorough, be committed, be opinionated! I think that's a notion of Divas: they are quite
179. opinionated. Now I've known some singers where I think "My god I could never do that!" you
180. know? Rip down the pianist, tell them 'this is the thing', quite strong opinions about the speed
181. of things, how this should go, that should go. I'm not very Diva-like in that, that notion – my
182. opinions aren't so fixed. "Oh you like taking it at this speed, ok, let's try it. Oh I might like it a bit
183. faster" But god I've seen some people throwing some bloody diva tizzes...to their colleagues...
184. and you know the whole Diva tizz – and I, I don't think it's anything to do with – I think it's a bad
185. thing to lock it in with a Diva tizz: you know the number one soprano throws a tizzy because her
186. props aren't there on stage when they're meant to be there. So let's not call it Diva tantrums: it's
187. just, she's just unprofessional! You know? It's not a Diva tantrum it's just unprofessional. So I don't
188. put up with that sort of shit. I mean I don't subscribe to a legitimate Diva 'thing'...

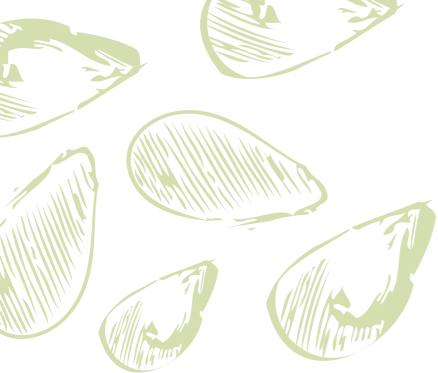
189.

190. **DA:** And you did say [last year] ... the Diva is striving for mastery and striving for divinity and
191. therefore, historically, is a woman who is asking an enormous amount of herself. And therefore,
192. perhaps, by extension, of the people around her who are supporting her to reach that goal. So
193. you were wondering, in the conversation whether the devolution into 'hissy fits' has, over time,
194. almost become an assumed 'right'. That if one is a Diva, one can maltreat people.

195.

196. **AT:** I think you're absolutely on it. I think you're absolutely right. If you see great, fantastic artists,
197. you think, ok they have a right to do that because their artistry is so unbelievable. They have
198. a right, in a sense, to demand a high level from everyone else. But the thing is like: mediocre,
199. mediocre, mediocre singers – but they do all the tantrums that go with it! They appropriate!

(continued next page)



1.1.2 Striving for 'the gold' – Annette Teoriero

200. *The Diva and Time*

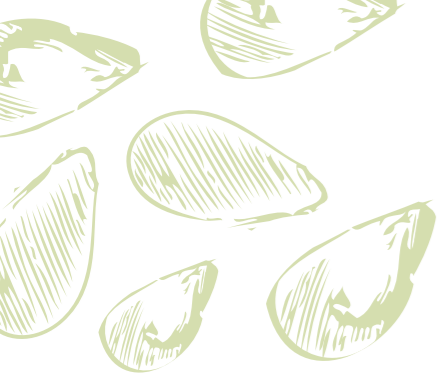
201.

202. **AT:**...That thing of taking the moment, you know, a lot of my generation of singers – when you
203. were coming through and being taught – and I can imagine, I'm sure there's a million singing
204. teachers still like it – and there were all the singing competitions, and once you got to thirty – if
205. you hadn't made it by thirty, forget it! So you grew up with this notion that if you hadn't made
206. it by thirty, "forget it". Don't even sing, forget about it. Stop trying, forget it. So you live with
207. that thing of "oh time's running out, time's running out". And once you get to thirty it's babies?
208. Or singing? You know, and so it's very much placed on you that thing of committing and taking
209. responsibility, and if you miss the moment you miss the moment. You may as well go on the scrap
210. heap. And, there's a guy in London who was like that and he'd say "by the time you're this" and
211. "by the time you're that" – and I was really quite young but thought "god alright!" And by the
212. time you're approaching thirty you think "Oh, god! I've missed the boat! Oh god!" ●



Annette Teoriero

Photographer: Heidrun Lohr
Song Cycle with Cement Mixer
by Annette Teoriero and Sonia Ryan
Performance Space, Sydney. 1995



Residing in Power:
First Interview with
Nikki Heywood,
April 2008

1.1.3 Residing in Power – Nikki Heywood

1. *The Diva in Creatures Ourselves*

2.
3. **NH:** ...I don't know. It's more in retrospect that [the diva] could be a title for her...But it's also
4. – it's about scale again and it's about entrapment, really, and the feminine place – the feminine
5. in that role of queen, or monarch – I referenced insect colonies a lot, and I guess I was really
6. interested in looking at – it came out of a personal investigation into looking at the role of women
7. that I had seen within my family history, particularly in my grandmother and great-grandmother,
8. who were very larger than life women. And I was interested as much in their occupation of
9. physical space and the relationship of scale of people around them. And I guess, yes, that sense
10. of entrapment that I was exploring was how she had been positioned and ensnared for the use
11. of others, really.

12.
13. **DA:** How the queen had? Or the monarch?

14.
15. **NH:** Yeah. And her mortality within that as well. She occupies a space that needs to be taken up,
16. but how her size also needs to be contained.

17.
18. **DA:** Ah. (pause) So talk to me about the containment, or the size needing to be contained.
19.

20. **NH:** Well, in terms of my research into queens in beehives or termite colonies, where her
21. function is like supremely powerful, but her role is, her role is very determined and sort of
22. singular, in a way,

23.
24. **DA:** And is it primarily a reproductive role?

25.
26. **NH:** Well, it is, but I suppose what I was interested in, in the way I depicted this feminine, was,
27. she was also – her power was sort of dangerous, too. And if unleashed – you know I did quite a
28. lot of reading at that time around the monstrous feminine as well.

29.
30. **DA:** Right.

31.
32. **NH:** And I guess this is where this whole idea of the silencing of the feminine is really a
33. fascinating one. Because, for me, there's a really strong connection with that almost physical,
34. metaphysical, power of the feminine to reproduce. Which is almost that sense of the fertility
35. goddess, or, the role of the feminine as the centre of creation, I guess. But how the shadow of that,
36. or the underside of that, is that extremely destructive power as well. And I was quite interested in
37. the fear of the power around the feminine in that sense (pause) What more can I say about that?

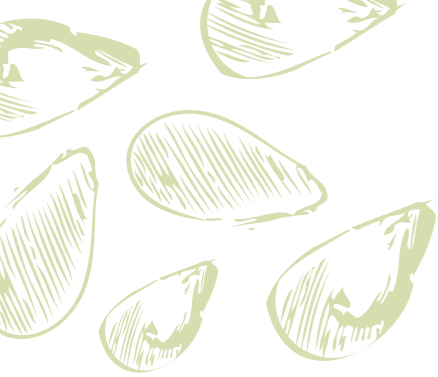
38. *Containing the Feminine*

39.
40. **NH:** Yeah, well that triggers again for me that image that I played with which was – which had a
41. bit of both, really: the top half of my body was sort of bound but overly expanded, too, I actually
42. padded my breasts, I had much larger breasts and there was a sort of a sense of a corset. But
43. below there were these enormous skirts and this enormous golden skirt. I wanted to be as big
44. as possible. It was quite unwieldy and quite bizarre to move in. Referencing Queen Elizabeth the
45. First quite a lot and those women from that time but her in particular. Partly because she was
46. often referred to as like a queen bee...and the court was her domain. And you could reference
47. the courtiers as the drone bees who functioned around her. But I was also just thinking back to
48. this feeling I get from looking at my grandmothers of them being contained within the domestic
49. sphere. But that's where their power operated. And outside of that they didn't really have much in
50. the way of power. Not to say that they were held there by men who had much greater power than
51. them, either. That certainly wasn't the case.

52.
53. **DA:** But culturally they were held there, perhaps?

54.
55. **NH:** Mmm. But it is an interesting question, isn't it, that one of the 'unbridled' voice. And what is
56. it she will say that's not – that shouldn't be heard or, we don't want to hear...

(continued next page)



1.1.3 Residing in Power – Nikki Heywood

57. *The Diva's Mouth*

58.

59. **NH:** But we were just talking about that: when are the moments when you can let yourself say
60. something that's really quite harsh? It's quite direct and it's tactless. But saying it in such a way
61. that it's not actually about me insulting somebody it's about me doing something that's actually
62. serving the greater good of the work itself...

63.

64. And without – with a high investment but no personal investment. Somehow. And I often, think
65. that – for me that's a position I often – I mean not that I want to be able to turn around and tell
66. people to shut-up, but – that position of going: I want to stand fully in my power and recognition
67. of what I know to be true, and be able to say it without fear. And, which is...Cause the other side
68. for me when I think about *No Door On Her Mouth* is, there's a moment in *Creatures Ourselves*
69. where – I'll say 'she' even though it was me performing, I'll say 'she' – She sat on a chair that
70. was elevated and she was isolated, there was no-one around here, and she'd been sort of left
71. there. Like, on a sort of throne. And she opened her mouth. And it was a moment that I played
72. with a lot: How wide can my mouth be? Can I make my mouth signify the biggest black hole
73. you could ever find? And staying with that idea, with that image, what sound would come
74. out of that mouth? So it's a moment where she screams, she moans, but it's beyond that, too.
75. It's a sounding that's almost like a foghorn. Like this big [unintelligible] BAAAAAH. (laughter).
76. And it's quite a dark image, it's quite threatening and it's about that thing of playing with the
77. boundaries, somehow of the infinite interior and the infinite, sort of, grief and experience that the
78. mouth can open onto. And that coming out of a state of isolation as well, you know? The single-
79. pointedness of this place that she's occupying which is at once powerful but also very alone. And
80. I was thinking about that earlier when you said something about the risk is that you find yourself
81. alone...

82.

83. Until, potentially, you meet someone or you find a situation where the power of the diva can be
84. held, can be responded to, can be understood and appreciated and, not a threatening one.

85.

86.

87. *The Diva in Contemporary Performance*

88.

89. **DA:** ...during one of our conversations last year – or it might have even been the first
90. conversation when I was talking about starting this project and exploring the Diva and you made
91. the comment that you hadn't really seen women claiming that space on stage as a Diva in recent
92. times...And I wondered if that was still the case or whether since that conversation you've seen
93. some Divas?

94.

95. **NH:** You know I saw a work the other night, the piece that Meryl Tankard made with Sydney
96. Dance Company, and it was a big group work and there was no singular person but this one

97. performer – you might have met Sarah Jane Howard?

98. ...Anyway, she's got – she's fucking amazing – I mean she's just an extraordinary presence on
99. stage. And I came away – I went to see it with (X) and my overall impression of her is that she's
100. like a goddess on stage. Not that she's necessarily really claiming that space, but she's got this
101. incredibly powerful, muscular body and exceedingly feminine at the same time – she's got this
102. long red hair and very pale skin – but, you know, she was just luminous, she just glowed.

103. And incredible presence.

104.

105. But in terms of somebody deliberately exploring that...

106.

107. ...Mmm. Interesting, isn't it, that expression: larger than life. I guess this is where it comes
108. down to definitions, but, for me, somehow – I guess what I'm interested in is the representation
109. of – what's being shown is the covering, the glam, big costume, big hair sort of thing. Which
110. is the covering. But I'm really interested by what is underneath. When you say 'larger than life'
111. for me it's like 'The Life Force' personified. It's almost transcendent, isn't it, beyond every-day
112. representation of life. Almost like an elemental force.

113.

114. **DA:** Yeah, and as you're saying that I'm thinking, it's almost as though all of those trappings, all
115. those things which are trappings of a – what is that –

116.

117. **NH:** Are the trappings the things that make the Diva acceptable? You know, make us want to look
118. at her? They do two things: they distance us from her but they make us safe as well, somehow,
119. because they're, they create a form that we find, not necessarily beautiful, but it's almost like an
120. exaggerated grotesque beauty, somehow.

121.

122.

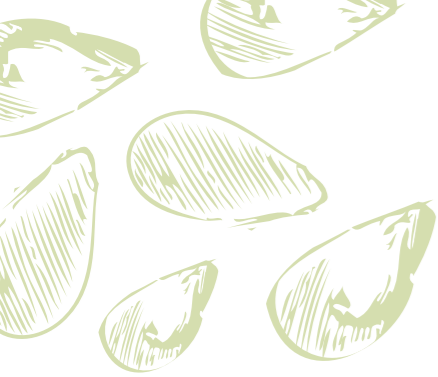
123. *A Lack of Residence*

124.

125. **DA:** ... So when you talk about 'what is beyond the every day' and 'what is that life force
126. personified', 'what is elemental', I go 'YES! What is that?' you know, because I feel it in me!
127. Getting back to the personal I feel those forces in me. And yet, so often, I don't give permission
128. for those forces to manifest or to carry me.

129.

130. **NH:** Yeahyeah, they're two different things, aren't they? The manifestation or the residing within,
131. you know; if you're able to reside in that place maybe what you manifest is a part of that, whereas
132. – I think a lot of that Diva consciousness is actually about manifesting something because of a
133. lack of residence – ...Maybe that's what makes it grotesque, because the trappings...
134. ...And maybe the assumption is: if I make myself look like this, if I stand in that place of, make
135. that shape that will give me the authority to be or give me permission to be something that
136. maybe I'm too afraid to be, or haven't been allowed to be or don't know how to be.



1.1.3 Residing in Power – Nikki Heywood



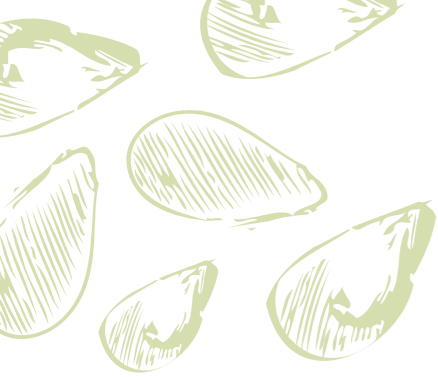
Nikki Heywood
Photographer: Heidrun Lohr
Creatures Ourselves by Nikki Heywood
Performance Space, Sydney. 1992

137. **DA:** And maybe standing in that place and making that shape can be a useful step along the way.
138. If one doesn't know how to reside in, or how to be, or is not able to give oneself permission.
139. So maybe there's a usefulness in that. But I think the point of the journey would be to get to the
140. point where you do reside in it. That's the point of my journey. I've got the answer that's great I
141. just have to go write it now.
- 142.
143. (laughter)
- 144.
145. **NH:** But it's funny cause the paradox there is that, you know, it isn't enough just to be –
146. I mean that's really important, grounded being, ground from which to operate, but then to come
147. from that place of incredible strength and tapping into the elemental forces there's still that
148. question: well what does that manifest in the world around you? What does that manifest as a
149. creative force? ●

1.2 Writing to a Pear:

Writing Excerpts, September 2007

First Offering, July 2008



In September 2007, and at the suggestion of Julie Robson, I placed a golden brown pear on a blue china plate, and each day for a week I wrote to the pear.

Elements of these texts forged the first offering which was presented in July 2008.

20 September 2007

You have skin wrinkling along your neck. We have that in common. Turning you just now I stopped to gaze at you from this angle, caught first by the sight of the dark indentation on your left hip. A deep scar, or brand. Then I noticed the way you are leaning forward, the movement implicit in your stance. You have places to go, things to do, people to see. A still firm fruit, but perhaps not for long. And the way your stem curves back, counterpointing the forward thrust of your neck: a jaunty devil-may-care stem, wind-in-my-hair stem. The tree that bore you, held you firm as you grew plump, dropped you when your juices began to flow, that mother-father tree a distant memory. Your skin is mottled, the colour of sunshine and dusty feet. Summer seems so long ago. It has been winter now for years. Did I imagine? Or did you just sag, ever so slightly. What sorrows do you hold in your sweet flesh? Looking more closely I see your other scars. You are marked and pitted with an age. And I perceive all of this you-ness with my eyes and my mind. My mind, existing in all my body, wonders what it would be like to inhabit your skin, to be flesh of your flesh. I could eat you and we would be one.

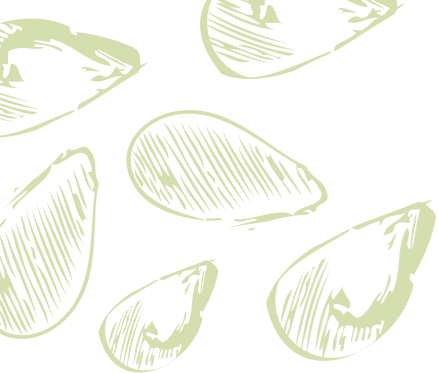
I, too, am pitted and scarred. You are gold and earthy, I am silver and wet. Silvery lines trace my hips where the skin has stretched to hold the fullness of my youth, and now I am beginning to wither. I, too, have a forward momentum, infinity is not so long and wide as when I still clung to the mother-father tree. I, too, am jaunty. I, too, sag a little, when I think I am alone. The weight of all my sadnesses surprising me when I least expect. Skin wrinkling, crêpe skin, at my throat.



23 September 2007

Floating in a sea of letters, words, phrases, black marks that enter by my eye and assemble into bridges, chemical reactions, memory, senses, hurts, highs, ah-hah(!), colour, texture, scents, sense, aural pleasure, arousal. Surfing Cixous and Irigaray, dumped by a wave of Le Doeuff, finding a Hopkins life raft in the high seas of Boudou Walker and Lyotard, rolling in to shore on my own imagination, pitching a tent in my heart until I can make my way back to the summer house in my womb. Crepey lines at my neck soon to migrate to my décolletage, I ponder regeneration. My skin is tougher than a girls' and my juice is sweeter still. Am I lonely? My man fantasy, partner fantasy a bad habit. It takes ten days, some say thirty, to create a new good habit. Already I miss you less. But here, I'll just have another weep, bathe the wound. I have cried so often in the last three months there are salt crystals gathering in the fine lines around my eyes and mouth. In the crepey folds of my neck. I glitter, salty, in the sun. Preservation. Tasty morsel, salty plum. My twelve unborn daughters whisper and giggle under an umbrella on the beach of my interior ocean. Twelve little mermaids with no interest in self mutilation. They sing to me of desert wildflowers. I see a woman with white hair standing in strong sunshine, her skin weathered, her knuckles large, her hands still agile her eyes bright, glittering. Salty. A future me. Beyond the gaze, beyond desire for escape (into drugs, into sex, into abuse). Cutting a sharp figure in the sharp light with her sharp thoughts and her fine feelings. But where are the others? Why is she alone? It is easy to be zen in isolation. How can her glittering wisdom inform a community of me's and not-me's? How does she engage? Without losing herself or closing down others? Is it in the listening or the speaking? Or the bridge between them? ●





First offering of performance materials presented in the Rex Cramphorn Studio, Sydney, July 2008

In July 2008 I travelled to Sydney where I presented performance materials to my interviewees and cohort of peers: Margaret Cameron, Nikki Heywood and Annette Tesoriero. The eleven sketches, notated below, emerged from early studio explorations. These sketches are not laid out like a performance text, but constitute the notes I made to myself in preparation for the presentation. Some are merely 'triggers' for improvisation. Others are more elaborate and include text and actions:

1. In the space a stool or wooden chair. A pear and a peeler. A second pear hangs from a blue ribbon. A door frame marked on the wall in red electrical tape. To the left, an open laptop with the image of tea-pot projected onto someone's lap.

A woman places herself within the frame. She announces:

I am not an overly emotional woman. (She makes the shape of grief. She makes another shape of grief. And another. She sees the pear. Shrieks) *I crave poetry.*

2. A woman claims space and says:

A woman stands on a rock and stares out to see. A fierce wind buffets her (She fans herself). She cries out from the depths of her soul: Lascietemi morir. (Strikes a dramatic pose) Let me die. (She touches her own cheek tenderly. She fans herself again). I am not an overly emotional woman of a certain age. There is a physical reason for my tears. (She fans down her body to the floor. She begins to sweep). Once upon a time a miller made a deal with the devil. He traded what stood behind his mill for untold wealth (O Husband, what have you done?). The miller thought he was trading a fruit tree, but at the precise moment the deal was struck, Sally, the miller's daughter, stood behind the mill, sweeping. When the devil came to collect his due he was offered a pair (pear) –

Of hands.

There is a physical reason for my tears.

