The Practice of Adaptation:
Turning Fact and Fiction into Theatre.

Janis Balodis
(n5336058)

Submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Queensland University of Technology
2012
The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet the requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously written or published by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature

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Date

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Acknowledgements
I would like to acknowledge and thank the following for their contribution to this project:

Professor Rodney Wissler (Supervisor) for his insight, intelligent and thoughtful advice, his calm and patient guidance, his encouragement and expertise in this field.

Professor Paul Makeham (Associate Supervisor) for his knowledge, humour and keen judgement, his incisive corrections and opinions, and unfailing editorial direction.

Sean Mee and La Boite Theatre Company for commissioning and producing the works in its 2006 and 2007 play seasons.

Paul Grabowsky and the Queensland Music Festival for their support and belief in the musical presentation of the story of the 1964 - 1965 Mount Isa industrial dispute.

Pauline Walsh, my wife, for her patience, encouragement, affectionate support, faith and endurance.
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1 TITLE

The Practice of Adaptation: Turning Fact and Fiction into Theatre.

1.1 Abstract

Adaptation of novels and other source texts into theatre has proven to be a recurring and popular form of writing through the ages. This study argues that as the theoretical discourse has moved on from outmoded notions of fidelity to original sources, the practice of adaptation is a method of re-invigorating theatre forms and inventing new ones. This practice-led research employed a tripartite methodology comprised of the writing of two play adaptations, participation by the author/researcher in their productions, and exegetical components focused on the development and deployment of analytical tools. These tools were derived from theoretical literature and a creative practice based on acquired professional artistry “learnt by doing” over a longstanding professional career as actor, director and writer.

A suite of analytical tools was developed through the three phases of the first project, the adaptation of Nick Earls’ novel *Perfect Skin*. The tools draw on Cardwell’s “comparative analysis”, which encompasses close consideration of generic context, authorial context and medium-specific context; and on Stam’s “mechanics of narrative”: order, duration, frequency, the narrator and point of view. A third analytical lens was developed from an awareness of the significance of the commissioning brief and ethical considerations and obligations to the source text and its author and audience.

The tripartite methodology provided an adaptation template that was applied to the writing and production of the second play *Red Cap*, which used factual and anecdotal sources. The second play’s exegesis (Chapter 10) analyses the effectiveness of the suite of analytical tools and the reception of the production in order to conclude the study with a workable model for use in the practice of adapting existing texts, both factual and fictional, for the theatre.
1.2 Defining terms in the title

Practice

“Practice” is often simply defined as the act of doing something, as opposed to “theory”, which is understood as the abstract ideas or acquired knowledge about that something; the assumption often being that it is the application of theory that results in practice. This study assumes that practice and theory are not opposites or separated in time, but rather that practice is steeped in theorisation. Indeed, practice is a constant process of developing and testing theory, which symbiotically describes and suggests or prescribes further purposeful action. Thus, practice can more usefully be defined as informed action.

In some contexts this is referred to as “praxis”. In the online encyclopedia of informal education, Mark K. Smith (1999, The practical: making judgments, para. 3) cites Freire:

We find two dimensions, reflection and action, in such radical interaction that if one is sacrificed - even in part - the other immediately suffers (1972, p. 60).

In identifying the moral dimension of Freire’s praxis Smith acknowledges that for Aristotle also, praxis places an emphasis on a moral commitment in its application of acting truly for the common good of humanity. By not delimiting himself to moral expectations Smith (1999) extrapolates usefully from Grundy (1987) in explaining praxis as a double-looping process:

In praxis there can be no prior knowledge of the right means by which we realize the end in a particular situation. For the end itself is only concretely specified in deliberating about the means appropriate to a particular situation (Grundy, 1987, p. 147). These two statements capture something of the fluidity of the process. As we think about what we want to achieve, we alter the way we might achieve that. As we think about the way we might go about something, we change what we might aim at. There is a continual interplay between ends and means (Smith, 1999, The practical: making judgments, para. 5).