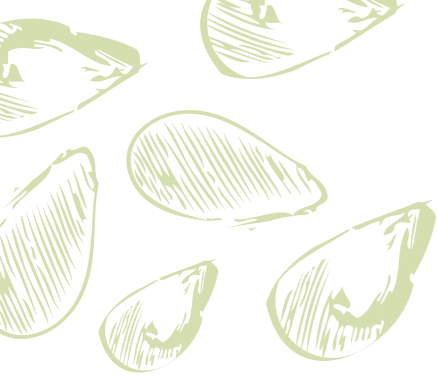
3. A woman sits on stool/chair peeling a pear. A teapot projected onto her belly. Then an angry mouth (My friend the chocolate Cake Track no. 1)

4. (holding the pear on outstretched hand) *You have skin wrinkling along your neck. And I see you are leaning forward, momentum implicit in your stance. You have places to go, things to do, people to see. A still firm fruit, but perhaps not for long. And the way your stem curves back, counterpointing the forward thrust of your neck: a jaunty devil-may-care stem, wind-in-my-hair stem. The tree that bore you, held you firm as you grew plump, dropped you when your juices began to flow, that mother-father tree a distant memory. Your skin is mottled, the colour of sunshine and dusty feet. Summer seems so long ago. It has been winter now for years. Did you just sag? What sorrows do you hold in your sweet flesh? I could eat you. You are gold and earthy, I am silver and salty. Silvery lines trace my hips where the skin has stretched to hold the fullness of my youth, and now I am beginning to wither. I, too, have a forward momentum, but infinity is not so long and wide as when I still clung to the mother-father tree. I, too, am jaunty. I, too, sag a little, when I think I am alone. Skin wrinkling, at my throat.*

5. (Repeating the actions of: A woman stands on a rock and stares out to see. A fierce wind buffets her. She cries out from the depths of her soul: *Lascietemi morir.* Let me die.) *I am not an overly emotional woman of a certain age. There is a physical reason for my tears.*

6. *K!...OOr...RRR...AAAHHH....Zhe... K!...OOr...RRR...AAAHHH....Zhe... K!...OOr...RRR... AAHHH....Zhe...Courage*

1.2.2 First Offering



1.2.2 First Offering



7. (In the Frame)

You winked. You are about to speak. I want to lean in, collude (your belly is warm), but your neck looks less strong now; less certain. Do you know where it is that you are going to? (shrieks) Your liver spots frighten me! If I had a car I would put you in my pocket or perhaps in a basket and we would drive out of this city. Women of a certain age do that. They get desires to walk into the bush or the ocean. And why not? No husband, no children, my friends are self-sufficient. I can come and go come and go come. Go. You are less independent, I can see that. Your neck troubles me. Your tilting, that I took for forward momentum, now looks like a small hunch. A bunch of troubles in your lap and you lean over them, fussing, mother hen. I'm sorry. You were about to say something. What is it? "Look behind you?" Behind me? Behind me is the past. Did you hear about the girl with no door on her mouth? Rolled a boulder to fill her gaping; gasping she busted granite to smithereens – beware the grinding capacity of an angry jaw! I don't want to feel this grief. Behind me is the future – what is unknown, that which I cannot see. I sense. In my dreams I have seen a man, off to the right, floating in a boat on the high seas, waiting for me. My very own pirate. In the dream I was naked. Perhaps he is waiting for me to get dressed. Dressed in the beautiful garments of my own weaving: threads of silver psyche and gold soul and philosophy of the deepest blue, crimson morality and a forest green heart. I'm not ignoring you, my pear. But i see in the sad hunch of your shoulders my own reflection. And I want to see myself grandly erect. Not weeping, weeping.

I am an old woman now.

(O Husband, what have you done?). When the devil came to collect his due he was offered a pair (pear) –

Of hands (she collapses)

There is a physical reason for my tears.

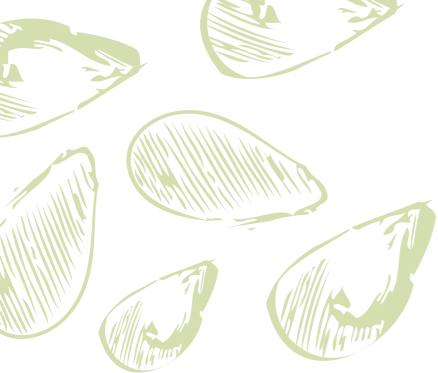
*Look mum, no hands! Get a grip. I have beautiful feet.
(She stands, fans herself furiously. Strikes a pose, sings)*

*Think I feel a little empty, yes
I'm hollow and blue, and I'm leaning gently into my grief –
I'm letting the river of tears wash through me*

8. (She unfolds her fan and reads)

Floating in a sea of letters, words, phrases, black marks that enter by my eye and assemble into bridges, chemical reactions, memory, senses, hurts, highs, ah-hah(!), colour, texture, scents, sense, aural pleasure, arousal. Surfing ecriture feminine, rolling in to shore on my own imagination, pitching a tent in my heart until I can make my way back to the summer house in my womb. Crepey lines at my neck soon to migrate to my décolletage, I ponder regeneration. My skin is tougher than a girls' and my juice is sweeter still. Am I lonely? My man fantasy, partner fantasy a bad habit. It takes ten days, some say thirty, to create a new good habit. Already I miss you less. But here, I'll just have another weep, bathe the wound. I have cried so often in the last three months there are salt crystals gathering in the fine lines around my eyes and mouth; on my lashes; in the crepey folds of my neck. I glitter, salty, in the sun. Preservation. Tasty morsel, salty plum. My twelve unborn daughters whisper and giggle under an umbrella on the beach of my interior ocean. Twelve little mermaids with no interest in self mutilation. They sing to me of desert wildflowers. I see a woman with white hair standing in strong sunshine, her skin weathered, her knuckles large, her hands still agile her eyes bright, glittering. Salty. A future me. Beyond the gaze, beyond desire for escape (into drugs, into sex, into abuse). Cutting a sharp figure in the sharp light with her sharp thoughts and her fine feelings. But where are the others? Why is she alone? It is easy to be zen in isolation. How can her glittering wisdom inform a community of me's and not-me's? How does she engage? Without losing herself or closing down others? Is it in the listening or the speaking? Or the bridge between them?

9. Justice is sleeping (Chant)



1.2.2 First Offering

10. Referring to the hanging pear:

From this angle the flesh appears firm under the skin. Not exactly bursting, but still firm. Except at the sacrum there is a watery-ness. As though, just under the skin, the flesh has dissolved into a small puddle. Resolve dissolves into puddles of salt water at my feet. I miss him so much. He has a small puddle in his sacrum, too. Perhaps if we stood back to back our puddles could connect, become an ocean. Come swim with me, you don't have to drown, no.

*You say that you love me I say that I love you
We're giddy and gorgeous and gay
Till you say you don't trust me to behave
You want me to prove my love to you and make you feel safe.
So I've been dressing to please you I don't dare to tease you
Gave up a job with good pay
Still you say you don't trust me to behave
You want me to prove my love to you and make you feel safe.*

*Well now my arms are aching my hands are numb
My fingers are stiff from
holding on
How long do we cling to this life-raft of love?*

11. (In the Frame, with a strong accent)

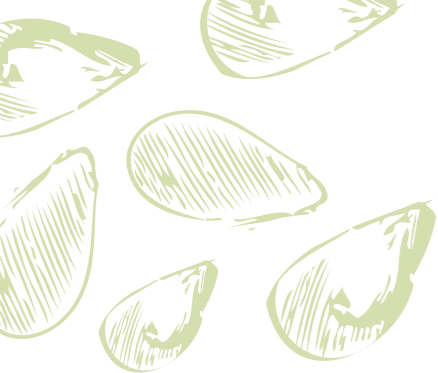
*In my mind is the phrase "a constellation of freckles" and I wonder where is my mind?
Does it have a physical location? Who am I, this "I" that observes you (not-I), and observes the constellated freckles on your skin. And I wonder if I have a constellation on my skin. A constellation of spots (leopard) or blemishes (leper) or stars (diva). Yesterday the osteopath said, "There is a physical reason for your tears. The nerves feeding the parasympathetic system pass through the vertebrae T1-T9, the ribcage, which is where your body is showing signs of long-term stress. This is the area of the spine physically related to emotion. As you begin to heal and strengthen there will be shifts, counter-adjustments. These are the physical reasons for your weepiness." My constellations of tears. See? I am wet. Slick with sea-salt. Lick me. I am not an overly-emotional woman-of-a-certain-age (as we all thought: how old are you, if you don't mind me asking, no, I think you are too young for the perimenopause)*

I have a physical condition. ●



1.3 Craving Poetry

Interview transcription, July 2008



A conversation with my cohort of peers followed the presentation of initial performance sketches.

Unfortunately the recording device was erratic in its performance and some of the commentary has been lost. Nevertheless I managed to capture the core and spirit of each woman's response.

Selected responses follow:

1. **MC:** ...I'm hearing a very new step into a very new work. One that is not related to the history
2. of Heroin(e). And I found this in your bag, just now, and it encapsulates what I think I just heard
3. (sound of gasp – Dawn reads "I crave poetry")...and I heard it, I Heard it, Dawn. The writing is
4. really great. It's poetry, you know, that's what I felt. Once I heard that I had a different way of
5. seeing you. You were there between two worlds – of yourself, in a way – yourself as a performer,
6. and yourself as a poet. And in some way the performer was sending up the poet...And I don't
7. mean any of that as a criticism. I'm just saying that is absolutely – that is exactly what we do,
8. when we don't want to hear the plain-ness and the extent of the poetic voice. It's quite another
9. thing to allow oneself to speak one's poetry, and not to enact it. Because in the listening of one's
10. own poetry, all of the enactment occurs, you know, in so many ways. [Unintelligible] the language.
11. And I felt like you had - feel like you already know that. Part of what you were communicating to
12. me then was your lack of confidence in what you're starting to really love. Something you're really
13. starting to love. And you're expressing a certain lack of confidence in that and what in...?. to see
14. if anyone else can hear what you're hearing and what you're afraid to hear, and to leave alone.
15. Not that you would only just say it, I'm not suggesting that. But I heard this really long part of it
16. that you let yourself say, and, well I might as well go all the way to what I -
- 17.
18. ...
- 19.
20. **MC:** I think the sequence of what happened for me was...I saw, I saw this...and then you did
21. this. And then I saw this point, sitting, with the two pears instead of hands so that they were the
22. amputated stumps. And then I started – I could draw that in – and then I started to hear what
23. you were saying. And I just saw a woman in a white dress with a teacup and the two pear hands
24. and maybe a hanging pear. And then I just wanted to say to you, you know, to re-look at the text
25. without enactment. Just so you can hear it play. And allow it to be a long lyric poem.
- 26.
27. ...
- 28.
29. **AT:** [...unintelligible...] If you're looking at the Diva stuff and the voice then it's the VOICE that
30. needs to be forefronted...You need to be much stiller...
- 31.
32. **MC:** ...dare to allow yourself to be serious...dare to allow yourself to be deeply, serious and lyrical
33. and poetic. And I think if you do that you will hear the parameters, the parameters of that shape
34. will - they'll transform already just in lines...[unintelligible]. I would really love to hear a reading
35. that was...sober.
- 36.
37. ...
- 38.
39. **MC:** ... a diva may simply be a woman of experience. A woman with experience. It may be AN
40. experience. And it's a useful structure: Ode to a pear. Even if you read everything like...this is the
41. next stanza to the pear. This is the next response to the pear. And you may not have to reveal
42. that- but whatever that was it gave you this poet's voice.
- 43.
44. **AT:** [unintelligible...something about the mushiness of the pear. The pear is 'moist'...]
45. And I think, because of your content, you know is not angular and and so in a sense what we
46. yearn for is some further expression that were vulnerability and safe, the whole notion of safe,
47. and generosity of time, taking your own time and allowing those simple ...
- 48.
49. **NH:** ...that fluidity, of being able to pour yourself through space, which goes against that idea
50. of taking up shapes, a bit...there was a moment when you made a comment about your feet and
51. then you got up and walked away and I wondered what would happen if you stayed with your
52. feet. You said you had beautiful feet and they are beautiful, what would happen if you just stayed
53. there and let the feet dance?
- 54.
55. ...
- 56.
57. **NH:** (something about interiority)...I'm thinking about the strength of the pear...the core
58. ...[unintelligible]...when you said "sending something up" it made me think of the word
59. melodrama and it certainly had that quality. And I wonder what it would be to strip that away and
60. just have the purely dramatic. [Unintelligible]... for me there was a strong sense of the academic
61. writing around what you are trying to do – which almost takes you outside your skin...as though
62. you are trying to construct something outside your skin. Whereas my experience of you, Dawn, as
63. a performer is that your strength is really about inhabiting your skin. So I'm just aware of that as a
64. danger zone, but I think you are able to negotiate between the two worlds. I mean certainly the
65. academic writing is influencing...
- 66.
67. **MC:** You don't have to take up the academic model of setting up a hypothesis and then proving
68. it, as an artist you can read all that stuff and then let yourself thinkfeel. You don't have to argue
69. anything, you don't have to take that dyad. Because there is a difference. Because what you're
70. actually doing is (excavating? explicating?) I don't think I have the right word... you're explicating,
71. it's a different way...umm...Your whole voice, your whole poetic voice is explicating a theory of
72. form. Cause you're making something. It's a different model; there are (several?) models evidently
73. in academia that you can through experience and practice develop a theory of form. It's a
74. different way of writing into proving something. Instead of writing an essay you are developing
75. a performance so you need to stay totally within the artistic experience. You know it is really
76. amazing reading some interesting thinking and a great place to allow yourself to borrow that like
77. a magpie and let it sit within your poetic voice because it will come to you while you are looking
78. at the sea. You will think of some feeling you've had from some amazing thinking opening your
79. mind up increasing the [unintelligible] around you... ●

1.3.1 Interview transcription, July 2008

1.4 Sometimes Tea Is The Answer:

Selected Journal entries 2007-2008



The following excerpts and images are intended as mere traces of the hundreds of pages of personal and studio journaling produced both digitally and in notebook form between 2007 and 2008.

Here, and later in the appendices, some entries have been chosen because they are referenced in the exegesis. Others have been selected to provide a sense of the rich 'stew' from which both exegesis and performance have emerged.



1.4.1 Selected journal entries 2007 - 2008

26 September, 2007

Things are falling apart in my hands. First the wine glass I was washing. Then the casserole dish: hot oil and tomato spitting. Then I sliced the tender part inside between fingers on a tin, and cut another finger on a shard of casserole dish. Things are falling apart in my hands...

3 November 2007

My yoga practice reflects my life:

1. **I am afraid of falling flat on my face.** These words came out of my mouth when I was telling N about my inability to bunny-hop in to the handstand position. I think my arms will collapse and I will fall flat on my face. Perhaps there is something there as well about not being strong enough to support myself. This is about so much more than my yoga – this is my life.
2. **Finding a fine point of balance.** There is one position that requires a very fine point of balance and I fall out of it again and again. I wonder if my centre is not yet strong enough to support it. I begin to think about the things that are not in balance in my life.
3. **Failure, frustration, rage.** In falling out of that position time and again I experience feelings of anger and frustration. I feel like crying because I can't do it. I want to give up. I want to swear. I get so mad at myself. I have to be told that I can ask for help. I don't want to ask for help because I feel like a failure.

8 March (international women's day), 2008

1. Vocal & Physical explorations of the words Shame, Courage, Responsibility, Fear/Pain, Gratitude...

SHAME – I stand and fold myself in on myself, left arm across waist, left hand hugging kidney, right arm between breasts, right hand at throat, at mouth. I am aware of tension between inner thighs as though they are joined by tight rubber bands. Right hand covers mouth. I stuff my entire fist into my mouth. Until I gag...I cross arms and legs and begin to move, crab-like, across the space. I walk to the door and try to wedge myself into the frame...

16 April, 2008

...I have images in my head of a woman glued to a doorframe, cutting off her own hand to break free; a woman, all in white, sitting peeling pears, a teapot projected onto her belly, then an angry mouth projected onto her groin. A woman with a toy dog on a lead. The dog has all four paws bandaged. The woman is amputating the hands of a doll (or of a pear that has arms). She says: *Get a grip!* Maybe the woman is bandaged, too. Or not.

23 April 2008

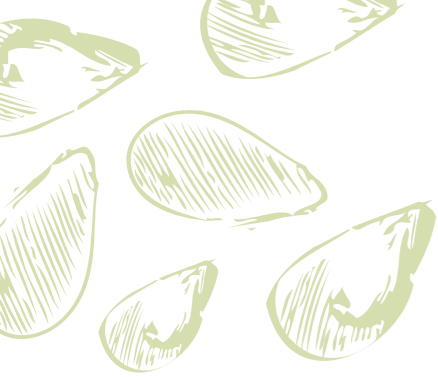
...All day I walk around with a stone in my stomach and a mean hand squeezing my heart. My dry eyes burn into walls, the floor, the sky, aching for a trigger to release the flood. I walk around all day and want to cry and can't. I read an unexpected poem and suddenly I'm turning my face towards the wall, hot tears squeezing out and trickling. The hand around my heart releases its grip but doesn't let go. I wipe my face and hope no-one comes to the door...

I wrote "I crave poetry". Every now and then I say it on the studio floor. It sounds self-conscious, wanky. But when the ache in my heart is driving me out of mind and out of my office I step into the office next door for the first time since I arrived and ask J if he has found a good poem to share. He brings me Edna St Vincent Millay (what lips my lips have kissed and where and why), and minutes later Archibald McLeish (you, Andrew Marvell). Then he puts the Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms on my desk and emails me the link to poets.org and now I, too, receive a poem every day. And today it is 'After the Movie' by Marie Howe and the first reading elicits tears. I read "On Becoming a Poet" by Mark Strand, in the Norton Anthology and am struck by his closing comments, that poems:

have a voice, and the formation of that voice, the gathering up of imagined sound into utterance, may be the true occasion for their existence. A poem may be the residue of an inner urgency, one through which the self wishes to register itself, write itself into being, and finally, to charm another self, the reader, into belief. It may also be something equally elusive – the ghost within every experience that wishes it could be seen or felt, acknowledged as a kind of meaning.

It could be a truth so forgiving that it offers up, a humanness in which we are able to imagine ourselves. A poem is a place where the conditions of beyondness and withinness are made palpable, where to imagine is to feel what it is like to be. It allows us to have the life we are denied because we are too busy living. Even more paradoxically, a poem permits us to live in ourselves as if we were just out of reach of ourselves.

The Making of a Poem – The Norton Anthology of Poetic Forms.
Edited by Mark Strand and Eavan Boland. Norton, London, 2001. P. xxiv.



1.4.1 Selected journal entries 2007 - 2008



24 April, 2008

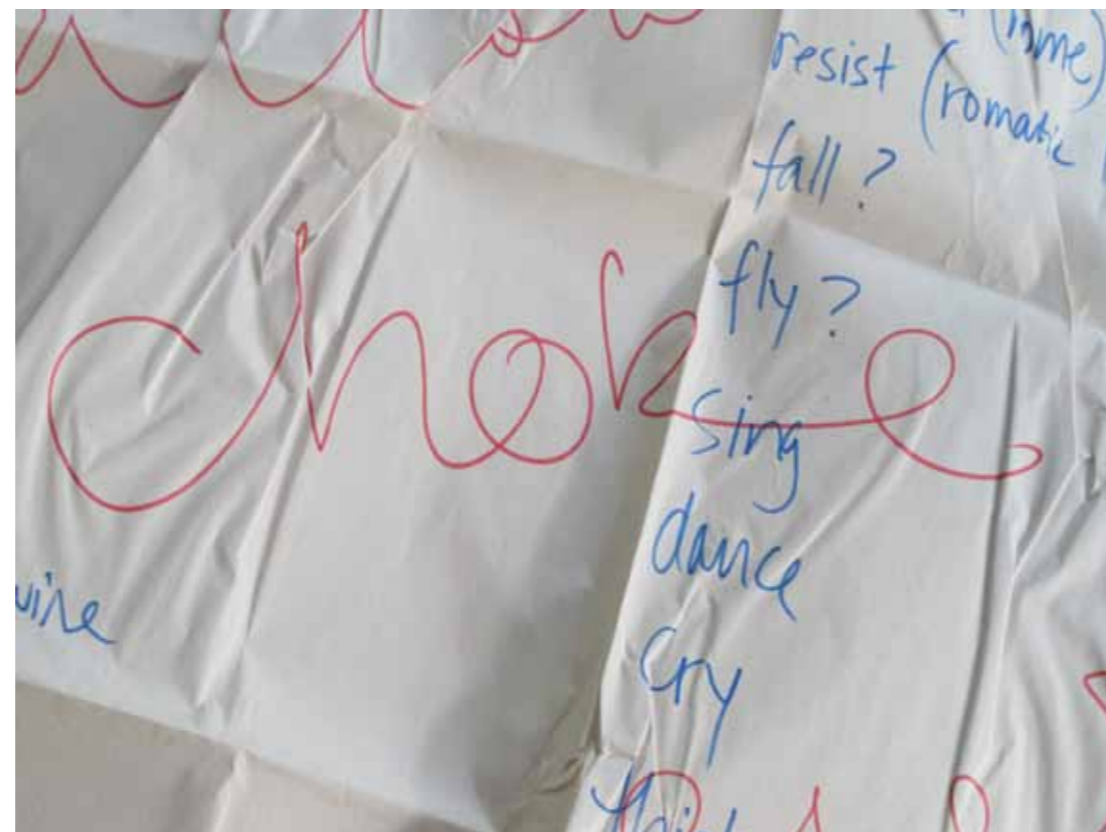
Tonight I have come home with Adrienne Rich and Yasmin Levy. Yasmin emits soulful cries and... Adrienne tells me that "a wife's declaration that she is about to seek divorce is a frequent occasion for a husband's violence, against others or himself" (p. 220) and I think we have not come so far in 21 years...

20 Sep. 08

Sometimes tea is the answer.
Sometimes tea is the answer...

I am astonishing. I am resisting romantic love...

M says, "If you are deconstructing romantic love you discover yourself victim. But in doing that already your position has changed"



28/12/08

When I arrived in the studio today I hung 7 pears from the suspended wire box that houses the data projector. I took pictures of this orchard.



I swept the space, played Kate Bush and did some M&B to warm up. I imagined what it would look like to see a woman running back and forth, sideways, through projected light/images, in a long space. I heard my breath become more laboured, harsh. In the silence afterwards I stood, hearing ragged breath.

The breath is important...

- She gave up her job.*
- She changed the way she dressed.*
- She moved through town like a ghost.*
- She discouraged visitors.*
- She avoided eye contact.*
- She drew the curtains, closed the blinds and hung a towel over the kitchen window.*
- She moved through town like a ghost.*
- She sat up all night in the little room under the loft, clutching a torch, listening for his footsteps.*
- She bit her tongue.*
- She chopped off her hands.*
- She held her breath. ●*



2. *Buds*

2.1 Handless Maiden Tales:

Creative-writing excerpts 2009



Personal myth-making has a long history in both feminist theatre practice and therapeutic settings. In 2009 I re-wrote the myth of the Handless Maiden several times through the lens of personal experience. I sought to understand my own enchantment with the myth, and to confront the faces of femininity I have personally adopted:

i.

Once upon a time a miller made a deal with the devil. He traded what stood behind his mill for untold wealth (O Husband what have you done!). The miller thought he traded a fruit tree, but at the precise moment the deal was struck his daughter stood behind the mill, sweeping. When the devil came to collect his due he was offered a pear/pair...of hands.

ii.

Once upon a time a girl lost her hands because her dad made a deal with the devil. Handless, she lost her agency, lost her grip on things, and she wandered into the forest.

She stayed in the forest for two years. Her friends were concerned, then alarmed. The friends made countless visits, each time bringing a red thread, so the girl could find her way back out of the wild wood.

One day, when she was tired of weeping, she opened her eyes to see her situation in a new light. She had been living in the bush with a man, but now she could see he was a bear. She looked down at her stumps and saw tiny little baby fingers pushing out and with these she picked up the freshest red thread and let it lead her all the way across the country to the far side of the continent.

There, between the Indian Ocean and the desert, she found an orchard. The orchard was filled with women's laughter. Intrigued she found them sitting in the dappled light, eating pears, drinking wine and speaking philosophy.

The girl, who was now a woman, sat down to rest, and the next time she looked down at her stumps she saw that she had grown little girl hands. And she smiled.

2.1.1 Handless Maiden Tales

iii.

The deal is this: give yourself to the devil or risk losing everything and everyone. Give yourself to the devil or lose the man you love, the home you live in, the life you thought you were working towards. Give yourself to the devil or lose the high dream.

What happens is this: you start crying, and you say, well, I was planning to quit that job anyway. Eventually. May as well be now.

What happens is this: you tell your friends in the city it's too far to drive and when they invite you stay the night you say you are too busy.

What happens is this: you defend your choice of bra and knickers vehemently. You defend the way you dress vehemently. And then you stop buying lingerie and start wearing crew neck t-shirts. It's not worth the argey-bargey.

What happens is this: You tell yourself he loves you but he's been wounded in the past and he just needs time to see you're not like all the other two-faced slut bitch women he has been with. What happens is this: he finally asks you to give up your very soul. You bargain and plead. He is immovable. It's me or your soul, he says, Choose..

[

] And you choose your own soul. You choose life. He has asked for the one thing you cannot give without losing yourself completely.

And so you lose the man you love. You lose the house you live in, and you lose the life you thought you were working towards.

You are left with yourself.

And now begins the loveliest romance of all.

2.2 Fundhus & Eloquence

Transit 6 Festival and second
work-in-progress showing 2009

2.2.1 Transit 6 Programme



Transit 6

I work with people of the periphery because I belong there and because the periphery is a non-place from which to look at society better. Like art, it is, at the same time, a way of living on the outskirts and in depth. There I meet an unrecognised knowledge that amazes me. It is not an attitude of assistance, but an aesthetical choice. It is my place.

Patricia Ariza



As an actress my first thought on periphery concerns the relationship between my centre - the heart of the action in my torso - and the detailed precision of the extremities - my hands, feet and eyes - that tell the anecdote and make the action believable.

As an actress my main concern is the power concentrated in my centre.

So I am confused. Why chose to work on the periphery? Why is being on the periphery so important to many of us women theatre practitioners?

We chose to work on the periphery, both geographically (in places distant from the main cities, in countries at the extremity of the world, in neighbourhoods at the edge of the towns) and as genre (theatre that confines with film, music, nature, visual art, writing...).

The choice of the periphery comes as a consequence of where we place our performances, why we make theatre and with whom, as a need to emigrate and travel.

When the Magdalena Project lost its physical centre - the office in Cardiff and its revenue funding - the activities mushroomed in events all over the world and the network maintained its connection internationally through the website and *The Open Page* journal. The Magdalena Project became a tangled bond of peripheries, and each of these peripheries was at the centre of our professional and personal lives. In a global world, in which it is becoming more and more difficult to remain enclosed within the boundaries of a national and traditional culture, where is the centre and what is the periphery? Each periphery exists only in relation to its centre as each centre to its periphery.

Women in theatre are our centre, like the poor in opposition to rich, mad in opposition to normal, black or yellow or red in opposition to white, young or old people in opposition to middle-aged could be. We make the periphery our centre because we do not accept the world as it is, with its injustice and segregation, its mainstream thinking and order. We make work on the periphery because we are not satisfied with the theatre we know from before. We chose periphery as the place where small essential human values are cherished.

Women working in theatre are definitively on the periphery of those deciding for the world, but although we know our influence is nearly inexistent we still feel the enormous responsibility of sharing our knowledge which unites body and mind, torso and hands, feelings and actions to promote a different way of perceiving and thinking. Remembering how the Magdalena Project acquired more life and dynamism after losing its physical centre, I understand that the actress's principle I should refer to when thinking of periphery is another: going out of balance and transforming weight into energy.

Abandoning the centre is a way of taking a risk, of accepting the challenge, of needing to move away from an inert centre that no longer feeds us and gives a false feeling of security. Being on the periphery is to explore unknown places with the necessity of making something happen. The heart of the action, our centre, becomes our profession, and how we manifest it, our periphery.

The 6th Transit Festival will gather examples of 'peripheral' manifestations inviting performances and women who are geographically and artistically placed at the borders. The programme includes workshops, site specific events, performances, lectures, master-classes and work demonstrations.

Julia Varley

THEATRE – WOMEN – ON THE PERIPHERY

TRANSIT, Odin Teatret, Box 1283, 7500 Holstebro, Denmark
tel. +45.97424777, fax +45.97410482,
email transit@odintheatret.dk
www.odinteatret.dk www.themagdalenaproject.org

2-5 August 2009

On the periphery of Transit Workshops and performances by Odin Teatret

with Roberta Carrer, Else Marie Laukvik and Julia Varley.

6-10 August 2009

TRANSIT 6 – WORKSHOPS

On the periphery of theatre:

- 1 **POLITICS** a workshop with Ana Woolf and Patricia Ariza.
- 2 **SONGS** a workshop with Brigitte Ciria and Marianne Suner.
- 3 **LIFE STORIES** a workshop with Gilla Cremer and Margaret Cameron.
- 4 **FILMS** a workshop with Anne-Sophie Erichsen and Leo Sykes.
- 5 **PUPPETS, SONGS AND RITUAL** a workshop with Deborah Hunt and Parvaty Baul.

6-10 August 2009

TRANSIT 6 – PERFORMANCE PROCESS WORKSHOPS

6 **THE ACTS-VIGIA**, a performance process directed by Jill Greenhalgh.

7 **DANZÒ DANZÒ** by Thiasos Teatronatura, an outdoor performance. generations.

6-16 August 2009

TRANSIT 6 – TRAINING SESSIONS, MEETINGS, PERFORMANCES, DEMONSTRATIONS, EXHIBITIONS, INSTALLATIONS

Theatre – Women – On the Periphery

With: Exile Theatre **AFGHANISTAN** - Helen Varley Jamieson, Madeline McNamara **AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND** - Ana Woolf, Natalia Marcet, Teatro del Bardo **ARGENTINA** - Margaret Cameron, Dawn Albiner, Aphids **AUSTRALIA** - Festival Voix de Femmes **BELGIUM** - Monica Siedler, Leo Sykes, Fase 3 **BRAZIL** - Patricia Ariza **COLOMBIA** - Teatret Om, Odin Teatret, Dorthe Kærgaard **DENMARK** - Nora Amin **EGYPT** Voix Polyphoniques **France** - Eva Balzer, Gilla Cremer, Natascha Nikprelevic **GERMANY** - Parvaty Baul **INDIA** - Vocabolo Macchia Teatro Studio, Teatro Lila, Thiasos Teatronatura, Teatro di Nascosto, Roberta Chivarino **ITALY** - Eugenia Cano, Maria Sanchez **MEXICO** - Zid Theater **THE NETHERLANDS** - Grenland Friteater **NORWAY** - Deborah Hunt **PUERTO RICO** - Elizabeth de Roza **SINGAPORE** - Pepa Plana, Simulacro Teatro **SPAIN** - Teater InterAkt **SWEDEN** - Trickster Teatro, Teatro delle Radici **SWITZERLAND** - Ya-Ling Peng **TAIWAN** Maggie Gale **UK** - Bond Street Theatre **USA** - The Magdalena Project, Jill Greenhalgh, Gilly Adams **WALES** -

The programme can undergo changes also in consequence of answers we receive concerning economic support to Transit 6

For information concerning the full programme of workshops and performances please consult

www.odinteatret.dk or www.themagdalenaproject.org

PARTICIPATION FEES

For participation in two half-day workshops or one full day workshop, and in the whole festival including all meetings and performances, food and lodging (4 persons per room), daily transportation between the lodging quarters and Odin Teatret, from the 6th to the 16th of August 2009..... **Euro 900**

For participation in Odin Teatret's workshops beforehand with the same conditions additional..... **Euro 300**

Applications to participate in the workshops and festival should be sent to: **TRANSIT, Odin Teatret, Box 1283,**

7500 Holstebro, Denmark

or by email to: transit@odintheatret.dk by March 1st 2009, naming the priority choice of workshops.

Paintings by Dorthe Kærgaard

Design by Marco Donati

prehelvetia
swiss arts council





2.2.2 Transit 6 Workshop Brochure

transit 6

Odin Teatret, Holstebro, Denmark 2-16 August 2009

ON THE PERIPHERY OF TRANSIT

2-6 August 2009

Odin Teatret workshops:

THE ECHO OF SILENCE with Julia Varley (3 and 4 August 2009 – 9:00-13:00)

This workshop concentrates on the unity of the physical and vocal impulse, and of the singing and speaking voice, on the relationship between text and action, trying to recognise the individual and choral voice and to reach the generosity of the voice given to space. Participants should know by heart a text (poetry or prose, about half a page) and a song on the theme of silence

COMPOSITION with Else Marie Laukvik (3-5 August 2009 – 14:30-18:30)

In the physical training of the actor, composition means, primarily, ways of walking and plastic exercises. This workshop looks at composition as the body's physical, creative expression in the process of improvisation and in vocal training. Participants should bring props to use in the work.

THE DANCE OF INTENTIONS with Roberta Carreri (5 and 6 August – 9:00-13:00)

The work will be divided into two parts. The first will concentrate on the actor's physical training - on the awakening of the actor's presence. The second part will concentrate on work with the voice including exercises to awake the sonority of the voice and to develop the capacity to make vocal actions in space. Each participant is required to come to the workshop with a text of about 20 lines learned by heart as well as a song.

TRANSIT 6 WORKSHOPS

7-10 August 2009

1. On the periphery of theatre: POLITICS with Patricia Ariza and Ana Woolf (7, 8, 9/8 – 9.00-13.00, and 10/8 – 9.00-11.00)

Using Tadashi Suzuki's technique and Latin American rhythms and dances, Ana Woolf will concentrate on how the hips and feet are central to creating presence, establishing a centre from which the actress makes contact with the periphery. Patricia Ariza will share the experience of 'collective creation' through improvisations and analysis, intuition and reason, in a journey which connects theatre with otherness in order to discover what the group wants to talk about.

Ana Woolf is a teacher, actress and director. After working in Buenos Aires for ten years and co-founding Magdalena 2nd Generation, Ana Woolf has lived in Denmark where she has collaborated with Teatret Om and Odin Teatret, and in France where she taught at Nice University. Patricia Ariza is a well known actress, director, writer and founding member of Teatro La Candelaria, Bogotá, Colombia. Patricia is president of The Colombian Theatre Corporation, and has organised many festivals and events with displaced women, young people living on the streets, prostitutes and drug addicts.

2. On the periphery of theatre: SONGS with Brigitte Cirila and Marianne Suner (7, 8, 9/8 – 9.00-13.00, and 10/8 – 9.00-11.00)

The workshop will explore two processes: 1. creating theatre material from the basis of a song and 2. creating songs from a physical or rhythmic idea. These two processes will be in dialogue with each other and develop in parallel. In smaller groups, the participants will also create images, actions and scenes using music and songs as starting points.

Brigitte Cirila is a singer, actress and director. In 1991 she created Voix Polyphoniques and, in 1998, the vocal group Les Dissonantes, whose concerts took inspiration from the repertoire of Bartok, Kodaly and Ligeti. Marianne Suner collaborates with Brigitte Cirila in Marseilles where she divides her time between contemporary music, opera singing and compositions for vocal ensembles.

3. On the periphery of theatre: LIFE with Gilla Cremer and Margaret Cameron (7, 8, 9/8 – 14.30-18.30, and 10/8 – 11.30-13.30)

Margaret Cameron engages various non-psychological approaches to meaning and is concerned with thrift as a creative principle seeking the simplest and most eloquent syntax of form and content. Gilla Cremer has vast experience in creating performances from novels and biographies. Margaret and Gilla will lead the participants of the workshop to give shape to personal voice - stories that have not yet been put into words. Practising presence and invention on stage and determining the centrality of the listening self as audience, the process does not intend to strip off privacy, but search for a personal porosity.

Gilla Cremer lives in Hamburg and has been producing at Kampnagel, Kammerspiele Hamburg and Thalia in der Kunst Halle. Since 1987 she is performing her solo shows in Germany and abroad. Margaret Cameron is an actress, director and writer living and working in Melbourne, Australia. Her solo performances have toured internationally. She is recipient of the Australia Council Theatre Fellowship and the Eva Czajor Memorial for Female Directors singer and has an MA in Performance Studies at Victoria University, Melbourne.

4. On the periphery of theatre: FILM with Anne-Sophie Erichsen and Leo Sykes (7, 8, 9/8 – 14.30-18.30, and 10/8 – 11.30-13.30)

The workshop will start from Anne-Sophie Erichsen's experience in teaching actors and Leo Sykes interest in pedagogy for directors, to build personal scores to use in individual and group improvisations and focus on differences in creative processes and acting for theatre and film. Each participant will then elaborate their material both for the stage and for the camera. The group will work on discovering the different kinds of modifications each medium requires in order to maximize the life of the material.

Anne-Sophie Erichsen is an actress, film maker and director, working with Grenland Friteater in Norway. She leads workshops and tours internationally. With her colleague Geddy Aniksdal, she directed the Magdalena festival 'A Room of One's Own' in 1989. Leo Sykes is a theatre and film director. She



worked with Odin Teatret as assistant director, and now teaches and directs Udi Grudi in Brazil and Teatret Om in Denmark. Leo's films have been presented in festivals and on television.

5. On the periphery of theatre: PUPPETS, SONGS AND RITUAL
with Deborah Hunt and Parvathy Baul
(7, 8, 9/8 – 9.00-18.30, and 10/8 – 9.00-13.30)

With the title "Playing with the Dead" the participants will work with Deborah Hunt to make a tabletop Bunraku inspired puppet and on manipulation techniques to bring their puppet alive. Alone or in small groups, the participants will create short pieces for unusual places. Participants are asked to bring a few lines (prose or poetry) on "devotion" and one small object, black trousers and long sleeved shirt. Parvathy Baul will work with participants with body movement and singing only, based on her experience in Baul singing, dance and storytelling. These elements are only for practice and are meant for inner realisation of the participants only after they have been worked on for a very long time.

Deborah Hunt is an expert in manipulation and creation of masks with 25 years of experience working with puppet theatre all over the world. Originally from New Zealand, Deborah Hunt moved to Puerto Rico in 1990 where she lives now.

Parvathy Baul has trained in traditional singing and dancing since she was a child and has developed a deep interest in India's folk culture, specially the baul tradition. Since 2000, Parvathy has been travelling and performing both inside and outside India.

6. On the periphery of theatre:
THE ACTS – VIGIA
(7, 8, 9/8 – 9.00-18.30, and 10/8 – 9.00-13.30)

In connection with the presentation of THE ACTS – VIGIA at Transit, Jill Greenhalgh will direct 12 performers, between 18 and 30, in a performance process. The emphasis will be on making performance material rather than pedagogy. The theme of the work is endemic sexual violence against women and Jill Greenhalgh's starting point is the femicide that is occurring in Juarez. This is a difficult and painful thematic. The participants should do some independent research on what has been

happening there for the past 14 years. A skeleton performance with a fixed structure with sound, and film and actions already exists.

Jill Greenhalgh is a producer, director, performer and teacher. In 1986 she founded The Magdalena Project and has remained its artistic director since. Her current performance work includes different groups of women performers across the globe. She is a lecturer in Performance Studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth.

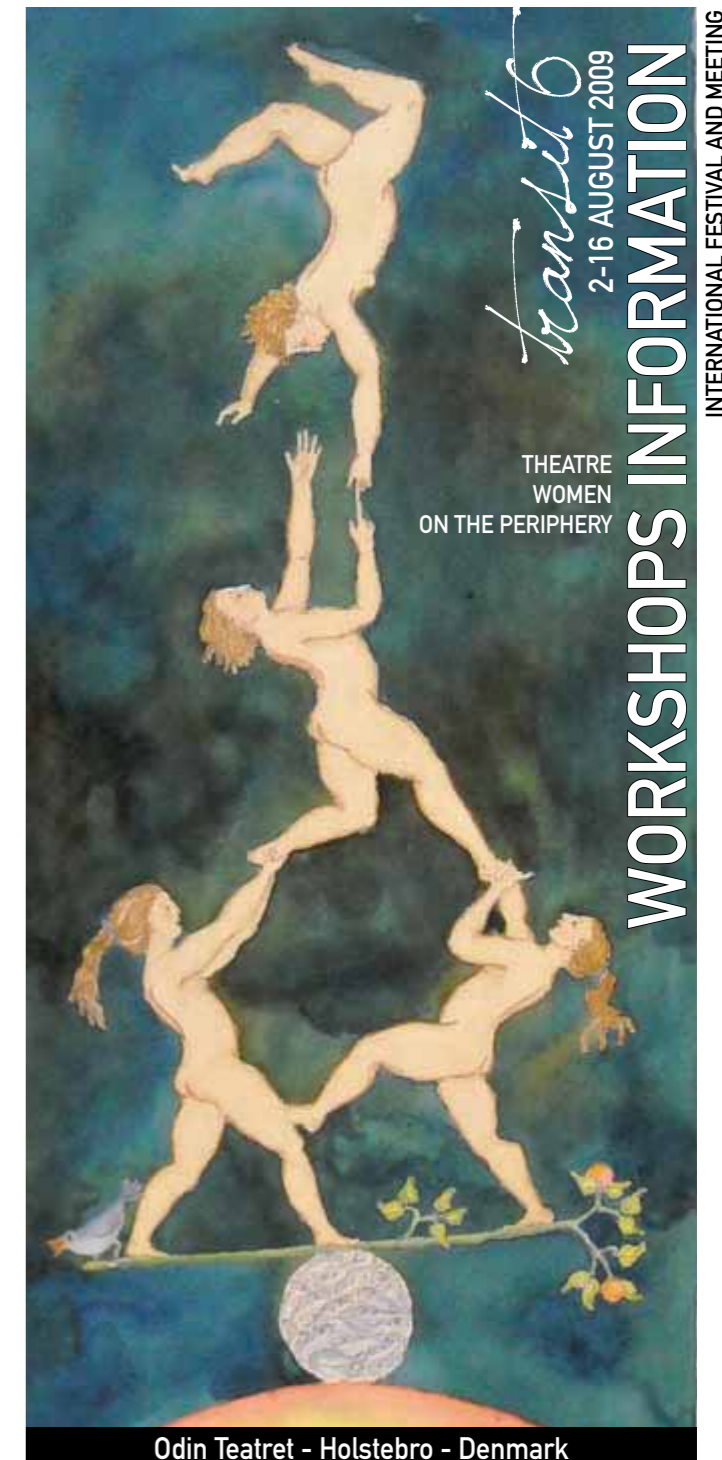
7. On the periphery of theatre: NATURE
(7, 8, 9/8 – 9.00--18.30, and 10/8 9.00-13.30)

In connection to the international debut of DANZÒ DANZÒ by Thiasos TeatroNatura, the show inspired by the fairy tales of "Women who run with the wolves", a few participants have the possibility to accompany the preparation of an outdoor special venue performance which will be presented at Transit by the sea.

Thiasos TeatroNatura is a company founded by Sista Bramini and Francesca Ferri, based in Rome, Italy. The company, nowadays composed by six actresses, specializes in performances, workshops and special events made in outdoor environment, in specific connection and accordance with the surrounding nature, which becomes a life partner. Thiasos won in 2000 the prestigious prize of the League of European Parks (Europarc) for the "best territory interpretation".



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2.2.3 Life Stories

Fundhus and Eloquence

“Gilla works from her fundus, her personal storehouse of experience and emotion, in order to tell the stories of other women. Margaret draws on personal experience in order to make something ‘eloquent’.”