Donald Schön was a pre-eminent and highly influential scholar whose contribution to the discourse on theory and practice culminated in his developing an epistemology of reflective practice. In seeking to clarify the moral dimension of praxis later theorists acknowledge their debt to Schön whilst questioning “the extent to which his conceptualisation of reflective practice entails praxis. While there is a clear
emphasis on action being informed, there is less focus on the commitments entailed” (Smith, 1999). Richardson (1990) argues that Schön creates “a descriptive concept, quite empty of content” (Richardson as cited by Smith, 1999, The reflective practitioner – reflection-in-and-on-action, para. 8). Given Smith’s explication of the processes of praxis above, one might argue that Schön’s notions of reflective practice are inclusive of actions that are informed at many levels, one of which may involve a moral commitment if that were deemed to be appropriate to the particular situation. As shall be explained in more detail later, a moral dimension emerged as the right means to achieving a particular approach to the production of *Red Cap*. However, as a significant plank of the practice-led methodology of this study is the deployment of Schön’s epistemology of reflective practice, the term “practice” has been chosen for consistency and as a more suitable descriptor of the processes used rather than “praxis”.

Reference to the “practice” of adaptation assumes recognition of writing for performance as a creative practice that involves both a mastery of craft skills and “professional artistry”. Donald Schön (1987) uses the term “artistry” to refer to the “high powered” and “esoteric” “kinds of competence that practitioners sometimes display in unique, uncertain, and conflicted situations of practice” (p. 22). These are exactly the types of situations that Smith (1999) alludes to above, as requiring a flexibility of approach and acceptance of “the fluidity of the process”. William Froug (2000) who interviewed and wrote about many of America’s best screenwriters makes the distinction between the craft and the art of storytelling. He argues that the craft of storytelling (the shaping of plot, character and dialogue) can be taught in a few hours whereas “the study of the art … requires hours and hours of one-on-one work and, for most writers, is a slow, long term project” (Froug, 2000, p. 8). In my practice the storytelling is through the medium of playwrighting, and my experience is that mastering the art is a continuous and life-long project of reflective practice.

**Adaptation**

“Adaptation” is a contentious term being both a descriptor of a process and an end-product art form. For the purposes of this study, the title primarily refers to the *practice* of transfer of a printed source text from one literary genre to the literary genre of a play text. This play text is then the adaptation as an end-product that will be performed as a piece of theatre. It is necessary to emphasize the playwrighting *practice*
of adaptation as much of the theoretical writing assumes the *process* of adaptation is the study of the differences between the source text and its end-product.

The term “adaptation” is most commonly used in reference to adaptations of novels, particularly classic or literary fiction. Theatre adaptations may be made from other sources of *fiction* including short stories, novellas, graphic novels, picture books and poems, and other plays. In addition, sources of *fact* from which adaptations may be made are non-fiction books, essays, oral histories, true-life stories, radio-documentary, newspaper accounts and transcripts from courts of law and parliament.

In my study of the practice of adaptation I am making a distinction from those texts that are called adaptations because they are new translations of plays from one language to another and also those that are directorial interpretations or re-workings of classical texts.

**Theatre**

For the purposes of this study, the term “theatre” is limited to text-based theatre where the text is spoken and/or sung by actor/singers, and excluding ballet and physical and visual theatre except where these forms or styles are integral to the performance of text-based theatre. The study does not focus exclusively on the literary form of the play text because the play text is a blueprint for the complex event that collaboratively integrates the talents of actors, director, movement choreographer, and designers of sets, lighting and sound-scapes; and that magical exchange of energies between actors and between the actors and the audience that creates *theatre*.

These definitions are expanded in Chapter 3, the Contextual Review and in Chapter 4 on Methodology, which contains material on practice-led research.
2 INTRODUCTION

A context for the research into theatre adaptations

Given the prevalence of the practice of adaptation it is surprising that the critical literature on the history, theory and practice of stage adaptations of novels is not as extensive as that on adapting literary texts to films. Though stage and film are quite different end forms, both are performative arts and usually use a scripted text as a blueprint. Consequently there are many correspondences to draw on in seeking an understanding of the phenomenon, both in methodologies of practice and adapting techniques, and particularly in the ways that the transposition or transformation from literary text to performative text is problematized. The questions of “fidelity”, the use of appropriate narrative strategies, and critical antipathy to the practice are common to both film and theatre. These issues do not directly affect the practice, the “how-to-adapt” process that is the primary concern of my study, but they underlie it, tacitly, and inform what Schön (1987) calls “reflection-in-action” (p. 22) by the adaptor, an important strategy dealt with more fully in Chapter 4.3.