[notes from workshop journal, August 2009]

In August 2009 I was invited to present *No Door On Her Mouth* as a work-in-progress at Transit 6, an international festival of women in contemporary theatre. Themed: *Theatre – Women – On the Periphery*, I intended to present the work as a result of literally being at the edge: geographically, philosophically, and physically. Before I presented my work I participated in a workshop co-led by Margaret Cameron (Australia) and Gilla Cremer (Germany). The workshop was titled *Life Stories*. The two key words for me from this workshop were fundhus and eloquence, and my participation proved to be a moment of quickening.

When Gilla Cremer speaks of *fundhus* she is speaking of the actor’s personal storehouse of physical, emotional and spiritual experiences; of what and who we are. According to Cremer we are each of us a multiplicity of women, men and children. Our task is to know “where things are in our storehouse” and to work with awareness that the storehouse gets bigger every day because “life does that”. Cremer uses her personal *fundhus* to make “a wonderful lie”, mining her own personal life story to bring life to the biographies of other women. She works with story, and these stories become “a kind of boat, stimulus, beacon; a partner for [the] work, or an obstacle to the work.”

Cameron describes Cremer as “fearless” and “amoral” in her willingness to bring all aspects of herself to a role, without judgement. The admiration in this observation is tempered by a reaction to Cremer’s language: when Cameron hears the word “lie” she can feel her “body contract” and therefore proposes discourse to open up the field to thinking, to “open the gates” around the word “lie” [journal notes]. Cameron is driven by a different imperative than Cremer’s creation of character to tell a story. Cameron uses language to “create space”, to make the “immaterial material”, to “speak something that seems impossible to speak”. She does this through the practice of Art, where one of the principles at work is $1 + 1 = 3$. The third thing is the space between 1 and 1: that is where the eloquence begins.

My participation in this workshop illuminated for me that a kind of knitting or weaving together within me has taken place. It is a weaving of two performance modalities that feed my own practice and which, until now, I experienced in some kind of opposition. Participating in *Life Stories* showed me that perhaps these two modalities can usefully dance together and that if an opposition exists, the space between once again proves extremely interesting.

Here I include two excerpts from three different days during the five-day workshop:



Life Stories Workshop: Two Excerpts

“Tell it exactly, in minute detail, use language and body and sound. Keep working. Invite being seen.”
Margaret Cameron

(i)

We begin with Margaret and Gilla asking a series of questions which bounce off each other lightly with space between them:

*How do you love?
Where is your love?
Where is your fear?
What is your fear?
How do you fear?
How do you betray?
Who do you betray?
What is your anger?
Where is your anger?
How do you anger?
How do you speak?*

Then an instruction to remember oneself as a seven-yr-old child and to dance (we are given time to do this) “Keeping the spirit of your skipping, say out loud, call out one question you had as a seven year old”:

*Why am I last?
Will I die if I eat chewing gum?
Will I get pregnant if I eat eggs?
Will I have a best friend?*

“One by one, enter the room, ask the question to the group and leave the space. Keep the spirit of skipping. Don’t think.”

*Are my parents really the magic kings and if they know I know will they stop bringing presents?
Why am I always wrong?
Why do I always have to be organised like my sister?
Why do we leave bourbon out for Santa Claus?*

Gilla: Please realise the difference between keeping the spirit of skipping and having to skip.

Margaret: It’s a spatial difference. Don’t worry.

(ii)

Margaret begins to work with Y. “How is your anger?” The instruction is to answer the question with the spirit of anger. “Show me the shape (of your anger). Show me and tell me while approaching me. Tell it exactly, in minute detail, use language and body and sound. Keep working. Invite being seen. How is your anger?”

Then Margaret creates a shift by asking Y to say, “I am anger” and then tell us who she is. Then she is instructed to now use gesture only; now sound only. Now moving between gesture, sound and language on the word ‘shift’.

Y exhausts herself in the exercise and in this moment something interesting starts to happen: the gestures seem exact but also humorous (up to this point they have been heavy). Suddenly she says “I am anger and I am tired” and this utterance lands – in Y’s body, in my own. She receives it. I receive it. Margaret shifts the question: “Where is your anger?” “My anger is in my gut. My anger is Mississippi.” It is a profound metaphor, arrived at through embodied and perceptual practice.

Margaret: That exercise – first trying to make anger an object and then trying to make it a subject... ‘I am Anger’ is a lie, a construction. The construction enables voice, through separation. And later, when you were telling that Anger is tired, there was an eloquence in that. When I say ‘help’ I mean creating a construction that enables eloquence. How do we make space? We don’t just have it: Space between Y and her anger.

Gilla works with another participant, an Italian girl. Instructs her to take Y’s anger (and her story). She leaves it up to this participant whether to ‘pretend’, or not. “You can invent”. She asks the Italian girl what happened to her brother. The Italian girl talks about him being shot because of the colour of his skin and when Gilla asks what did this do to you she replies, “He blows up in my body”. And then she enacts this with just sound. Taking away all movement and language is very powerful in this moment...

At the end of this session Margaret observes that we have looked a lot at anger today but we could as easily look at ‘I am sorrow’, ‘I am desire’, ‘I am joy’. Gilla reminds us of our capacity to let go (the emotion). She also remarks that, “if I let anger out in this way (outburst) then the audience has no room to feel it. I open a window to anger, but I don’t perform it.” Someone asks, “Where is the line between theatre and therapy?” Margaret says, “If it’s too close you can’t use it”. Gilla says, “Use only material that happened seven or more years ago.”



2.2.4 Transit 6 Journal Notes – Formal Opening

Transit 6: The Formal Opening

Theatre speaks in a deeper way than I can do with words.” Julia Varley

An overturned music stand. Scattered pages and small stones. Julia Varley stands by a piano in the long white room. Brigitte Cirla sings something in French from behind us. And then Natasha enters humming and making bell-like overtones. It is a beautiful improvisation and Brigitte joins her voice together with Natasha’s. It becomes a dialogue. And then a conversation as Parvarthy from India stands up and begins to sing and dance. They conclude and then Iben Nagel Rasmussen enters the space and begins falling out of balance, catching herself, coming back to centre, and then falling again. Jills’ daughter, sweet fifteen-year-old Meg Brooks, stands up, tugs her purple skirt and walks to the piano where she plays and sings her own song ...*It takes a while to see...*

And now Julia in white with a blue overcoat that has yellow and orange flowers asks if languages have been organised. They haven’t, and there is a moment of shuffling so the non-English speakers are near to those who can translate. Julia is patiently waiting, quietly contained as always. She begins with a story about an earthquake that occurred during the previous Magdalena gathering in Italy. There was a lot of confusion, she told us, and the next day they decided to do the performances even though the theatre had lost part of its roof. They found another space to perform in. Noemi, the scholar, had died and been buried in her home. Julia apparently insisted the work go on, saying Noemi would have wanted it. Then she said, “when you cannot feel the ground under your feet you can always go back to the work. And offer your work to others.”

She went on to acknowledge the three singers that had welcomed us into the space, starting from a distance, both geographically and in terms of form, and then coming into dialogue and conversation. She said Iben’s ‘falling out of balance’ exercise was deeply connected to her question about the periphery, and she described Meg’s offering of the song as the start of a long journey, also a place of risk. Julia said, “Theatre speaks in a deeper way than I can do with words.” She went on to acknowledge all the performers and spoke of feeling great privilege because she knows everyone in the room and is aware of the incredible richness gathered here.

Next she posed a question: Where does the motivation to go on making work come from, without the energy of youth? “I feel nagged by the increasing speed of our world. Our world is going faster. Young people are used to this and expect results to come quickly. They have not been trained to patience. They expect immediate results.” When Julia thought of the periphery she thought of geography, culture, outskirts of cities, the ‘edge’ of theatre (live art, theatre that is explicitly political or with strong social themes). But mental balance only occurred to her later when she realised it was the theme of many of the performances. And also, realising that many of us feel alone. And in this loneliness is the effort to retain balance. “My heart is in my centre, but it is only when I take a risk to leave my centre that I have the possibility to go somewhere. This is how we keep working in a world that seems to need us less and less. It is possible to place and sell performances. New media does not seem to need our skills.

The world is faster, bigger, noisier, and so we go in the opposite direction. Iben falls and then she goes back. The tension between the centre and losing it completely is the tightrope. The relationship between what we know, and the going where we don’t know.”

Julia then recalled a conversation when Jill Greenhalgh had asked the question: *Why am I so bored looking at theatre performances but I get so excited watching Federer play Nadal?* Between them they decided it was 1) Because they play well; and 2) The element of surprise: you don’t know how it will finish. “Being on the periphery should not justify our performances being bad.” She said she is afraid we do not do our best because our life is difficult or our situation or economy is difficult, but that we need to work our craft to the maximum (through inevitable patience and boredom). “Why do we allow our performances to be boring?” She reminded us that it is the performer who needs to go on the journey. If we are too preoccupied with ourselves the audience cannot take the journey out from the centre.

Julia concluded by offering us a personal answer to the question she began with: How, where does one find the motivation when one does not have the energy of youth? For Julia it is in small meetings, for example meeting all the children in Holstebro as Mr Peanut, and observing their absolutely individual expressions. Or when someone thanks her for continuing the work and lets her know that this supports others to continue also. “So many of the older women are now leaving us,” she said. “As we keep on, we keep on for them, too, and in this I find meaning. In this tension between the periphery and the centre.” She described Odin as a safe place to come home to but also a place to take a risk. Finally she shared the story of a bridge that was blown up (at the command of a theatre director) and which now, the children jump from, into the waters, the leap a symbol that they are growing up. “Our periphery is in the jump.” ●





No Door On Her Mouth –
Work-in-progress presentation
at Transit 6 Festival
The Black Studio,
Odin Teatret,
August 2009

[a woman – me – inhabits a space that is empty except for a pear attached to a ball of twine. The twine is attached to the pear stem and loops through something in the ceiling. The pear is balanced on the remaining ball of twine. The woman carries a handsaw, red electrical tape, 'fragile' tape, a screwdriver, she has orange and black tape on her wrists which she will later use to make the work 'falling'.]

My name is Dawn Albinger and I would like to thank Julia Varley for inviting me and the Department of Culture and the Arts in West Australia for supporting me to be here today. Just over two years ago I moved to one of the most geographically isolated cities in the world, Perth, Australia. The isolation I experienced in making this move led me to examine my internal anchors, to question what it is that grounds me. And one of the answers is: poetry. I would like to share one of my favourite poems with you. It is called Wild Geese and it is by American poet Marly Oliver and I have written a melody for it:

(sings *Wild Geese*)

Today I am here to share a work-in-progress titled *No Door On Her Mouth*. This work was originally born of the question: How can the Diva icon usefully inform my feminist theatre praxis? I defined the Diva as a woman who claims space centre-stage, a woman with an unbridled tongue, one who embodies the full emotional spectrum from gorgon Medousa to goddess Athene. A woman who privileges her desire! I was going to make an EPIC piece of theatre! Then, on the studio floor I was faced with my own muteness and a second question emerged: how/why do some women participate in their silencing and oppression?

At the same time I took up a daily astanga yoga practice: I wanted to develop a strong physical and philosophical core, to learn how to stand on my own two hands. What the yoga practice has taught me is just how many cunning strategies the body has for avoiding actually strengthening one's centre, or of really getting to the heart of things. And what is at the heart of things is the heart.

Just before I begin I would like to acknowledge Gilla Cremer and Margaret Cameron, whose workshop I attended over the past 5 days. It has left an indelible mark on this work. You will notice that there is a piece of paper on each seat. I would appreciate it if, after my presentation, you capture any initial impressions and/or questions and leave them with me. I look forward to longer conversations with any and all of you over the meals or at the bar. So, this is not yet a finished work, but:

Today it goes something like this:

2.2.5 *Transit 6 work-in-progress script*





2.2.5 Transit Work -in-progress

[walks to the back wall and begins marking out a door shape with red electrical tape]
It is like standing in a Bunnings hardware superstore which you entered to escape the pursuit of memory, doubt and useless hope. Here you indulge a fantasy of building your own home. *All by myself*. But once inside you are lost and bewildered. You want to leave. Every man intent on purchasing something for the home project a vivid reminder that you cannot go home. Your home is no longer your home. You have no home to go home to. You find your heart beating wildly as tears blur the tins of white paint. You were going to paint the floor white. Freshen things up a bit. There is another you inside the you standing in front of the tins of white paint. This other you is flailing about like a fish out of water; hitting, gasping, making it hard to find your way out. Or find your breath.

[walking to the OHP and turning it on, walking back into the frame and taping hand to left hand edge of frame]

You blink. Swallow. Speak to the friend who brought you here. You have no idea what you are saying, what she is saying. Somehow you manage to find the screwdrivers, the electrical tape, the cashier, the exit. Outside it is chilly.

[a happy accident: I undid my tool belt to take up the handsaw and the saw fell to the ground out of my reach. A beat. Then I reached for it with my foot, using the wall as a stop and still using my foot I lifted the handle so that I could reach it]

Your friend follows you. "It's astonishing" she says. "How you made that move, from there to here. It is astonishing." "Yes," you reply lightly, "I have a capacity for dramatic gesture".

[the performer-researcher picks up a handsaw, and makes the action of sawing off her own hand. A sharp intake of breath. Cries like a black cockatoo without sounding like one while making the shape of grief]

[She slowly unfolds as she speak-sings:]

I am experiencing strong emotion

An excess of feeling

I weep in public places

I feel ashamed and embarrassed because I do not have words

I have only tears.

I do not want to cross this thresHOLD [she stands up straight, hugs herself]

And the comfort I would wrap around myself is hollow worn torn untrue

I am weeping I am weeping

An excess of bodily fluids

My nose runs.





2.2.5 Transit Work -in-progress

[shift. Speaking to the pear]

You have cried so often there are salt crystals forming in the fine lines around your eyes and your mouth...the crepey folds of your neck...you glitter, salty, in the sun. Preservation, tasty morsel, salty plum. You are standing in a pear orchard. You are standing on a rock staring out to sea. You are standing at the edge of the continent. You are standing at the very edge of yourself. It is a thresh-HOLD. [throughout this section the woman picks up the ball of twine and begins to roll it so that the pear is hoisted just above her head]

You reach, but there is no handle.

Ah well, you cry, some things are not meant to be grasped.

Ah well, you cry, some things are out of your hands.

Some things are out of your hands

(a cry from the gut) Lascietemi aprire!

Let me open.

[her body opens, backwards...]

Ah well. Sometimes tea is the answer. [she quickly ties the twine to the leg of the OHP table, leaving the pear hanging]

I crave poetry.

And pots of tea.

[she spins to face the back wall and assumes the shape of a teapot]

Tears well up and spill up and over my lids

Cannot contain the contents of this pot

This leaky vessel

This bleeding weeping leaky vessel

Awashhhhhh [the pot tips]

I don't want to go down with this ship

Down, down, drowning

Learning to breathe under water

Learning to speak with my mouth full





2.2.5 Transit Work -in-progress

[shift]

[open mouth wide. stuffing fist into mouth until it is vomited out again]

Some things are difficult to swallow

Let me tell you a different story:

[sweeping floor]

Once upon a time a miller made a deal with the devil. He traded what stood behind his mill for untold wealth [O Husband! What have you done?] The miller thought he traded a fruit tree, but at the precise moment the deal was struck his daughter stood behind the mill, sweeping. When the devil came to collect his due, he was offered a pear/pair of hands.

[enact amputation. Cry like a black cockatoo without sounding like one]



[speak-sings]

You say that you loved me

I say that I loved you

We're giddy and gorgeous and gay

Til you say you don't trust me to behave

You want me to prove my love to you and make you feel safe.

So I've been dressing to please you

I don't dare to tease you

Gave up a job with good pay

Still you say you don't trust me to behave

You want me to prove my love to you and make you feel safe.

Now my arms are aching my hands are numb

My fingers are stiff from holding on

How long do we cling to this (life-raft) (thing we) called love?





2.2.5 Transit Work -in-progress

[shift]

I am astonishing. You need to write a list.

[Pull out 'fragile' tape and roll across back wall while hum/singing you say that you love me...]
Make the word 'falling'. Make a song like a kettle, starting very low and ending very high, until completely out of breath]

[in a very high, tight voice that gradually descends]

Things are falling apart in my hands!

First the wineglass I was washing. Then the casserole dish as it came out of the oven – all hot tomato and spitting oil. Then I cut the tender webbing between my fingers on a tin. And I cut another finger on a shard of casserole dish. My hands are bloody and mangled. And then I broke my little finger throwing a tantrum. Things are falling apart in my hands. Perhaps I am holding on too tight-ly.

I am astonishing. I am resisting romantic love.

When you fall in love it is like falling into a kind of stasis. Ah well, you say, perhaps after all these long years life doesn't need to be so hard anymore. And so you fall asleep, just when the real work is beginning.

[fall asleep on your feet. Snore. Stir after each 'Bong']

BONG!

BONG!

BONG!!! [extend the third bong, waken.]

You are sleeping, waking slowly, in your dreams a strange man questions you.

[lose feathers without appearing to]

He asks about the women who are having surgery to remove the flesh of their upper backs. Ah, well, you say, they do that in order to appear slimmer. And to ease the pain. The strange man asks if the surgery has been successful in reducing the pain. Ah, well, you say, actually, no. And suddenly you make a connection: underneath the amputated flesh, behind their hearts, are tiny furled up wings. And now these women will never fly.

Ah well, you say, the world is full of flightless women and handless maidens.





2.2.5 Transit Work -in-progress

[shift]

Have you written that list? You need to get a grip. Be decided.

Weeping the handless maiden wandered into the wild wood. Until she came to a pear orchard. And there, under the pears, the king found her, loved her, married her, and had silver hands made for her which were beautiful but quite useless.

[stick a screwdriver into the pear. Present it]

A still firm fruit, but perhaps not for long. The flesh appears firm under the skin. Not exactly bursting, but still firm. Except at the sacrum there is a watery-ness. As though, just under the skin, the flesh has dissolved into a small puddle.

Resolve dissolves into puddles of salt water at my feet. I so easily tip back into the net of our longing, one for the other. Dragged through the seas in this net, fishy, I distrust my nose. *Come swim with me, you don't have to drown, no.*

You know you are loved because you have a jealous lover. You know his love was precious for it was difficult to obtain. And because love can deny nothing to love:

You bite your tongue.

You reign yourself in.

You chop off your hands.

You hold your breath –

[holding breath for as long as humanly possible, raising fists in the “look mum, no hands” gesture; sinking in the door-frame]





2.2.5 Transit Work -in-progress

[shift. Sings:]

Think I feel a little empty

Yes I'm hollow and blue

And I'm leaning, gently, into my grief

I'm letting the river of tears wash through me.

Rolling in to shore on my own imagination, pitching a tent in my heart until I can make my way back to the summer house in my womb. Crepey lines at my neck soon to migrate to my décolletage, I ponder regeneration. My skin is tougher than a girls' and my juice is sweeter still. Am I lonely? My partner fantasy a bad habit. It takes ten days, some say thirty, to create a new good habit. Already I miss you less. But here, I'll just have another weep, bathe the wound. My twelve unborn daughters whisper and giggle under an umbrella on the beach of my interior ocean. Twelve little mermaids with no interest in self mutilation. They sing to me of desert wildflowers.

[stands]

I am astonishing.

I am resisting romantic love.

[walks to the OHP]

Resisting romantic love is useful.

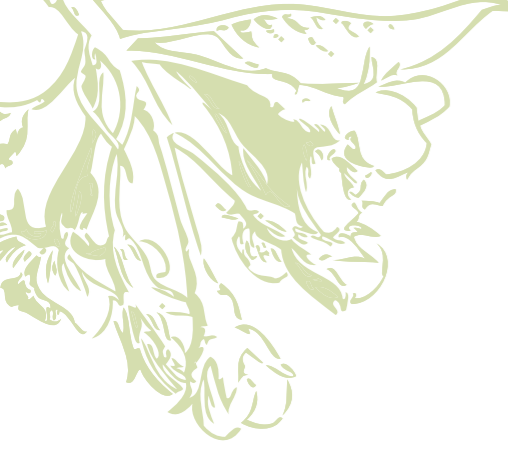
It gives me something to do.

[lights out] ●



2.3 Resisting Romantic Love

Selected Journal Entries 2009
& A Reflection on Practice



Selected 2009 Journal Entries

28 Feb. 09

In my yoga practice this morning I experienced heaviness and strong nerve pain in my sacrum and left buttock, back of the thigh. This has been building for 48 hours. Dev said "soft face" at one point. I was screwing up my face in pain, pushing hard against my pain, perhaps even wanting to be witnessed in my pain ("Look how hard I am working!"). I softened my face, and my attitude softened and my body softened. It occurred to me in that moment that maybe it wasn't my body that was heavy, but my thoughts. As I observed myself through the next few moves with this question in mind I found that, despite the nerve pain, my body was not, actually, heavy. A little weary, perhaps, but light.

...

14 Mar. 09

Sometimes silence is a response to the ineffable. Sometimes silence is an expression of awe. Or reverence. Some silences are canyon wide and deep, spreading out from the edge of ourselves to the edge of everything. What does it mean to be at the edge of oneself? Are edges useful? When I wrote last July that I was at the edge of myself I was in a place of extreme discomfort within myself. Describing it as being at the edge of myself was a way I sought to articulate this discomfort which was comprised of many feelings: heart-ache, nausea, vertigo, adrenalin-shakiness, restlessness, fear, yearning. Literally standing at the edge of the Great Australian Bight offered the metaphor for standing at the edge of myself, which means, I suppose, that I was saying the body of the continent was my own body. And standing where those cliffs fell away to the Great Southern Ocean the vertigo I experienced was overwhelming because I was already experiencing vertigo, and continued to experience it for weeks afterwards...