2.1 Why: The role of autobiography

In accordance with the autobiographical nature of practice-led research, I am initially writing in the first person to personalise the experience and analysis of my creative practice, and to contextualize my experience as a creative practitioner.

I have been a freelance writer and director for thirty years. I have written sixteen main stage plays, two large-scale community theatre works, six contemporary music theatre works, and six hours of television drama for the Australian Broadcasting Commission (ABC). Three plays have been adapted for ABC Radio, six plays have been published by Currency Press, one by Playlab Press and three have been published in literary magazines in Latvia. As Associate Director of Melbourne Theatre Company I directed eleven productions and have directed two outdoor productions for Northern Rivers Performing Arts (NORPA) in Lismore, New South Wales.

My work as a writer and director has primarily been text based, exploring the psychology of character, although I have also written a large scale visual theatre-puppet theatre piece, which was an adaptation of the picture book The Red Tree by Shaun Tan.
My dramaturgy\(^1\) has embraced text based works in theatre, television drama and film, as well as visual and physical theatre. My writing is concerned with themes of identity and with the deeper questions of identity, of taking responsibility for how we construct our worlds and our places in them, with belonging, and not belonging.

**A context for an evolving epistemology of practice**

For the purposes of this study I am researching creative practice through reflective practice and exegetical inquiry. The epistemology of my practice is based on an ongoing evolutionary process of theoretical and analytical inquiry that has run parallel to and has informed my creative practice throughout my career, initially as an actor and subsequently as a playwright for the past thirty years. This inquiry developed as a matter of necessity as I am largely self-taught in both disciplines and as the demands of practice often overreached my competences in knowledge, craft skills and techniques. By reading and applying methods and craft skills suggested by how-to books, and by reading and analysing other successful plays as useful models, I have had to learn my creative practice *by doing* and *while doing*.

**Using actor’s questions**

As a young and inexperienced actor I studied *Stanislavsky on the Art of the Stage*, translated by David Magarshack. Resolving that knowledge of directing would deepen my training as an actor I completed a directing course at E15 Acting School in the UK. I became an Acting Tutor at E15 Acting School and taught acting with a particular emphasis on improvisation and group-devised play building.

This experience informed the largely intuitive writing of my first play, *Backyard*. Not having written a play before I placed my trust in an acquired base of ordinary practical knowledge. I assembled my scant materials: the characters and situations of the loosely constructed scenario were adapted from people and events I had witnessed whilst growing up in North Queensland.

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\(^1\) Developmental *dramaturgy* is defined by David Kahn as “a study of the script with a director’s sensibility, understanding it as it will work on the stage … envisioning the theatre it will produce” (Kahn, 1995, p. 29). It is a system and process of analysis of a play’s intentions and how effectively those intentions are realized in the script.
The framework for writing the scenes was based on the essential information actors need to know: Who am I? Where and when does the action take place? What do I want? Why do I want it? What obstacles do I have to overcome? Other questions emerged from the writing to inform scenes needed to fill narrative gaps: What happened before this? What happens next? The central character Pencil is a small-town version of Stanley Kowalski, from *A Streetcar Named Desire*. And though Tennessee Williams’ southern-gothic was a model for *Backyard*’s Far North Queensland setting, the key character of the eccentric abortionist Sandshoeboots was probably more informed by any number of crazed and damaged women in early Edward Bond plays. *Backyard* was subsequently workshopped in Canberra at The Australian National Playwrights’ Conference in 1980. Later the same year the first draft with minor revisions was successfully produced by the then Nimrod Theatre (now Company B at Belvoir Street).

**Outlines and treatments**

On the basis of one success, ABC Television Drama commissioned me to write episodes of the drama series, *Menotti*. Despite the critical analyses I had made of plays as an actor and director, I had no concept of story structure. I constructed story by solving problems, connecting images, characters and incidents, and by continually asking what the actors needed to know in each scene. I consulted *Writing Television in the 70’s* by Malcolm Hulke, a regular writer for BBC TV. The book is a guide on the television industry, how studios operate, what to write about, a chapter each on character and dialogue and a section on layout. There is nothing specifically on story or structure. However, the contractual requirements of ABC TV meant I added the skills of writing outlines and treatments to my “learning by doing”.

**Organising principle**

Understanding that an underlying story structure somehow organised the narrative I used particular design elements to create a form for plays. The image I kept in mind as the organising principle when writing *Too Young for Ghosts* was of a plait, the basis of the design of a traditional Latvian ring. Though there are three narrative strands and time frames in the play, the first drafts were structured chronologically. It was only when the play was workshopped at the Australian National Playwrights’ Conference that the three narrative strands were interwoven to give the play its innovative structure that now more accurately resembles the plait design of the ring. In
Wet and Dry, I set myself the formal challenge of locating every scene, except one, against a fence. In a play about infertility, physical and psychological barriers and sexual transgression, this image turned out to be an appropriate ordering principle though it arose intuitively, almost as a game. And it was by intuition rather than by design that the one scene without a fence is the scene in which a child is conceived.

My creative practice has always been intertwined with reading and analysing other texts (plays, novels, films, television and news media) in search of appropriate structures to use as models for my own works. As Associate Director of Melbourne Theatre Company for six years I read approximately three thousand plays. In an apparently paradoxical inversion of knowledge, I acquired more skills in analysing why plays do not work rather than in how they do. In screenwriting, the 1980s became the decade of the “three-act-paradigm”, with Syd Field as its seminal progenitor and Linda Seger (1989), Christopher Vogler (1992), Robert McKee (1999), and Australia’s Linda Aronson (2001) amongst the best known of his successors. Field (1984) essentially outlined how story principles and their relationship to well-made play structure applied to narrative in film. Field’s methodology is useful for analysing scripts once they have been written but for many writers including myself, it has a paralysing effect on creativity when applied to the practice of writing plays.

It is only in the last ten years that I have taken the time to reflect on my practice and that I am coming to understand what it is that I do, how I do it and why. This knowledge has developed through three processes: first, an analytical re-reading of my own plays; second, through writing smaller, more compressed works for music theatre; and third, coming to a deeper understanding of the elements of dramatic writing by teaching scriptwriting at Southern Cross University. What has been particularly instructive about working with composers is their approach to musical structure and understanding how it is the music that carries the discourse and programs the audience’s reception of their experience. Seeing how most scriptwriting students struggle to grasp the essential craft skills let alone apply them effectively has given me a greater awareness of how profound the concepts are and how difficult they are to master. Unlike any other form of creative writing - and in particular, the novel - in writing for performance everything must happen at once, in the present: story, character, dramatic action, the effects of the past, location, and the autonomous presence of other
characters. If any element is missing it doesn’t work at the very moment it is being experienced by the audience, here and now. This is what can make theatre so deadly dull, or so exhilaratingly death-defying.

2.2 How: The lens of adaptation

Though adaptation practice is still considered contentious in the theatre, it is one of the most common and accepted forms of storytelling in film. Similarly the critical discourse for film adaptations is wide-ranging and extensive and almost non-existent for theatre adaptations. A recently launched specialised journal, *The Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance (JAFP)* seeks to address this apparent lapse. R Barton Palmer (2009) reviewed *JAFP* for *Adaptation*, “a journal solely devoted to the academic study of literature on screen in the broadest terms (Cartmell, Corrigan and Whelehan, 2008, p.2). R Barton Palmer (2009) notes that whilst *Adaptation* “provides a general forum for the advancement, discussion and dissemination of both research and theoretical insights of scholars” into all “aspects of a transtextual practice” (Palmer, 2009, p.87), *JAFP*’s broader interpretation of “performance” invites studies that focus on adaptation from the perspective of practitioners, including theatre practitioners. The appearance of these two journals acknowledges the increasing focus on adaptation as a separate field of study unto itself. However, despite editorial policies that would welcome work on the practical challenges of adaptation in economics and production for example, both publications continue to have major emphases on the field of literature on screen studies. Perhaps film and theatre practitioners are too busily engaged with the demands of their practice.