Some vertigo is caused by standing at the edge of metaphorical cliffs, or the edge of abysses. And to inhabit such an edge, or ledge, can be silencing. The moment before one commits to an action, commits to an act of agency, the moment before one hurls oneself into space to fall, like a stone or a bird, to be a swimmer of immensity (Cixous).

17 Mar. 09

In yoga practice last night I was opened all through my ribs and up into my jaw. Literally torn open is how it felt. Like the muscles between all my ribs right up under my breasts, my armpits, all the way under my collarbone, neck and at the hinges of my jaw were being stretched to tearing point. A millisecond later a roar travelled up from my belly my chest my throat and poured out my mouth. And then everything was still and there I was in a backbend and then a laugh followed the roar and I was laughing hysterically I felt like I was tripping and then I had to ask Dev to help me up and as soon as I came to standing I fell forward and started weeping. I sobbed for five minutes.

2.3.1 Selected Journal Entries 2009

13 May 09

Last night I made a short choreography using fragments of journal entries (see below). When I laid down to sleep I kept seeing myself do the choreography in a wedding dress.

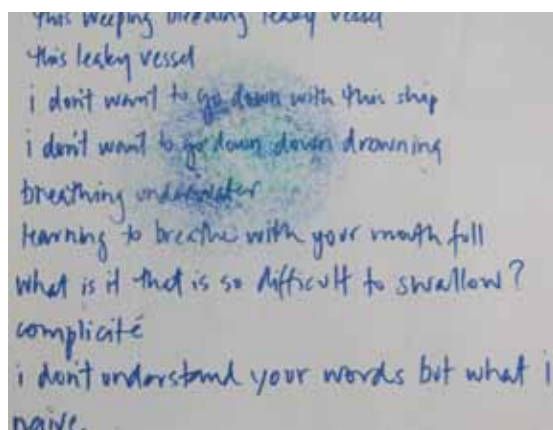
Choreography #1

1. Turn up
2. Enter swiftly and close the door, breathing through your nose
3. With dry eyes burn holes into the walls, the floor, the sky.
4. Simply say "I crave poetry" three times and follow the third with an immediate sharp intake of breath
5. Put your right hand into your mouth as far as it will go as quickly as possible
6. Clear your throat and sing beautifully, like a diva:
"I realise I'm already living
The picture I held in my head for so long
And I found that my heart, like a bird, it was singing
Because my life is a beautiful song" extending 'song' until there is no more breath
7. With urgency say: "I could so easily tip back into it. I keep looking for anything I could interpret as hope. Hope that it would be possible to move beyond the obvious obstacles"
8. SHIFT and say: "These words are not literal. They do not come close to what I am trying to say.
9. Sink and say "Yes" three times
10. Say: this is a beginning.

14 May, 2009

(after showing the choreography):

JR: What else is in the gag reflex? What does the image of the hand in the mouth mean to me with regard to the literature? The telling is more vivid than the doing. How would it be to interpret the instructions in sound – off language? What is the line between ritual and habit? How does the poetry fit if I am divorcing Romantic Love and marrying something else – your unromantic self – LH: - or marrying Romantic Love in a new guise. The form (repeating the choreography 3 times) troubles the fixity or fixedness of identity (and form). Reminds of Virginia Woolf in Mrs Dalloway – moving from the lived moment to the retelling (...?). the scaffolding becomes the ritual?





2.3.1 Selected Journal Entries 2009

5 June, 2009

I have been hanging on to 'choice' with both hands, hanging on for grim death. It is my Great (personal) Discovery: that 1) I was choosing diminishment and 2) I could and did choose to leave. And then Lekkie gently started prising my fingers from this choice I was gripping so tightly. And just now it occurs to me what was, perhaps, unspoken, the thing I was unable to find words for, was that I am holding to a position that the person who is in a situation of abuse is choosing to be in that situation. Even if it feels as though it is no choice. Even if they are afraid to leave. It is still a choice to stay. As I understand it this morning, Lekkie's discomfort with the word 'choice' was that it has a history within the feminist project of being related to liberal feminism's agenda of creating the same opportunities for women that exist for men, thereby increasing a woman's options in the world. Lekkie was wanting to shift or open the discussion towards desire as perhaps a more useful word to link with breath and grace. Because 'breath' and 'desire' exist in the semiotic, pre-linguistic world and 'choice', it seems, is of the world of the signed, of language, of logos...

28 July, 2009

The Weekend Australian July 25-26 has an article by Matthew Westwood titled 'Divas and Divos' which is a brief look at what makes a star, beyond being a very good singer, but really it seems to be about marketing. It talks about the "opera-pop crossover" and defends the choice of artists to take this route to fame, claiming "From the beginning, [opera] has been surrounded with money and high society. And the most successful singers know that glamour and a marketable personality is part of the deal." Westwood goes on to discuss how Opera Australia has benefited from star singers, and mentions two stars-in-waiting, Rosario La Spina, who has "a strong stage presence and that Italianate quality audiences love, and Emma Matthews "whose voice has developed a velvety timbre". Westwood observes that Matthews has "approached the international scene with undiva-like caution" and concludes: "No matter how talented, one is not given the diva's crown. Sometimes it has to be seized." So here we see that in contemporary opera there is still the fascination with 'otherness' – "that Italianate quality", 'glamour', 'personality', and action. The diva is expected to recognise her own worth and, like a contender for a title or territory, seize the crown. No waiting in the wings, waiting to be recognised. The diva charts her own course, navigates her career, makes choices, takes up space.

27 Oct. 09

Sunday evening, Channel 9, 6.30pm: "20 to 1 – Delicious Divas"

Bert Newton introduces the show and tells us we're going to be counting down the 20 most delicious pop divas of all time. As well as popular and talented he defines a diva as a singer who is difficult and demanding and as likely to hit the bottle or an attendant as a high note.

[We love to watch women behaving badly?]

20 – Beyonce Knowles is described as talented, rich, fun and intelligent. She has coined the verb "Bootilicious" and is a prime example. Demanding? One 'commentator' says "You have to have a few demands when you can shake it like that" – this response was juxtaposed with the information that Beyonce insists her thighs are greater in circumference than her dancers.

19 – The divine Miss M (Bette Midler) is described as a great singer with great comic timing. She says herself, "I take one little thing and I blow it completely out of proportion – that's how I live my life." LM observed that maybe BM is too 'nice' to be no#1 on this list.

18 – Tina Arena is not so lauded in Australia, but she is HUGE in France. Observations are made about the big voice coming out of her tiny frame. One interviewer says to her "Success is sweet revenge, isn't it?" [I didn't record her reply – because they didn't play it? Or it was innocuous] LM observes that in the absence of any 'bad' behaviour, Arena's success is portrayed as 'snarky'.

17 – Cher is portrayed as the "comeback Queen". More is made of her skimpy outfits than her voice. Interview footage shows her saying "I love my work", even though "the spotlight gets real, real hot" and ruins relationships. A commentator saying "Cher has defied age" is placed next to Cher saying "A real woman is never too old." [the implication being a real woman is never too old to look sexy, act sexy, have sex]

16 – Gwen Stefani was next and all I wrote was 'spunk'. I think I was referring to her looks and attitude.

15 – Barbara Streisand was introduced with a 'nose' joke and they were peppered throughout her little segment. Newton described her as trading on her unique looks and talent to become one of the world's best [looks before talent]. One commentator described her as "God's gift to drag queens everywhere." She is clearly considered not the most beautiful or sexy woman but she is variously described as "a tough cookie", "neurotic", and "talented", and she is admired for producing, directing, and starring in the film Yentl.

14 – Donna Summers is the first woman to have 5 no#1 hits in a year. A lot of discussion around her song "Love to Love You, Baby" and it's 22 simulated orgasms. [sound before language, Divas and Sex]

13 – Delta Goodrem [what??] beautiful, popular, strategic (moving from Neighbours to music career), fight with cancer, strength of character. It is suggested her 'goodness' is too good.

12 – Dolly Parton is presented with a boring focus on her breasts evidenced by numerous 'boob' jokes.



2.3.1 Selected Journal Entries 2009

11 – Liza Minelli is described as having a love of drama that extends into her personal life: alcohol and marrying gay men

10 – Janet Jackson is one of the most highly paid female artists. But the focus is on her appearance, “She looked amazing.” and the infamous ‘wardrobe malfunction’ when her breast was exposed during a show [the REAL body].

9 – Janis Joplin dies at 27 from a heroin overdose and claims a diva spot due to her ‘unique’ talent [she wasn’t beautiful either], the passion and pain in her life reflected in her voice, it’s ‘raw’ energy and the tragedy of her demise.

8 – Aretha Franklin is described as sassy before we are told she has won 18 Grammy’s and is the first woman to be inducted into the Rock’n’Roll Hall of Fame. Her ‘bad behaviour’ was to fall pregnant at 15 and again at 17 (ending her career as a gospel singer). She is described as ‘gutsy’ and commands respect [though this is also a play on her famous song of the same name].

7 – Madonna is surprisingly in 7th place (LM and I thought she would be no#1). In interview footage she says “If I didn’t have a huge ego I wouldn’t be here”. She also is recorded talking about the fact that she is a perfectionist and will always be aware of the tiniest mistake and focus on that. She is described as constantly re-inventing herself over a 30-year career. And the commentators end by tearing her down now that she’s approaching 50 [it’s interesting that at the other end of the list, Cher got some respect for pulling off getting around in skimpy costumes at the same age that Madonna is being attacked for doing the same. Is it because the commentators themselves are closer in age to Madonna?]

6 – Bert introduces number #6 by saying “Sometimes it takes balls to hold the position” [of Diva] and then goes on to introduce Elton John who is described as a “pain in the ass”, “the queen of tantrums”. One of the commentators says “When you’re that rich and talented you can get away with anything”. He is the only one on the list so far with any live footage of bad behaviour. [I also note that no mention is made of his looks or the way he dresses]

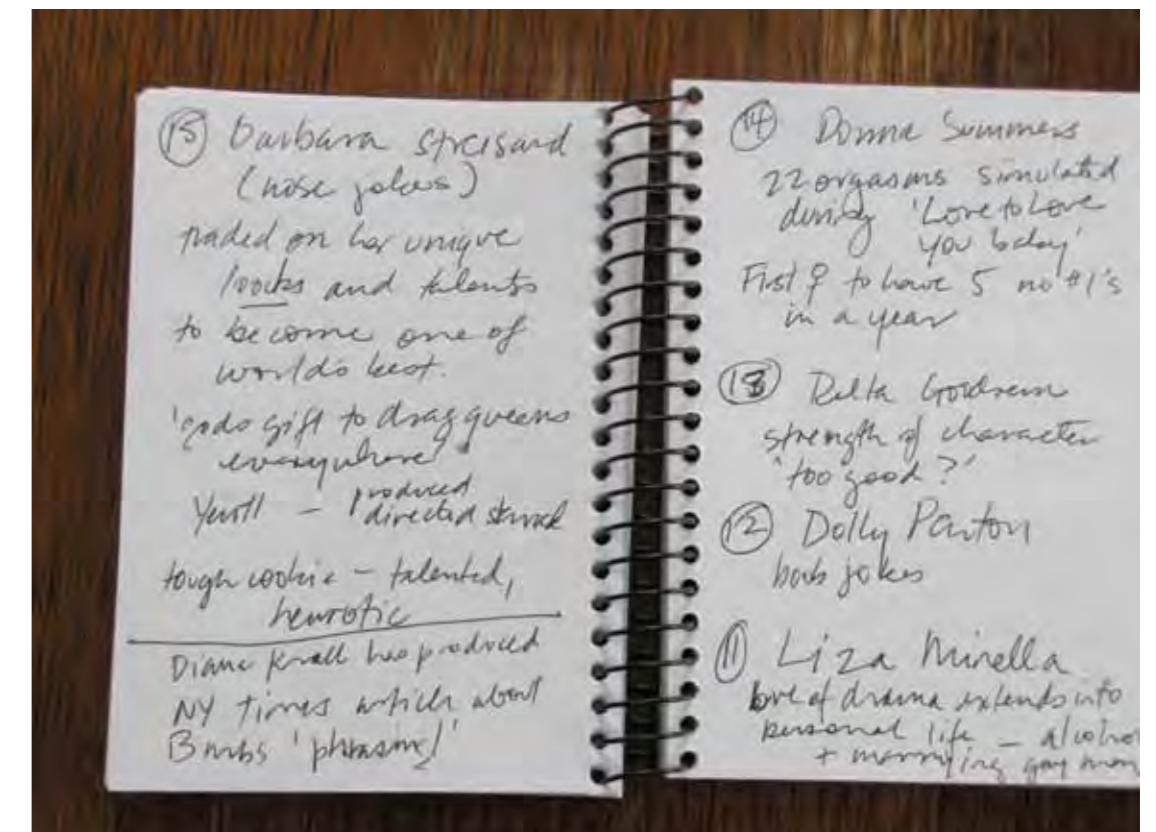
5 – Christina Aguilera is described as young, modern and fresh, another “phenomenal” voice in a petite body. But more than this it’s described as a black woman’s voice coming out of a petite blonde. [LM remarks wryly that that is what we all want, isn’t it? Then we don’t have to deal with that pesky racism].

4 – Celine Dion is described as a monster and a puppy. She has an incredibly high voice and has had huge success, particularly with the theme from The Titanic [one of the biggest romance flicks of recent years – Diva and Romance].

3 – Mariah Carey is here because of her incredible range, the ‘high’s and lows’ used to describe her life as well as her voice. It’s a rag to riches story with some scandal (she married the boss – of the record company). She has enjoyed enormous success – a number #1 hit for every year in the 90’s and over 200 million albums sold world-wide. She has had a public break-down and a comeback and wears the shortest shorts in the world.

2 – Diana Ross is described as one of the world’s sexiest women, and another one who ‘slept with the boss’ [the implication being to ‘get ahead’] because she is ambitious [read ‘conniving’] also evidenced by her moving to the ‘front’ of the Supremes and then onto a solo career.

1 – Whitney Houston! A diva that got ‘higher’ than any other. This is a reference to her crack habit, her voice is not actually higher than, say, Mariah’s. Popular, talented and a very public breakdown followed by a successful comeback. Final comment: “You can’t keep a talent like that down”.





2.3.1 Selected Journal Entries 2009

Falling to pieces/falling without losing form or integrity

There are two kinds of ‘falling’ occurring within my daily life and which impact on the research project in ways that cannot be denied. The first is a physical falling apart that involves bone degeneration and calcium overgrowth in my neck (the pain is exhausting), a tight diaphragm and tendency to hold my breath (unusually on an out-breath; I do not ‘breathe in’; there is no *inspiration*), and also a hormonal imbalance that occurs among ‘women of a certain age’, which leads to vertigo, anxiety attacks and unexpected floods of tears: I literally feel as though I am *falling apart*. I am at the edge of my pain threshold, I am at the very limit of who I thought I knew myself to be, and, holding my breath, I feel as though I am at the edge of conscious awareness, of life itself.

The second kind of falling also gives me vertigo and leaves me breathless, but is altogether a more pleasant sensation. I am falling in love. Having identified resistance to the myth of romantic love as a useful political tool, this falling takes a different form to my previous experiences, and I discover the possibility of falling without loss of integrity. Employing strategies I would have previously considered ‘un-romantic’ (making a list and checking it twice; the diva privileges her desire), I resist the impulse to fall in a way that is self-immolating, in which personal boundaries are erased. I resist saying “I love you” and having it really mean “I wonder if I am loved” (Irigaray). I resist falling in a way that takes me so far from my own centre that I rely on the unknowable other to return me to myself. The resistance is functional; it creates a tension that allows me to fall, not like a stone, but like a bird (Cixous).

Both of these ‘fallings’ inform the content of the solo performance.

Practice as a Gift of Love

In the studio I had asked myself a question: if breath and grace and choice are answers, what is the question? My immediate impulse was to burst into a song *I read something the other night about making a gift of love to the universe/Whenever something bad happens in your life*

It is a song I wrote in August 2006 after coming across this concept in a book I was reading on Maori culture (a gift from Magdalena Aoteroa when they came to our festival in 2003).

A woman sits alone in an empty space. She thinks: The performance I am making is my gift of love to the universe in response to something bad happening in my life. She listens for the feedback:

(wracked by a dry sob)

(pause)

O My Heart! O My Heart! O My Heart! O My Heart! O My Heart!

Later, in a phone conversation with Cameron, she observes that the gift I offer is the phrase “O My Heart!”

Resisting Romantic Love

I am astonishing

I am resisting romantic love

Resisting romantic love is a political act. It is useful. It gives me something to do.

I speak these words self-consciously on the studio floor. As with the phrase “I crave poetry”, identified six months prior as a key phrase, there is extreme discomfort in speaking the words out loud. I am curious about this painful self-consciousness and its relationship to the core (heart) of what I have to say poetically and philosophically. It is another six months before my articulation of this relationship in the performative paper I present at ADSA, and nine months before I am able to say that unquestioning adherence to the western myth of romantic love leads to flightless women and handless maidens.

The identification of *resisting romantic love* as a useful action first occurred in conversation with Margaret Cameron [2008]. Reflecting on the four solos I have made we identified deconstruction of romantic love as a recurrent thematic impulse [what do I mean by impulse – pulse, flow of blood] in my work. My next impulse following this identification was to use this discovery quite *literally* (Cameron on *literalness*) and to weave this phrase into my performance text. I am finally getting to the heart of things. ●



3. Blossoms

3.1 The Heart of Practice:
Second Organic Interviews 2009/10



Pulling Meaning Through Sound:
Second Interview with
Annette Tesoriero,
December 2009

This face-to-face interview was
conducted at the Falling Like A Bird
residency, Hothouse Theatre,
Albury, NSW, 2009.

1. **DA:** Maybe if I ask it in a different way: what is the core of your practice?

2.
3. ...
4.

5. **AT:** I think, I see my singing, and the work that I do around my singing, through my singing, as
6. absolutely my core. And because it is my core, because it is the part of me that is... sort of the
7. central me, that I feel is the essential me, that I, that I avoid working with it. I avoid, I avoid it! I
8. put all sorts of things, actually, in the way to avoid working in it and I look at it and I wonder if it's,
9. I wonder – sometimes the issue is: are you avoiding it because you absolutely understand that it
10. is too big for you at the moment? Are you avoiding it because you're fearful of what you'll find?
11. Are you avoiding it because the emotion the joy that you get from it is something that you're not
12. accustomed to getting and you don't feel as though you're worth that joy that you get from it?
13. Are you avoiding it because you – what was the other– are you avoiding it because you're not
14. ready for it in your life, you know, who you are as a person at that time in your life?
15. So, obviously...Now I feel like I'm ready for it!

16.
17. **DA:** So you're saying, before now, there's been times when you've not allowed yourself to really
18. fly with your practice?

19.
20. **AT:** Absolutely! I think, there have been times when I have, but then there's been other – you can
21. always look back and go "You know, I could have flown higher. I could've flown more. I could've
22. pushed harder. I could've done" – you know. But things get in the way like, you know, pleasure!

23.
24. ...
25.

26. **DA:** So what would you define as the core stuff of your art?

27.
28. **AT:** ...It's the musicality of language it's the sounds in language...for me is the thing that holds the
29. interest and then to find, locate, a meaning...Like, if I have a piece of text...Then for me it's really,
30. the interest is, I get so much out of just looking at *what are the sounds in the words?* You know?
31. I get a lot of information out of that. Not just the words but what are the words made of? And ,
32. so, I'm always thinking, you know, like you say core and heart and I immediately go French and
33. Italian, and so I'm always, I like to pull meaning through the sound of the word itself. Things like –
34. I'm always amazed when a word like feather, you know that 'fff' sound, and the voicelessness of it,
35. you know, and the 'f' is a voiceless letter. And so for me that's the – the interest for me has always
36. been in language and sound and resonance. And I don't know whether there's much else.
37. What I avoid, even though I love it to death, is putting myself in a room for half a day to just...
38. use my voice. To sing and, you know, sing and talk and - I avoid it 'cause it's – I don't know why, I
39. don't know why I do it (chuckle). It's funny isn't it?

3.1.1 Pulling Meaning Through Sound

40. **AT:** ...I think it's a sense of entitlement, that is...that is...something that...I certainly wasn't brought
41. up with and [it] certainly wasn't encouraged. And so – and the message that I always got – I don't
42. know if I've told you this before – was, my mother was a singer, so for me, well, my mother was
43. a singer and when she got married my father said "That's it. No more singing." Right? And so
44. singing – I remember my mother singing a couple of times, and the piano was in the lounge-room
45. and the music – sheet music – everything was really special, so that after my mother died, and I
46. was seven, all that stuff became sacred stuff. Sacred stuff. This notion that you get that/singing is
47. not/it's frivolous. And so, you know, my mother was expected to *not* sing and just make babies.
48. And she died at 38, so you know, what sort of thing is there that says, well, you know, how odd is
49. it that you have this woman who wants to sing, who enjoys it, loves it, but who dies at a very early
50. age? You go 'ooh look! There's a diva thing!' She is being punished, you know for this pleasure
51. that she has and this pleasure that she has by herself this autonomous pleasure by herself and
52. so she is punished because you are not meant to be able to do that, you know, your pleasure is
53. meant to be in a couple. Not by yourself. And so, you know, I don't know, I find it quite interesting
54. and so I never grew up with that entitlement thing it was always a struggle.