In 2009 the Association of Literature on Screen Studies changed its name to the more inclusive International Association of Adaptation Studies to reflect the field’s widening interests beyond novel and play adaptations to film and television. Despite the more expansive brief the overwhelming majority of papers presented at the association’s annual conferences have film adaptations as their common denominator. At each conference the appeal grows increasingly louder that the term adaptation be broadened and expanded to include more pragmatic issues of practice and new areas of study with an emphases on industrial, economic and political contexts. Now in it seventh year the Conference calls for papers on the theme of “Visible and Invisible Authorships”. Again the implicit focus is on screen adaptations and transmitted media.
One conference topic poses interesting questions for the practitioner of theatre adaptations: What is it to ‘author’ a contemporary telling of a tale that is already authored? Or one that is based on history and is in effect, implicitly but eloquently authorless? And what happens in the process of visiting a revised or renewed authorial inscription upon a work?

In confirmation of the growing stature of the practice of adaptation as field of study the Translation, Adaptation, and Dramaturgy Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research has called for conference papers in 2012 specifically about “adaptation as a process that can take place in the rehearsal room.” Every theatre practitioner is well aware that an analysis of this process could have “profound implications for our understanding of how adaptations may be analysed, but it also has the potential to alter our perception of and approach to the more traditional process of textual adaptation” (Cited from IFTR Conference information). The general focus of this study and the analytical chapters on *Perfect Skin* (Chapter 7) and *Red Cap* (Chapter 10) in particular address themselves to this apparent gap in the theoretical discourse on adaptation studies.

This practice-led study locates itself in the evident disjuncture between the different approaches to adaptation in similar performative art forms, in the gap left by the relative lack of critical discourse on theatrical adaptations. It investigates theoretical writing about film adaptation and applies useful findings to the practice of theatrical adaptation. It asserts that the lens of adaptation also offers the practitioner an innovative method of interrogating the craft and art of theatre writing practice as it allows him or her to concentrate on the use and application of appropriate craft skills, techniques and strategies without being concerned with making up an original story. The story already exists as a source text and while there are important decisions to be made about what category of adaptation is appropriate, the process primarily involves re-imagining it for the theatre, striking “the balance between preserving the spirit of the original and creating a new form” (Seger, 1992, p. 9).

**Key question**

The one generalisation that playwriting and screenwriting texts agree on is in suggesting that to adapt fiction or factual source texts, practitioners should use the same
craft skills, techniques and strategies as if writing an original work. At best, this advice is so banal as to be unhelpful. At worst, it misses the point entirely by not addressing how the craft skills, techniques and strategies are most effectively deployed to existing characters, themes, stories and narrative structure. The question raised by this study is: do adaptation studies for film offer theoretical guidelines and useful tools for the practitioner to develop a systematic and coherent theory and methodology for adapting texts, both fact and fiction, for the stage? The study attempts to answer this question by developing a suite of analytical tools derived from a process of critical enquiry into the theoretical discourse surrounding the practice of screen adaptations combined with the practical application of research findings to the writing of two plays, one an adaptation of a novel and the other an adaptation of factual and anecdotal source materials.