55.
56. **DA:** But you feel like you have that – I'm gathering from what you said before – you feel that,
57. having made some difficult choices and decisions you now feel like you are entitled and can give
58. yourself that pleasure.

59.
60. **AT:** Yeah. I guess. Yes absolutely. And so I will...continue pleasuring myself til I die now.
61. (peal of laughter)

62.
63. ...
64.

65. **DA:** How do you think about yourself and what you do?

66.
67. **AT:** (laughs)

68.
69. ...I guess it's a way of being. This 'thing' this 'art thing' this 'voice thing' this 'thing' is like being is
70. playing is doing! Is, you know, and so there's...

71.
72. ... you know it always comes back to my mother, you know that notion of voice – what that voice
73. is, what music is, what place it has in your life – and so taking it from that place, where you know it
74. has a special place because it is associated with someone who's not there – so it's associated with
75. longing and absence. Then you kind of pull that through and because you've got all that within
76. you - that longing and absence – you're working on lots of things all the time, and thinking about
77. things and I think, it's – people have thinking processes and I have a particular thinking process
78. which makes me a particular type of person but I don't know whether it makes me an artist. There
79. are lots of singers that I know that don't think the same way that I do, you know,



3.1.1 Pulling Meaning Through Sound

80. so it's got nothing to do with being a singer. And so the questions that I have and how I put
81. things together or want to put things together or want to turn things upside down to look at
82. them is more to do with my personality, I suppose, and whether you say "oh that's a personality
83. that's often seen in artists" well that's all fine – it might be often seen in mathematicians too.
84. Often seen in philosophers, you know what I mean? So I don't know if it's just the role of the artist
85. – maybe it is the role of the artist to question but not all people who call themselves artists
86.
87. **AT & DA:** Question
88.
89. ...
90.
91. **AT:** I'm also a mother, I'm also an arts manager, I'm also an education manager, you know...
92. and so, so in a sense an artist is a role and I just happened to have had – for whatever reason –
93. various roles and whether those other roles that I chose were diversionary, either consciously or
94. subconsciously, to keep me away from that other that hardest of that harder role of artist who
95. likes to question – And turn things upside down...
96.
97. **DA:** And why do you call that one harder?
98.
99. **AT:** Ahh, because I don't have a model for that, you know? I have a model for, sort of a model
100. for motherhood, and you have a model for the workforce, in some ways, but there really isn't
101. a model for being an investigative artist, you know? There really isn't that. So I think that's
102. important to understand that, and when you meet other artists, other people, other people that
103. like turning things upside down – as well as me. You go, oh good we're turning things upside
104. down – but I turn things upside down in a different way than they do – they move their bodies
105. and turn things upside down or – and I might have conceptual stuff that I like to play with and
106. then somehow stick my voice in it, around it, on it...or start with voice first...um. so I, yeah, ahh,
107. cause it's more – as opposed to a music thing it's more – like, I kind of did my music training but
108. that was, it was like, I just – I don't know what it is – I do my music training but I get more joy
109. out of, out of, um...out of doing vocal conceptual stuff rather than following a score. Following
110. a score is less pleasurable – sometimes more satisfying, you know, to do it well, but sometimes
111. I get frustrated because I want to do my own thing! I want to put my own stuff on it I want to do
112. my own thing – I want to be able to form things and change things. So I like composing but in a
113. loose way. I like the notion of composition, of bringing different, disparate things together.
114.
115. **DA:** To create your own picture. Whether that's an aural picture or a visual picture. Or both,
116. a combination. See I'd call that being an artist.
117.
118. **AT:** Being an artist. When I'm doing it I'm being an artist.
119. **DA:** Sure, sure. And being an artist doesn't mean that you're not also many many other things.
120.
121. **AT:** That's true that's true but it does, it does take a fair amount of sense of entitlement -
122.
123. **DA:** Well –
124.
125. **AT:** To say, first and foremost, I am an artist. ●



Annette Tesoriero
Falling Like A Bird July 2011 Residency
Photographer: Lisa Businovski



Longing and Reception: Second Interview with Margaret Cameron, December 2009

This face-to-face interview was also conducted at the Falling Like A Bird Hothouse residency in 2009.

The interview begins with a discussion of our morning's work in the studio: Margaret had given me instructions to put 'the push and pull' (from a movement exercise) in each word, and to work with 'microbreaths'.

Nikki Heywood joins the conversation towards the end.

1. I read Margaret something I written after our work that morning on Judith Wright's poem 'Egrets'.
2. After reading what I had written, I discovered the device was not recording, and turned it on:
- 3.
4. **MC:** Yeah, so, I wrote down some words when you were reading that. And, the microbreath
5. is a new term, and that's from/and I'm using it/and it may not even be how Helen Sharp is
6. using it. I think she talks of 'micro movement' and 'micro breath'. So that's a word that helps
7. me to understand something about...the movement of reception, when, ahh – because you
8. are in reception. Because you're receiving – simultaneously you are receiving and describing
9. or inscribing, or telling the inscription of what you are receiving in the breath. So speaking is a
10. choreography of breath. So you're in dialogue with the writer and the speaker – which is you – so
11. there are two things going on there. And the moment where you heard yourself, was, like, I don't,
12. you know – you agreed to receive. To me that was – you *agreed to receive*. At the very moment,
13. as Cixous would say, at the very moment of enunciation. You – I haven't got the quote with me
14. – but at the very moment of enunciation you heard and received at the same time. So you were
15. in – you are not a fixed being. And language always, the hard thing, the thing is language will
16. always try to *fix* you...and the speaking – So what was really interesting about the session was we
17. started with un-naming, somewhere, we un-named, I suggested un-naming the push and the pull.
18. You didn't distinguish, you didn't try or bother to name the movements, because there is really
19. no time. And the language is doing that in ways – the breath is doing that in ways that you can't
20. name...I think, something like that.
- 21.
22. ...
- 23.
24. **MC:** Was it like, well, me saying put the push and pull in each word was just a muscular act that –
- 25.
26. **DA:** To affect the breath?
- 27.
28. **MC:** To unhinge your normal fixing. So that it would put you at the risk of being un-fixed. At least,
29. that. You know. So that there might be movement. So just the fact that I was suggesting that was
30. probably – there's probably a much better way to do it because that was completely arbitrary.
31. But at least within that there's the possibility of two directions, rather than just one direction...
32. And...I think because the, because the (*wheah!*) the revelation, let's have a think about that
33. how to describe the revelation – I do know/there was like/it's strange, the place where I felt the
34. recognition, in you, of receiving and speaking at the same time, was exactly in the image of the
35. poem when she saw, in her own heart, the image of the clear dark water. So, the poem led you
36. there. It, you, you – The poem achieved itself. And you were, ah, you were, her.
37. **DA:** ... afterwards I was thinking the voice that I heard that I did not recognise was my own – it
38. was my voice but it was also her voice and that was...something. And then, but the other thing it
39. recalled for me was a moment when, outside of my practice, I experienced myself at the edge of
40. myself and did not know, had that sense of not knowing any longer, who I was.
- 41.
42. **MC:** That's very – because – the voice is so intimate. That it, ah, that's where it happens, that
43. feeling you've got, because...it's so full of education, the voice, it's just been educated out of, you
44. know –
- 45.
46. And somehow in song it achieves a freedom but in spoken word, it seems to me, really hard, and
47. it feels like all those things of 'laying bare' and stuff like that but it's actually just –
- 48.
49. Yeah but why it's so poignant, you know, a vibration like (does something wordless, soundless)
- 50.
51. **DA:** Aah. That's interesting.
- 52.
53. **MC:** Isn't it? I don't know, for me, in a way, and this is just in the context of the interview, probably,
54. for me the voice has been an incredibly, well it's been an agony. My journey in voice has been an
55. agony. Because at nine years old I was educated in elocution and given a voice that wasn't my
56. own. And so, til twenty-four, you know, even longer, I had this voice that made people dislike me,
57. made me dislike myself, you know, but also, it had inside it, just because I'd been asked to speak
58. poetry aloud, is that I think, something about the cadences of poetry, I was, feeling, them. And I
59. was copying intonation. But the journey back through that fifteen years – and I'm still doing it – it
60. wasn't until I started writing my own poetry, that I really felt that I wanted to try to speak that.
61. Then the first time I ever read a poem out loud, of mine, was in the country in Castlemaine. Yeah.
62. because that, because the two things came together then, not just the speaking out loud but I
63. had to – I gave up acting because I couldn't speak other people's words, because I'd gone too
64. far down the track of an education with my voice it was all too confusing. So I think that journey
65. of *writing* is really, really close to the journey of speaking. And then the path to hear your own
66. writing – and of course it's true that when you speak out loud you are actually writing her poem.
67. You know, as well.
- 68.
69. **DA:** In the hear and now -
- 70.
71. **MA:** Yeah you're actually writing it, inscribing it, in time and space. So I understand, I hear, I
72. understand what you're saying because of that accuracy and that weird feeling of not existing
73. because one's displaced one's – something that was holding you to some identity, because in a
74. way, it's like making love in – publicly – it's like, you know, it's like –
- 75.
76. **DA:** Yeah

3.1.2 Longing and Reception



3.1.2 Longing and Reception

77. **MC:** - it's like singing, I suppose.
78.
79. ...
80.
81. **DA:** I find it much harder to offer language in the spur of the moment.
82.
83. **MC:** But even when you say 'offer language', what if we were to say, 'to receive it'? Because you
84. started the conversation with 'you were receiving your own voice' you were receiving. And of
85. course with speaking – that's what I mean with the education – because we're always offering,
86. we're always...Communicating. It's been taught – this is our interface/this is our interface with the
87. world. So it's completely colonised...the voice is completely colonised by what you're expected
88. to do and be, and by what you *have* to do to be in the world. So to receive it yourself is...So that
89. thing of speaking aloud into the thing(?)...is your move to receive it....Cause it's the speaking
90. aloud...where it all happens. The speaking aloud engages the choreography of the breath. It's not
91. thinking aloud, it's speaking aloud.
92.
93. **DA:** It's an action.
94.
95. ...
96.
97. **MC:** So it's like – you know the imagery I'm getting are 'strings of vibration' and 'fingers of touch'.
98. That's what's going on in the talking. So that, so after our session I wrote, and I'm still trying to fix
99. it but I've read it once so I'll read it again:
100.
101. *To speak a poem aloud*
102.
103. *Caress the page*
104.
105. *Your hand upon a voice*
106.
107. *Lifting it humbly*
108.
109. *Neither shy nor –*
110.
111. *Not shy, not shamed – I'm not sure what it is but those two words are really – you know neither*
112. *being shy nor ashamed*
113.
114. (again) *To Bear Her*
115.
116. *On the pipe of breath*
117. *To a hearing, fingering the body of*
118.
119. *Her that receives this land as her own being.*
120.
121. So that's not just Judith, it's me. It's like, something about, and you know, Linklater talks about this
122. – the touch of breath, so that's...
123.
124. But it's...shame is really...yeah, something about that. It's like, I think it must be something like,
125. when, when, it's like the shame one experiences from the refusal to receive. When you sort of
126. meet that – you meet your own refusal to receive. And you just/something like that...
127.
128. [long pause – bird calls]
129.
130. [whispered] Pass it on. To pass it on. To suffer the poet. [speaking] to bear her/yeah, so it's not just
131. to bear her/to/and it's not to bear/bear her and to *bear* the poem and to *bear* oneself – I always
132. think /I think of *bear* as in to carry...to hold...But hold is tricky cause hold is/when I said 'hold' to
133. Deborah recently or reminded of that 'be-hold' exercise she said "oh 'hold' sounds like 'fixing'".
134. But it's not it's like 'to carry'...along or something – but it's interesting trying to find exact words
135. to tell something isn't it? Makes a real difference, doesn't it? And I guess that's why poetry is so
136. good to read aloud – a good poet...
137.
138. ...
139.
140. (NH enters)
141.
142. ...
143.
144. **NH:** [I'm trying to remember that phrase that you used at one point, Margaret, when you were
145. talking about that moment of receiving, of hearing yourself, but also the importance not to fix on
146. that – I don't know what the language you used but it was but it was spot on I think, not to take
147. yourself seriously, not to indulge, not to, not to let the tears/no I can't think what it was...
148.
149. **MC:** Something about handling it?
150.
151. **DA:** [intake of breath]
152.
153. **NH:** Handling?
154.
155. **MC:** It was something about receiving –



3.1.2 Longing and Reception



Margaret Cameron
Falling Like A Bird December 2010 Residency
Photographer: Lisa Businovski

156. **DA:** You said, ah, something about, you ah, you said something about longing and reception,
157.
158. **MC:** Ah yes to long and to receive what you're longing for, simultaneously
159.
160. **DA:** Describe the tears accurately and to handle it
161.
162. **MC:** To receive. The thing that's going through my mind in response to what you've said, is that
163. I've just put my hands on my own body, um, to locate [unintelligible] the autonomous breath. And
164. the/so it/I think that's very interesting, your question, how do you say I love you? Without asking...
165. If we put it in the frame of our conversation, you are/you're longing for love, and your giving of
166. love, are simultaneously received by you...and your own breath. And your handling of your own
167. breath. And it's not that different to what we talking about with speaking and the education of
168. speaking because the education of love is to give.
169.
170. And so the education of the voice is to offer. But what/it's a fucken empty gesture. To give love is
171. a very empty gesture. Because it's not like that. It's received...Yeah. And the more/no /the more/
172. to receive that experience is to love. And I think Irigaray is trying to talk about that in her later
173. books and in *The Way of Love*. And *The Way of Love*/when I was working with Helen (Sharp) on
174. the Irigaray project/we were describing it/ is not a path...And the biggest thing that comes to
175. my mind now about that is the autonomous breath and to experience to receive to/yeah/to
176. receive the/just to / put your hand on your own body...seems the simplest way to get through
177. romantic love. ●



Breathing into the Body of Culture: Second Interview with Nikki Heywood, conducted via skype in January 2010.

3.1.3 Breathing into the Body of Culture

1. **NH:** Something that I was looking at this morning was to do with the way that we keep culture
2. alive through the continual expression of it, or the expression of it. And I thought that's something
3. really worth remembering, you know, in those moments where you're wondering "Why am I
4. doing this?" you know? "Is it necessary? What would happen if I didn't do it? Would anyone
5. care?" And, yeah just that idea that, well, poetry doesn't exist unless we speak it. It doesn't, you
6. know, we need to keep breathing air into, into the body of culture. You know? We need to keep
7. reviving it or resuscitating it in some way.
- 8.
9. ...
- 10.
11. **NH:** Now the meaning thing.
- 12.
13. **DA:** Yeah, the meaning thing, the meaning thing. Maybe this goes back to my question about
14. what's at the core of things or the heart of things for you in your practice? Because I suppose
15. that's what I am trying to get to in mine – that/do you know what I mean?
- 16.
17. **NH:** Mm, mm. It's funny, isn't it? I almost equate it with – oh hang on I haven't got my video
18. on – with when my mother says to me, "Oh I don't know what I'm going to do" and I think well,
19. somewhere it's a little bit like that. What I find most interesting in performance is when people
20. are committing themselves to doing a task. And that task is actually potentially what carries
21. the meaning, not actually setting out saying "I want to make meaning" – do you know what I
22. mean? They're just doing the thing they need to do...to get to the next moment. Or, to be in the
23. moment, you know?
- 24.
25. ...
- 26.
27. (Discussion revolves around some of the researcher's insecurities regarding the making of her solo
28. and then moves back to discussing Nikki Heywood's work)
- 29.
30. **NH:** Yeah it is hard to essentialise it like that because, you know, because at this point in time, for
31. me to say what my work is, is actually quite difficult cause I'm, you know, I'm coming out of quite
32. a few years of assisting other people to make work, stepping into other people's processes quite
33. often and then trying to apply something that's meaningful for me. And I'm, you know I'm pretty
34. much at the point where I'm trying to dream through my own work and how I'll bring it to fruition.
35. And I have very similar questions to those you're engaging with, you know – *is the meaning*
36. *important here?* And I think really what I'm interested in is whether the things that I've said that
37. I'm exploring remain of interest to me. You know, is the thing that I'm trying to bite off actually
38. the thing that I want to keep chewing on? You know, is it?
39. **DA:** What's one of those things that you've bitten off that you might or might not keep
40. chewing on?
- 41.
42. **NH:** Well the main thing that I'm trying to look at working on is the idea of captivity. So when
43. I'm dreaming about what that word is or what it could be the images that I'm coming up with all
44. have some kind of relationship to captivity and the fact that, that fact that idea is strong enough
45. to actually hold a whole lot of things that come up/comes in quite random relationship but they
46. still feel like they belong to this bigger conceptual framework of captivity, makes me realise that
47. it's something that I definitely have got to explore. Like it's definitely in there and I look at the
48. history of work that I've made and that I was making in the 90s and I realise that I, actually there's
49. strong elements of the ideas of captivity in those/in those creations, but I hadn't named it. Oh
50. well – in one in particular I had sort of given it that name but I hadn't realised just how central that
51. idea was and has remained. So, you know, and that's an interesting thing: to recognise that after
52. ...eight/actually seventeen eighteen years, that I'm still essentially interested in the same stuff
53. that I started working on. And I've heard that quite a lot, that people, or sometimes artists keep
54. remaking the same work –
- 55.
56. **DA:** That might be more interesting in terms of what I'm thinking of allowing a kind of, as
57. Margaret would say somehow this third thing is created. I don't know, but anyway, my hand
58. gestures probably don't make much sense!
- 59.
60. **NH:** No no it does make sense. You know I think that's really quite a delicious idea to – how to
61. be really busy and how to be really still all at the same time? But yeah you actually need to really
62. explore busyness in task-based activity. And somewhere the stillness – given what you're talking
63. about resistance – somewhere the stillness might be found there -
- 64.
65. ...
- 66.
67. **DA:** I'm aware that we might be running out of time, Nikki, but can you recall what led you to talk
68. about that notion of riding the wave when we were talking to Margaret?
- 69.
70. **NH:** Brian Masumi
- 71.
72. **DA:** Masumi, that was it.
73. **NH:** ...the thing from Masumi was really to do with consciousness of being and – Well it's such



3.1.3 Breathing into the Body of Culture

74. a fabulous concept and it's almost sort of zen-like because it is about registering that in each
75. moment, in each breath that we take that we're constantly on the edge of the unknown. You
76. know, facing as though, you know we're going in a particular direction, but you look at the fact
77. that there are constantly waves breaking so there's always the edge of another wave, there's
78. always [unintelligible] in a wave...if you're using the analogy you can either go underwater and
79. be drowning in or or you can be on the edge of it moving just ahead of it. And I think that's – in
80. performance that's the sort of consciousness, that's achievable – not easy but achievable. And
81. it even goes back to that thing Margaret was talking about playing shape. You know, it's great
82. to locate that place in yourself where the tears originate and it changes the way you/it changes
83. the quality of your voice or where you're speaking from, but once – you're job as an artist or as a
84. performer is observe what that is and to actually, you now that's your tool, that becomes your tool
85. – to be able to master that taking on of that shape. You know, doing the old Stanislavski method
86. thing of going into the feeling, not that – I don't really think that's what Stanislavski was on about
87. but you know!
88.
89. **DA:** Yeah yeah it is that thing of – and if you play the shape, you create the form, you create
90. the structure both physical and orally so you recreate what your breath was doing, you recreate
91. the voice going high here or low there, you recreate the physical resistances and whatever that
92. were in the body, and then, and then it reads, I guess. And sometimes the feeling will flow again
93. through that form, through that shape, but not always. And I think that –
94.
95. **NH:** Sometimes it won't flow for you but it will flow for the audience... I've just got this beautiful
96. little quote sitting here from Margaret: "If speaking is a choreography of breath" and in a way
97. that's what we're talking about – improvising to the point where you can create a choreography
98. that you can repeat, and you can speak again into that shape or choreography of breath. And
99. of course, you know, every time you're doing it you're doing it afresh – you have to find it again.
100. And it goes right back to what we were talking about in the beginning: Breathing life into the
101. corpse of Culture you have to...you have to invest the energy into it you have to find the pathway
102. to it...O it's Wonderful!
103.
104. [laughter] ●



Nikki Heywood
Falling Like A Bird June 2010 Residency
Photographer: Lisa Businovski

3.2 Ruptured by Breath:

Third work-in-progress showing,
February, 2010

3.2.1 3-Minute work-in-progress DVD

This brief DVD captures highlights of the work-in-progress of *No Door On Her Mouth* made at The Blue Room Theatre as part of the Magdalena Perth Workshop Festival, February, 2010



No Door On Her Mouth
A work-in-progress

by Dawn Albinger
2010 Magdalena Perth
Workshop Festival
Blue Room Theatre, Perth



Helen Sharp's remarkable body of work cannot be comprehensively received nor integrated through one four-day encounter. Following are merest traces of our encounter.

3.2.2 Perceptible Breath Encounter with Helen Sharp

Notes from my encounter with Helen Sharp written on the butcher's paper during the work as they arose:

- Am 'I' the holding in my belly?
- The forms are to be infiltrated by pleasure;
- Q: how do I make room? Claim space? A: Well, just enjoy yourself....and attend. The breath is the guide rope. A companion.
- "The experience of breath keeps returning me to myself" (Julie Robson);
- There is no path, but in the breath encounter there is a way;
- The invitation to find a way that doesn't hurt has an emotional charge...there's a lot of breath in that (...and a lot of feminism);
- This is your country;
- An invitation to subtlety, subtleness;
- Animated surrender;
- Breath practice can become the practice of the daily

Helen made conceptual offers:

1. Invite being carried.
2. I let the breath come, I let it go, and wait for it to return of its own accord.

And there was a pre-existing list on her paper that she referenced from time to time:

3. To breathe with the whole body.
4. Favourable tension (eutony).
5. Spherical space.
6. Resonating.
7. A sense of the whole.
8. Breath out of movement; movement out of breath.
9. Dimensionality.
10. Inhale, exhale, pause

In my journal I wrote:

THE WORK IS STARTING TO BREATHE. I AM THE WORK. I AM BREATHING. ●



“...the more I have allowed my physiology to inform the practice, the deeper I have been led into places of stillness and silence” Dawn Albinger

I have spent the past two-and-a-half years of studio practice attempting to engage with a sense of being divested of cultural artefacts in order to attempt to arrive at a point of conception, as close as possible, to the Diva as unbounded, authentic, feminist performer. ¹

The presentation of the work-in-progress at the Magdalena Perth Workshop Festival reflected this un-masking of the Diva, this stripping back and stripping bare, in its bare staging, simple costuming, and seeming lack of ‘story’ or of clear contextualisation of the material: there were few ‘cognitive hooks’ for the audience to cling to. It was the least coherent of my work-in-progress showings to date and yet, in surrendering to an intellectual inability to get to the heart of things, a breakthrough occurred, and a core revealed. In an extended pause between the line, “It’s me or your soul, he says: Choose” and the line that follows, “And so you choose your own soul”; and, amplified, as Cameron might say, by an audience of ‘many me’s’, I heard an entire cultural history of human beings entertaining self-limiting choices. I had come full circle from my question about how [some] women participate or collude in their own oppression or voicelessness to an answer that resounded in the pause between the question and the response that, on the surface of things, appears to be a ‘no-brainer’: And so you choose your own soul. I will return to this extended pause and the supposedly ‘no-brainer’ response shortly, but first I will discuss further the relationship between this ‘stripped back’ showing and the un-masking of the Diva.

Originally a reference to the Handless Maiden myth, the choice of simple white under-garments for costuming in this iteration of the work assumed a greater significance for its refusal of a key Diva attribute: her carefully constructed appearance. In *The Queens’ Throat*, Wayne Koestenbaum devotes an entire chapter to codes of Diva conduct in which he usefully identifies and exposes certain behaviours, attitudes, and perceptions (both a diva’s perception of herself, and other’s perceptions of her), events or experiences (vocal crises, comebacks), aesthetic choices (such as gowns) and choice of companions (dogs, ‘buffers’, fans, royalty), as being part of an elaborate code of female behaviour. He concludes that “Diva conduct...has enormous power to dramatize the problematic of self-expression” (1993, p. 133) and mimicking the diva is a positive act of self invention, “– of pretending, inside, to be divine – to help the stigmatized self imagine it is received, believed, and adored” (1993, p. 133). A fan of fabulous frocks, I was initially seduced by the possibility that a feminist theatre praxis might likewise benefit by mimicking the diva’s elaborate code of female behaviour. But I would now argue that simple mimicry is more likely to reinforce a patriarchal society’s perception of an ideal and fatally constructed femininity, and that, in order to receive herself, the feminist practitioner (and philosophical subject) must first divest herself of all her cultural artefacts or labels.

3.2.3 Stripped Bare

So the frock is ditched and the performer exposed. This choice draws attention to the incontrovertible physical presence of the performer: her [my] body is very real, very present, and very fragile. And this “weeping, leaking, breathing vessel”² cannot be separated from the process of thinking and meaning-making that has occurred, led by studio praxis. As a performer my preference has always been for the extreme gesture: vocal and physical. Driven by a desire to give expression to and celebrate my too-muchness (too big, too loud, too strong, too emotional), I have developed a style of performance that is often described as ‘cartoon’, both for this quality of extremity, but also for the line between humour and pathos this allows me to navigate. The dovetailing of this investigation of the diva icon with beginning a yoga practice further led me to reflect on the desirability of developing a strong physical and philosophical core. I intuited a relationship between the two and assumed that developing physical strength would lead to a stronger sense of self as philosophical subject. Earlier works-in-progress reflected this as I adopted strong shapes and physical stances – even speaking whilst literally standing on my own two hands in a hand-stand. However, the more I have allowed my physiology to inform the practice, the deeper I have been led into places of stillness and silence. This once-strong body registers injury and aging, loss, abandonment, and vulnerability. This body, clothed in thin white fabric, is clearly biologically female. But stillness and silence have led to a focus on perceptible breath, and, as in many eastern traditions, to a stripping of the cultural labels that attend female biology. In positioning the Diva as an icon of perfection, not of femininity, but of the female philosophical subject in practice, I approach the Diva as pure form, as a boundless horizon (an event horizon?), and physiology, spirituality, theatre practice and philosophy come into some kind of alignment.

Dawn Albinger Journal Notes, June 2010. ●

¹ In conversation with supervisor, 24 February, 2010.

² Line from the performance text.

3.3 Falling Apart:

Selected Journal entries 2010



Falling Apart: Selected 2010 Journal Entries



6 January, 2010

Yesterday Nikki said, "Maybe the task is to describe the threshold space [the space of muteness, silences, cups of tea, occasional words, scraps of song, tears] exactly."

7 May, 2010

Inland by Chase Twichell

Above the blond prairies,
the sky is all color and water.
The future moves
from one part to another.

This is a note
in a tender sequence
that I call love,
trying to include you,
but it is not love.
It is music, or time.

To explain the pleasure I take
in loneliness, I speak of privacy,
but privacy is the house around it.
You could look inside,
as through a neighbor's window
at night, not as a spy
but curious and friendly.
You might think
it was a still life you saw.

Somewhere, the ocean
crashes back and forth
like so much broken glass,
but nothing breaks.
Against itself,
it is quite powerless.

Irises have rooted
all along the fence,
and the barbed berry-vines
gone haywire.

Unpruned and broken,
the abandoned orchard
reverts to the smaller,
harder fruits, wormy and tart.
In the stippled shade,
the fallen pears move
with the soft bodies of wasps,
and cows breathe in
the licorice silage.

It is silent
where the future is.
No longer needed there,
love is folded away in a drawer
like something newly washed.
In the window,
the color of the pears intensifies,
and the fern's sporadic dust
darkens the keys of the piano.

Clouds containing light
spill out my sadness.
They have no sadness of their own.

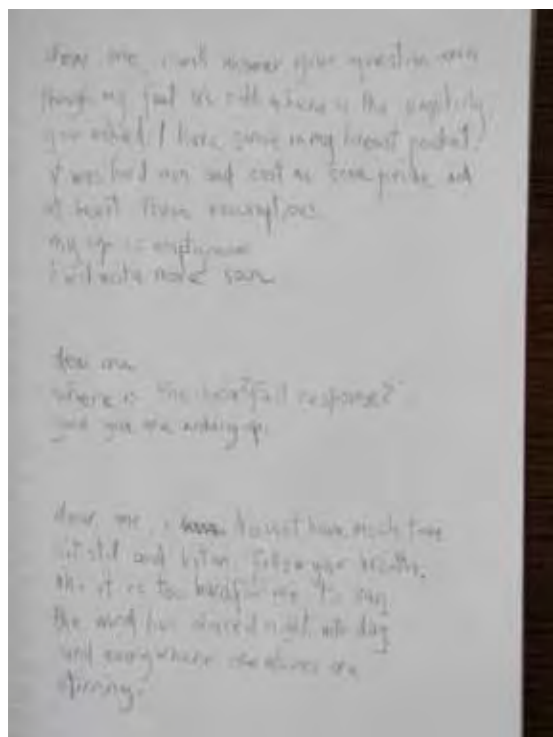
The timeless trash of the sea
means nothing to me—
its roaring descant,
its multiple concussions.
I love painting more than poetry.

I read this (Chase Twichell poem) out loud. Did I receive the poet or myself?
tears, unbidden, in my throat

3.3.1 Falling Apart



3.3.1 Falling Apart



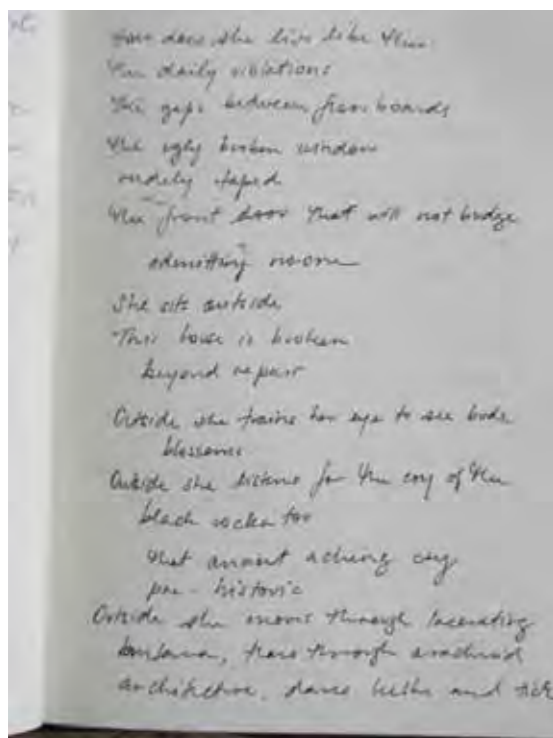
I was saying the words 'all along the fence' and receiving at once
the crashing ocean
and the memory of standing in a summer cornfield. I was seven.

I was saying the words 'spill out my sadness' and receiving
the crashing ocean,
the summer sky in Iowa,
the clouds today.

and the pears!

time collapsing
everything already happening
all seasons
all solitude
all invitations

this was an email I wrote to m after reading Chase Twichell's poem aloud. M wrote back:
'yes yes yes'



10 August, 2010

"...falling apart is a necessary part of the journey...It is an inevitable part of entering through the gate into the larger being."

"...falling apart is a deeply somatic experience...What falls apart is not our body...The only thing that falls apart is our mind or, more specifically, what we typically think about everything, all our concepts of "me" and "the world"."

Reginald A Ray, *Touching Enlightenment: Finding realisation in the body*. (Sounds True Inc, Boulder, Colorado, 2008) p187.

The process of 'thinking' this morning has led me to link the somatic experience of 'falling apart' with 'being on the threshold' (land/sea; country/world; self/not-self) – both images from the February work-in-progress showing at the Blue Room.

The woman 'falling apart' is on the threshold of entering the orchard, the place of reception. But it is not a linear, directional journey. She is, at once, the woman resisting, the woman falling apart, the woman entering, the woman receiving. Time and space are immaterial. If our job as performers is to make the immaterial material (Cameron)...how do we do this without 'fixing' meaning...

12 August, 2010

... written in response to rediscovering the 'chrysalid manifesto and the question: where's the simplicity? Where's the simple heart-felt response...

dear one, I will answer your question even though my feet are cold. Where is the simplicity, you asked. I have some in my breast pocket. It was hard won and cost me some pride and three assumptions. My (tea)cup is empty now. I will write more soon.

dear one,
where is the heartfelt response?
good. you are waking up.

dear one, i do not have much time. sit still and listen. follow your breath.
ah. it is too hard for me to say.
the wind has chased the night into day
and everywhere creatures are stirring.

dear one,
I have sharpened my pencil.
I agree.
You are too precious.

dear one,
i apologise. you are young and still hoping
the pain will end.
it is possible to dull the keen blade
but then all will be grey.
receive.
attend.
you are so loud in your seeking...
where is the simplicity, you asked
it is in the receiving
and it is anything but simple.



3.3.1 Falling Apart

26 August

...When all is said and done
Will you remember:
You were the one who raised her fist

When all is said and done
Life goes on

Every crease enfolding
Unfolding
A Promise
A Breath

Pared back,
succulent, glistening

Flesh removed,
All that is left to you
Of you
Is glossy blackness
Mute
Still
Pressed down
Buried

What if it were possible to make the tiniest gesture towards warmth?

What if
Knowing your own capacity for violence
You made a gift of love to the universe?

29 August

Information for Sam:

IMAGE WORLD

Teapot – personal domestic ordinary life
happening while one is living ordinary life
cherished object, comfort, nourishment
internal place of residing, container, pot, well
iconic

Opening doors and windows

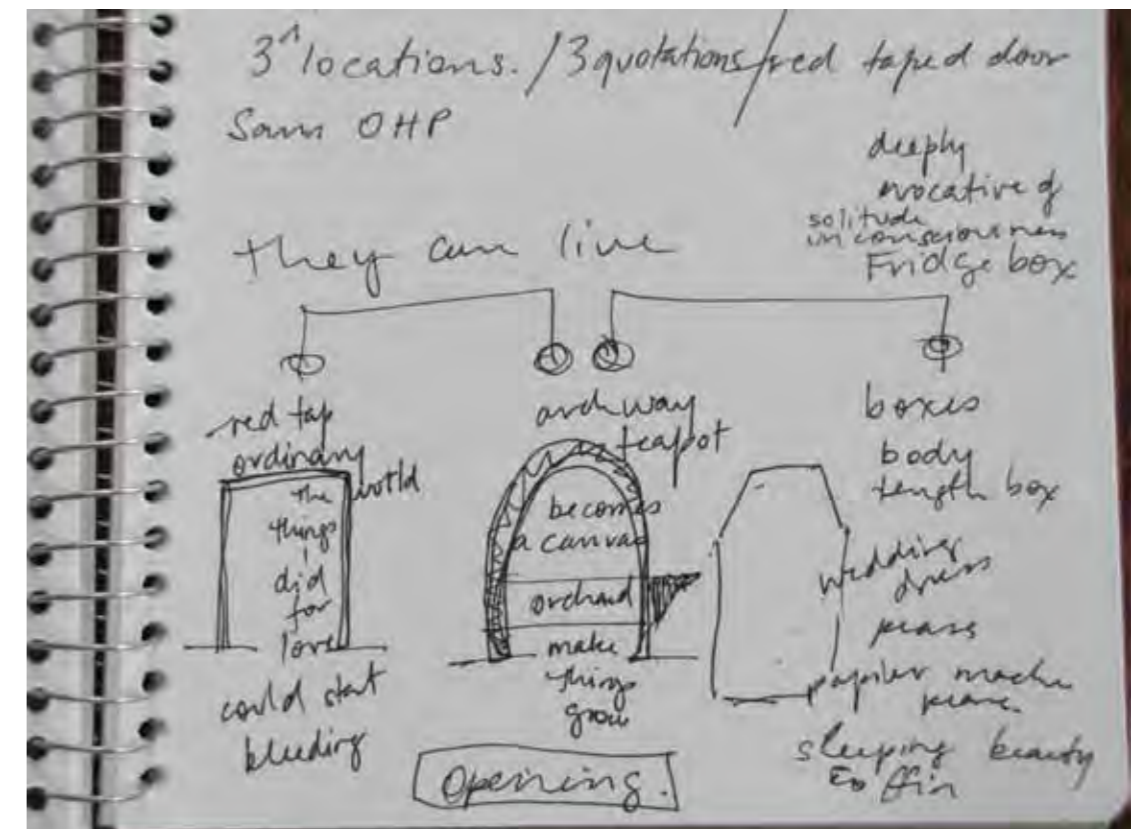
Garden Arch

Blood, Handprints, bleeding handprints

Multiplying pears

Planning to hang pears in the windows, clean, tribute to Modjeska

Referring to the cultural corpus, to women, and also to what women might receive. ●





4. Fruit

4.1 No Door On Her Mouth

First season, Perth Blue Room 2010

4.1.1 No Door On Her Mouth Programme

‘we still do not know how to love ourselves with respect and in reciprocity here and now’ – LUCE IRIGARAY

She will answer your questions with questions. She will ask *Are you lonely?* and *Have you cried, my dear?*

She cannot un-know what she knows and what she knows has cost her some pride and three assumptions. The first assumption is that there is an answer other than the one forming inside her (you), desiring reception. The second is that it is somehow easy to speak. The third assumption is that she is doing this for anyone else.

Passing back and forth across multiple thresholds (conceptual, perceptual, emotional, somatic); she is falling through a thousand openings. Spaces enfold-unfold within her waiting. Muted, she is holding the weight of all sadnesses. Dissolving and resolving she falls too often, hesitates too long, clings too hard. Until the returning inhalation reveals the intimate kernel of *diva voce* and she gives audience to herself. And once received, there exists the possibility of being believed and adored; there exists the possibility of a feminine divine.

The Dark Garden: the refusal to hear what one is saying, the refusal to say what one is saying; it is the denial of breath, the braced inability to receive oneself.

The Crossing: vertigo, nausea and lassitude are experienced when, passing beyond known contours, the coherent self dissolves in the space between the exhalation and the returning inspiration.

The Orchard: the incoherent self is received and nourished. Understanding silence, here it is possible to tell of dark gardens and desert crossings. To tell it exactly. And to let it go.

– Dawn Albinger

*pray with me
not on your knees, my dear
unless your desire is kneeling*

‘an opera inhabits me’ – HÉLÈNE CIXOUS

This work has been developed over three years as the practical component of a practice-led Contemporary Performance PhD through Edith Cowan University. It evolved from personal and social questions of how some women collude in their own oppression and silence, and of the human capacity to make self-limiting choices.

For companions on this journey I chose (or was chosen by) the *Diva* – icon of unbridled, expressive womanhood – and the *Handless Maiden* of medieval myth who, mute and maimed, stumbles into a pear orchard to be nourished by trees bending down their boughs. These two have led me into spaces of silence, stillness, where I begin to audience my own *diva voce* and acknowledge a deep craving for poetry. In dialogue with Margaret Cameron I have stripped words to their bones, making palpable conditions of “beyondness and withinness” (Mark Strand)

This work is also in dialogue with a number of writers, philosophers and poets. Five that have been directly referenced in the written score are Ann Carson, Simone de Beauviour, Hélène Cixous, Adrienne Rich and Mary Oliver.



“Albinger is an accomplished and empathetic performer”

– JONATHAN MARSHALL, REAL TIME

Dawn Albinger is a deviser, performer, vocalist, writer & producer. She is currently undertaking a PhD at the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, Edith Cowan University. Her doctoral studies are centred on the *Diva* icon & her usefulness (or otherwise) to a feminist theatre practice & have led to explorations of beautiful and grotesque sounds and an excavation of the western myth of romantic love. Her experience in collaboration is augmented with a history of solo performances that are semi-autobiographical, exploring the edges between personal and cultural voices. Solo and group works have been produced nationally and internationally. In 2003 she was the artistic director of the inaugural *Magdalena Australia Festival* (Brisbane Powerhouse). Between 2000 and 2007 she initiated and was a member of *sacredCOW*, an award-winning ensemble devoted to original performance. In 2003 was awarded a *Matilda Special Commendation* for the *Magdalena Australia Festival* & her performance in *The Quivering*.

Earlier solo works are *the chrysalid* (1997), *ruthless* (1999), and *heroin(e)* (2007).

I would particularly like to acknowledge key individuals and networks that have supported the development of this work:

Margaret Cameron, Nikki Heywood, Annette Tessoriero, Dr Julie Robson, Dr Leekie Hopkins, The *Magdalena Talks Back* reading group, The *Magdalena Project* (particularly Jill Greenhalgh and Julia Varley), Eugenio Barba, *Magdalena Perth*, Helen Sharp, Suzon Fuks, Teresa Izzard, Dr Leah Mercer and the *Falling Like A Bird* ensemble www.fallinglikeabird.com

I would also like to thank Adrienne Barba at *bird* www.birdstudios.com.au, Edith Cowan University, The *Judith Wright Centre of Contemporary Arts*, The *Blue Room*, Grant Capriotti at *MuseBureau*, Dev Prem, Mette, Jess and Josephine and the thirteen circles of “*Spirit of Woman*” www.highspiritsretreat.com.au

And my beloved H.

Ladyfinger: A creative partnership in contemporary performance, production and research.



4.1.1 No Door On Her Mouth Programme

Dramaturgy as Perceptual Discourse

Here in the orchard, will she remain forever in a paradigm of wanting what is readily hers? But the bending arms of language accept her.

Because our ears are ripe for understanding, we speak to understand, not store each moment away, toward a future that will not occur, but 'write' it—saying words aloud. And in this saying aloud being is articulated between us—until words become language. We do not overlook our hearing, nor hold against a capacity to perceive the audible ... my self is not inaudible Through saying I hear and through (y)our ear I hear more what I hear—becoming exact and telling—becoming (a) telling. Each presence is amplified by listening and as listening is amplified—sometimes you hear what I do not. And in hearing you hear I cannot un-hear our hearing.

For we are listening toward each other, encouraged by

each receptive body to pick the audible fruit of meaning. Our ears drop down, strung as droplets on the sagging arms of time, hanging ready in the air for a picking that delivers nourishment, value and understanding. And when dropping fruit of times own will, it is because our listening ears have ripened things so that they fall full upon the telling earth between us, on the ground where we stand ... these fruits of words made of flesh are full of flesh for they are my being articulated. In listening that listens I bend toward an understanding of this—being articulated. To be in the word and in the world without being pronounced by it and to discover language in this context is also to recover it.

And so bowing toward each other, we receive our own ears. Each giving of receiving we are, through self-regard, teacher and student both, to the occasion of this audience.

And in receiving what we are giving—our giving in this discourse is ours to receive. But let us not forget that there are other sensibiles, for if we do not understand our hearing, we may nose it and smell the smell of it. And let us not imagine that we need to understand that—in the procession of thinking—the fruits become what becomes and what becomes, becomes ripe in every sense that is not sensible but full of sense and becoming apparent it falls as insight.

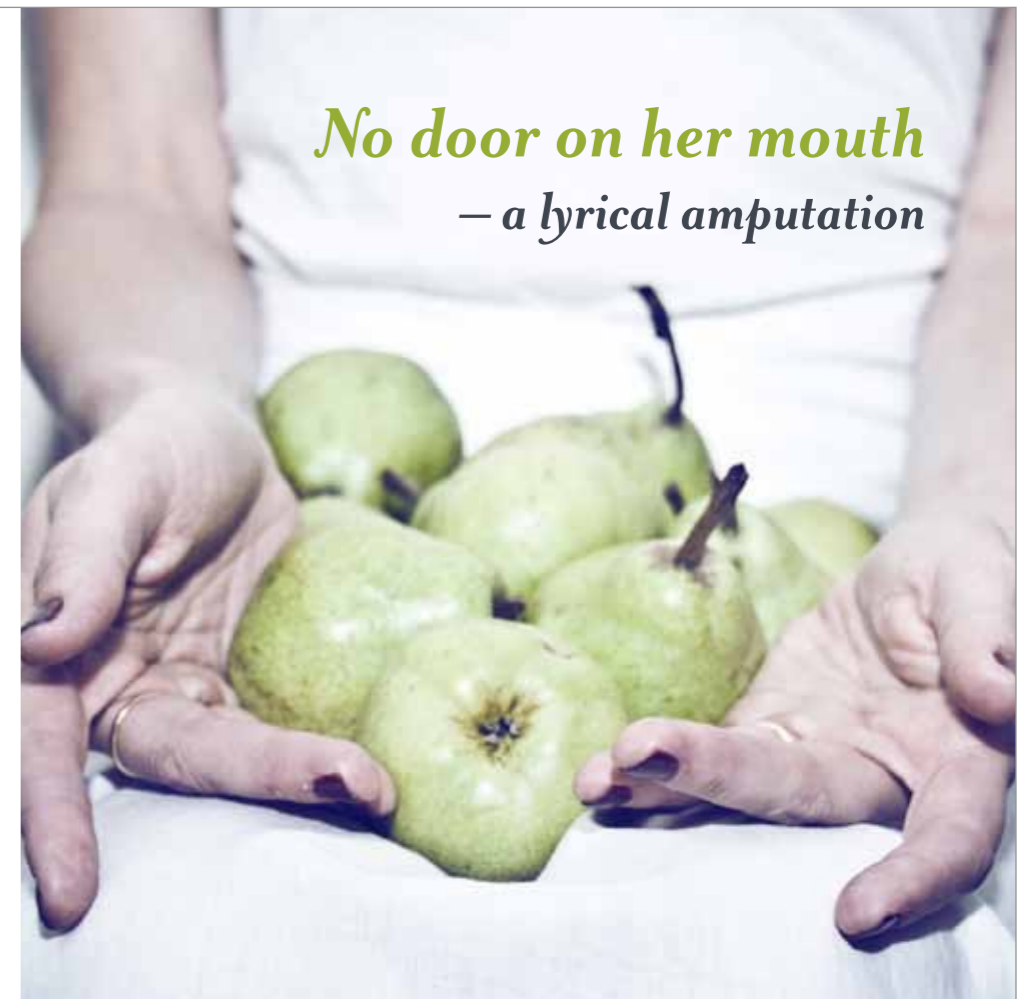
A methodology centered on propositions of self-reception, giving and receiving audience and hearing oneself hear, develop psychoanalytic, philosophic, somatic and perceptual practices that enunciate the central dramaturgy I pose to your work through my own.

—Margaret Cameron
September 2010

Dawn Albinger
Writer/Performer
Margaret Cameron
Collaborative Director and Dramaturg
Sam James
Video Artist
Geoff Squires
Lighting Design
Alice Hatton
Stage Manager
Joe Lui
Technical Support
Music
Original music by Linsey Pollak and Dawn Albinger
Pacini, Persiani and Bellini as recorded by Cecilia Bartoli



Photos by Lisa Businovski



*No door on her mouth
— a lyrical amputation*

A ladyfinger production

No Door On Her Mouth is assisted by the Judith Wright Centre's Fresh Ground artist-in-residence initiative, made possible through Arts QLD.

JUDITH WRIGHT CENTRE OF CONTEMPORARY ARTS



4.2 Lascietemi Aprire (let me open)

No Door On Her Mouth - a lyrical amputation
at the Magdalena@25 Festival, 2011



4.2.1 Legacy: Magdalena@25 Festival Programme

WELCOME

THE MAGDALENA PROJECT @25

When the Magdalena began in Cardiff in 1986 it would have been impossible to imagine that it might continue to exist a quarter of a century later, in the process shifting its focus from Wales to become truly international with potent manifestations in many different countries.

Twenty-five years is simultaneously a significant period of time and the blink of an eye. In conceiving this celebration we are somehow holding both these views simultaneously – honouring what has been achieved and the women who have achieved it, whilst asking what meaning the Magdalena has in the 21st century and whether it will survive longer than the original generation of women who initiated the Project and have been the prime movers in keeping it alive.

Hence our title: Legacy and Challenge. To assist the former we are launching a book which reflects and records aspects of the Project's history; in tandem we have a new website which uses the technology at our disposal to move us towards the future. This duality can also be seen in the theatre on show, where in addition to fully realised performances, there is an unusual amount of work in progress – signalling the strong desire to continue to make and share work which may be the most profound motivation for the Magdalena's continued existence.

We hope that the week's meetings and discussions, both formal and informal, will help us to evaluate what has been and identify what needs to be; that the performances will be provocative and the workshops instructive; but, most importantly, we want this to be an occasion for exchange, excitement, inspiration and friendship. We are proud to be able to host so many extraordinary women who have travelled so far to celebrate this milestone together.

THE 25 YEARS

- 2011 Legacy & Challenge · Magdalena@25** · Cardiff, Wales
7 Caminos Teatrales with Magdalena · Guanajuato, Mexico
Magdalena Sin Fronteras III · Santa Clara, Cuba
- 2010 II Festival Internacional de Teatro Cali** · Colombia
MagFest · Torino, Italy
Solos Fértels · Brasília, Brazil
Vértices Brasil · Florianópolis, Brazil
Magdalena Perth · Australia
- 2009 Transit VI - Women on Periphery** · Holstebro, Denmark
MagFest · Pescara, Italy
Magdalena Aotearoa Gathering · Wellington, New Zealand
Recharge: The Gathering · Wellington, New Zealand
- 2008 Vértice Brasil** · Florianópolis, Brazil
Magdalena Aotearoa Gathering · Wellington, New Zealand
Magdalena Sin Fronteras II · Santa Clara, Cuba
Magdalena Gathering · Brisbane, Australia
- 2007 Piezas Conectadas** · Barcelona, Spain
Magdalena Aotearoa Gathering · Wellington, New Zealand
The Way of Magdalena – Chronicle of the first 10 years of the Magdalena Project – Chris Fry, Open Page Publications
Transit V - Stories to be Told · Holstebro, Denmark
- 2006 Magdalena Antígona** · Bogotá, Colombia and Lima, Peru
Magdalena Singapore
- 2005 Magdalena USA** · Providence, Rhode Island
Magdalena Sin Fronteras · Santa Clara, Cuba
- 2004 Transit IV - Roots in Transit** · Holstebro, Denmark
- 2003 Magdalena Latina** · Buenos Aires, Argentina
Magdalena Australia - Women - Theatre - Travelling · Brisbane, Australia
- 2002 Magdalena Pacifica** · Bogotá and Cali, Colombia
- 2001 Transit III - Women - Theatre - Generation** · Holstebro, Denmark
- 1999 The Br/leeding Ground** · Cardiff, Wales
Magdalena 2nd Generación · Buenos Aires, Argentina
Magdalena Aotearoa · Wellington and Paekakariki, Aotearoa/New Zealand
- 1998 Presence and the Actor** · Llangrannog, Wales
Raw Visions · Cardiff, Wales
Performing Words · Rhayader, Wales
- 1997 Transit II - Women - Theatre - Politics** · Holstebro, Denmark
Bridges Back to the Roots · Wuppertal, Germany
Performing Words · Rhayader, Wales
Raw Visions II · Swansea, Wales
- 1996 The Open Page** · Launch of annual journal · 13 issues thereafter
Women of Latin America meetings · Argentina
- 1995 The Mothers of Invention** · Cardiff, Wales
- 1994 Magdalena '94** · Cardiff, Wales
- 1993 Raw Visions** · Cardiff, Wales
Women of Latin America collaborative meetings · Colombia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Uruguay
- 1992 Transit I - Directors and the Dynamic Patterns of Theatre Groups** · Holstebro, Denmark
Canu o Brofiad (Voices of Experience) · Aberystwyth, Wales
- 1991 V-Lines** · Cardiff, Wales
Woman - The Comic Soul · Aarhus, Denmark
Festival Voix de Femmes · Liege, Belgium
Unter Wasser Fliegen (Flying Under Water) · Wuppertal, Germany
- 1990 Love and the Longing to Survive** · Cardiff, Wales
Songs Through Silence · Aradeo, Italy
International Advisory Group · First meeting - annual meetings thereafter, across Europe
A Step Outside · Bristol, England
The Magdalena Grapevine · First newsletter published, three times annually thereafter until 1999
- 1988 Magdalena - International Festival of Voice** · Cardiff, Wales
A Room of One's Own · Porsgrunn, Norway
The Magdalena Experience · Book on the early history of the Magdalena Project, published · Susan Bassnett, Berg Press
The Way of Magdalena · Liege, Belgium
Process - the Devising of Original Material · Cardiff, Wales
- 1988 Women of Latin America** · First collaborative meetings · Peru, Colombia, Uruguay
Write On · Cardiff, Wales
Mothers, Children and Theatre · Aradeo, Italy
- 1987 A Woman's Language in Theatre? 2** · Cardiff, Wales
Siren Voice · Holstebro, Denmark
A Woman's Language in Theatre? 1 · Cardiff, Wales
International Research Project · Holstebro, Denmark
- 1986 Magdalena '86** · First International Festival of Women in Contemporary Theatre · Cardiff, Wales
- 1983 Birth of the idea** · Trevignano, Italy





4.2.1 Legacy: Magdalena@25 Festival Programme

THE PROGRAMME

TUESDAY 16 AUGUST

15.00 Foyer
ARRIVALS and REGISTRATION

17.00 Theatre
OPENING and WELCOME
with Susan Bassnett
BOOK & WEBSITE LAUNCH

19.00 Theatre
PERFORMANCE
THE THREAT OF SILENCE
Dir: Jill Greenhalgh (Wales) with Eddie Ladd and Nicola Thomas

20.00 DINNER

21.30 Theatre
PERFORMANCE
DREAM THROUGH YOUR SINGING MOUTH
Helen Chadwick (England)

WEDNESDAY 17 AUGUST

08.00 Salem
WAKEUP-WARMUP
Helen Chadwick - voice

09.00 WORKSHOPS
Lloft
1. Deborah Hunt (Puerto Rico)
SWAS
2. Gabriella Sacco (Italy)
Studio
3. Roxana Piñeda (Cuba)
Common
4. Vanessa Gilbert (USA)
Salem
5. Eddie Ladd (Wales)

09.00 Media Space
Talkshop
Open Dialogues, Reflections and Writings.
Facilitator Fran Medley (Wales).

12.00 Cinema
MagNet
Curated by Helen Varley Jamieson (New Zealand) and Valentina Tibaldi (Italy)
Daily online events connecting with artists worldwide and opportunities to hear festival artists speak about their work.

13.00 LUNCH

14.00 Cinema
CONFERENCE
THE SOLIDARITY OF RIGOUR
Julia Varley (Denmark), Jill Greenhalgh, Geddy Aniksdal (Norway), Anna Zubrzycki (Poland), Teresa Ralli (Peru)
Chair: Gilly Adams (Wales)

15.45 BREAK

16.00 Studio
WORK DEMONSTRATION
CONFESSIONS
Ana Correa (Peru)

18.00 Theatre
WORK IN PROGRESS
IF SILENCE KNEW
Cristina Castrillo (Switzerland/Argentina)

18.45 DINNER

20.00 Studio
WORK IN PROGRESS
TIERRA DE FUEGO
Carolina Pizarro (Chile)

21.30 Theatre
PERFORMANCE
THE PACKAGE
Deborah Hunt

THURSDAY 18 AUGUST

08.00 Salem
WAKEUP-WARMUP
Anna Zubrzycki - voice

09.00 WORKSHOPS
Lloft
1. Deborah Hunt
SWAS
2. Gabriella Sacco
Dance Studio
3. Maria Porter (USA)
Common
4. Sanja Krsmanovic Tasic (Serbia)
Salem
5. Eddie Ladd

09.00 Media Space
TALKSHOP
Open Dialogues, Reflections and Writings.
PLUS Helen Chadwick and Kordula Lobeck (Germany) talk about their work

12.00 1st Space
MagNet
Guided tour of the new Magdalena Project web site: learn how to register, and what you can do on the web site as a registered user.

12.30 Cinema
BOOK PRESENTATION
ON TIPTOE A SANTA CLARA
Selene D'Agostino (Italy)

13.00 LUNCH

14.00 Cinema
CONFERENCE
THE MAGDALENA AND LATIN AMERICA
Roxana Piñeda - Magdalena Sin
Fronteras (Cuba)
Pilar Restrepo - Magdalena Pacifica (Colombia)
Ana Correa - Yuyachkani (Peru)
Ana Woolf - Magdalena Segundo Generación (Argentina)
Luciana Martuchelli - Solos Fértéis (Brazil)
Grethe Knudsen and Katarina Barbosa Blad - Magdalena Norway
Chair: Marisa Naspolini - Vértice Brazil

16.00 BREAK

16.30 Theatre
WORK DEMONSTRATION
'DISMANTLING 'ANTIGONE'
Teresa Ralli

17.30 Studio
SPECIAL EVENT
THE GARDEN OF EPICURUS
Grenland Friteater (Norway)

18.45 DINNER

20.00 Theatre
WORK IN PROGRESS
BLOSSOM
Bruna Gusberti (Switzerland)

21.00 Theatre
WORK IN PROGRESS
HOJAS DE PAPEL VOLANDO (LEAVES OF PAPER, FLYING)
Roxana Piñeda

22.00 Studio
PERFORMANCE
NO DOOR ON HER MOUTH
Dawn Albinger (Australia)

FRIDAY 19 AUGUST

08.00 Salem
WAKEUP-WARMUP
Roxana Piñeda - physical

09.00 WORKSHOPS
Lloft
1. Deborah Hunt
SWAS
2. Gabriella Sacco
Studio
3. Anne Erichsen and Kjesti Høgli (Norway)
Common
4. Anna Zubrzycki
Salem
5. Ana Woolf

09.00 Media Space
TALKSHOP
Open Dialogues, Reflections and Writings.
PLUS Vanessa Gilbert (USA) & Ya Ling Peng (Taiwan) talk about their work and their Magdalena Festivals

12.00 1st Space
MagNet
Guided tour of the new Magdalena Project web site: learn how to register, and what you can do on the web site as a registered user.

12.30 Theatre
PERFORMANCE
FROM THE WAY
Jolanta Krukowska (Poland)

13.00 LUNCH

14.00 Cinema
CONFERENCE
THE MAGDALENA EUROPE, AUSTRALASIA, TAIWAN
Geddy Aniksdal & Anne Erichsen - A Room of One's Own (Norway)
Brigitte Kaquet - Voix de Femmes (Belgium)
Kordula Lobeck - Unter Wasser Fliegen (Germany)
Luciana Bazzo - Transit Festival (Denmark)
Madeline McNamara - Magdalena Aotearoa (New Zealand)
Dawn Albinger - Magdalena Australia
Ya Ling Peng (Taiwan)
Chair: Gilly Adams

16.30 BREAK

17.00 Theatre
WORK IN PROGRESS
AVE MARIA
Julia Varley

19.00 Llandaff Cathedral
BUFFET RECEPTION FOR HOSTS and participants

20.15 Llandaff Cathedral
PERFORMANCE
BLACK SEA SONGS
Voix Polyphonics / Les Dissonantes (France)

SATURDAY 20 AUGUST

08.00 Salem
WAKEUP-WARMUP
Ana Correa - physical

09.00 WORKSHOPS
Lloft
1. Deborah Hunt (final rehearsals)
SWAS
2. Gabriella Sacco (final rehearsals)

09.00 Media Space
TALKSHOP
Final Session: conclusions. All welcome.

10.00 1st space & off-site venues
PERFORMANCE
make-shift
Helen Varley Jamieson and Paula Crutchlow (UK)
followed by discussion.

OR

10.30 Studio
WORK IN PROGRESS
RECONSTRUCTING DESIRE
Gilly Adams and Maria Porter

11.30 Theatre
WORK DEMONSTRATION
BEHIND THE CURTAINS
Ana Woolf

13.00 LUNCH

14.00 Studio
CONFERENCE
LEGACY AND CHALLENGE
Chair: Fran Medley

PLUS

INTERVENTION
DON'T FORGET US
by Annet Henneman (Italy/Netherlands)

16.00 BREAK

16.30 Theatre
WORK DEMONSTRATION
STORIES OF BLOOD AND BREAD
Sanja Krsmanovic Tasic

17.30 Studio
PARTICIPANTS' SHOWCASE
Mistresses of Ceremonies:
Madeline McNamara & Ana Woolf

18.30 DINNER

20.00 Theatre
PERFORMANCE
THIS IMAGINARY WOMAN REVISITED
Fern Smith (Wales)

22.00 Studio
PERFORMANCE
SECRET GIRL: The Seven Kings.
Studio no. 2
Teatrollia (Italy)

SUNDAY 21 AUGUST

08.30 Salem
GUIDED MEDITATION
Gilla Cremer (Germany)
The Joy of Silence - a meditation on 25 years of The Magdalena

10.00 Salem
FINAL ROUND

13.00 Studio
FINAL LUNCH
With performance from Deborah Hunt's Workshop
PLAYING WITH THE DEAD: THE HISTORY OF THE MAGDALENA
Plus other interventions
MCs: Madeline McNamara & Ana Woolf

15.30 DEPARTURES

THE MAGDALENA PROJECT

Festival Team:
Jill Greenhalgh
Gilly Adams
Jessie Brookes
Meg Brookes
Vanya Constant
Emma Evans
Victoria Francis
Lisa Heledd Jones
Fran Medley
Giles Parbery
Sara Penrhyn Jones
Steve Robins
Frank Rozelaar Green
Sian Thomas
Valentina Tibaldi
Helen Varley Jamieson

Bursary Assistants
Rhiannon Brace
Leah Crossley
Bridie Doyle
Kelly Jones
Katherine Poole

Chapter Arts Centre
Market Road · Canton · Cardiff · Wales

www.themagdalenaproject.org

Tickets:

Your festival pass will get you into all events and meals so please keep it with you at all times. For those who want to attend more sporadically, subject to availability, it is possible to purchase DAY-TICKETS [£35] and tickets for individual events [£8].

Travel

Frank Rozelaar-Green is our dedicated festival driver. He is responsible for getting everyone from and to their arrival and departure destinations. We have striven to accommodate most people within walking distance of Chapter but Frank will be available to help with any other transportation needs.

Chapter Arts Centre

The festival is hosted by Chapter Arts Centre where Magdalena was born in 1986. Founded in 1971, Chapter is a meeting place for people and for ideas. It is regarded as one of the most successful multi-disciplinary arts organisations in the UK and a major centre for the contemporary arts in Europe. Chapter has a full programme of films, theatre, classes and exhibitions as well as hosting all the regular users of the restaurant and bar. We are more than pleased to be welcomed into the heart of the building and its activities for this week of celebration and extend our gratitude to all the positive collaboration that has led up to the festival. Special thanks to James Tyson (theatre programmer), Alexia Vaughan-Jones (café manager/executive chef), Abi Lawrence (front of house) and Megan Price (marketing).

wales arts international
celfyddydau rhyngwladol cymru

BRITISH COUNCIL

Cyngor Celfyddydol Cymru
Arts Council of Wales

Wales Arts International
Cymru

CHAPTER

MAGDALENA
NORWAY

WROCLAW
EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

2016

WROCLAW · POLAND
EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

VOIX
DE FEMMES

WROCLAW · POLAND
EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

WROCLAW · POLAND
EUROPEAN CAPITAL OF CULTURE

Thanks to Steve Allison of Design Stage who has been so generous with his time on the new website and in designing the festival poster and brochure. Steve has been designing for the Magdalena Project since the beginning and we owe him a huge debt of gratitude.



4.2.2 50-Minute DVD

This 50-minute DVD captures the entire performance of *No Door On Her Mouth - a lyrical amputation*, as performed at Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff, Wales, August 2011.

This performance, part of the Magdalena@25 Festival, is the most recent incarnation of the work. The full text of this performance has been included at Chapter One.