It is beyond the scope of this study to review all the theoretical discourse on film adaptations since George Bluestone wrote his seminal study of adaptation *Novels into Film* in 1957. However, the Contextual Review in Chapter 3 presents an historical overview of the critical and theoretical writing about adaptation over the past fifty years. Sarah Cardwell (2002) conveniently identifies three paradigmatic approaches: the medium–specific approach, the comparative approach, and the pluralist approach. In her influential study of television classic-novel adaptations Cardwell finds these separate approaches to be problematic. She argues for a need “to develop an understanding of … adaptation that recognizes the importance of its televisual context” and proposes a “non-comparative, ‘generic’ approach” (Cardwell, 2002, p.77). In delimiting the scope of her study in this way, Cardwell eschews fidelity issues and usefully identifies generic traits of temporality (the apparent present time of the storytelling), and performance as key medium-specific features. These are also significant practical considerations for the theatre adaptation practitioner. However, in 2007 Cardwell revised this strictly non-comparative approach in favour of a comparative analysis that focuses on the adaptation’s “artistic, and cultural contexts and its medium” (Cardwell, 2007, p. 55). It is as if she realized that too narrow a focus on the adaptation which precludes being able to discuss the source text is as limiting as having too narrow a focus on fidelity to the source text.

The adaptation of *Perfect Skin* was produced in 2006 and *Red Cap* was produced in 2007. The analysis of both plays relies on Cardwell’s revised, more expansive
conclusions published in 2007 rather than the more extreme position of a non-comparative approach to adaptation advocated in 2002. It proved impossible to sensibly analyse the adaptation and production of *Perfect Skin* without comparison to the narrative of the source novel. The suite of analytical tools was initially developed in response to Robert Stam’s provocative and ultimately definitive questions:

The important issue for adaptation studies is what principle guides the processes of selection or “triage” when one is adapting a novel? What is the “drift” of these changes and alterations? What principles orient the choices? (Stam, 2005, p. 34)

What events from the novel’s story have been eliminated, added, or changed in the adaptation, and more importantly, why? (Stam, 2005, p. 34)

Realizing that Cardwell’s strictly non-comparative approach would not serve the project I nevertheless was guided by her focus on genre and medium-specific demands, in her case, television and here, theatre. The time gap between the productions of the adaptations and further reading before completion of the study has allowed for Cardwell’s 2007 recalibration of comparative analysis to inform the Contextual Review and the exegetical analyses of both plays. Not only does it more accurately and concisely describe the processes theoretically it is more easily applied to practice.

### 2.3 What: Reasons for project choices

Nick Earls’ novel *Perfect Skin* was chosen as Project 1 of this study for the pragmatic reason that La Boite Theatre Company was considering it for adaptation and theatrical production. Consequently, there would be a guaranteed performance outcome that could be used to evaluate the success or otherwise of the practice and processes used to adapt the novel into theatre. The fact that La Boite placed a limitation on the type of adaptation - that it should be a close transposition of the novel rather than a commentary or an analogy – also served the purposes of the study. This allowed for the emphasis of adaptation to be on character, conflict and structure derived directly from the source novel, rather than from a more improvisatory and experimental exploration by actors of the discourse. This more conventional approach to adapting a novel (substantially in the classic realist mode) for theatrical production provides the study with a baseline to analyse practice, the dramaturgical process and production outcomes, in order to develop a methodological framework to apply to other adaptations.
Red Cap was chosen as Project 2 as the differences in source material and form provide a rigorous test for the framework developed in Project 1. The source material is from historical, anecdotal and documentary sources and music theatre is a markedly different form of written text, discourse and performance. As argued later in Chapter 3, music adds its own dimension as well as its own constraints. My inquiry assumes that many of the processes such as working with images and ideas, gathering materials, finding an organising principle, decisions about character and story events, and so on will be similar for both projects. The purpose of the practice-led research is two-fold. At one level it is to analyse how the differences in compressed storytelling, formal structure and style of expression have implications for practice and affect the performance outcomes. However the primary purpose is to evaluate the effectiveness of a suite of analytical tools derived from a critical analysis of adaptation studies for film together with a close analysis of the practice of adapting two quite different source materials and the subsequent theatrical productions.

2.4 Aims

This study assumes that rather than being a poor or slavish copy of the source text, an adaptation, when considered on its own terms has more in common with so-called original works of theatre. In developing a suite of analytical tools and assessing their effectiveness in the practice of adaptation, this research project advocates a deeper examination of the interdependency of theory and practice in adaptation studies as they relate to theatre. Furthermore, it seeks to create a methodology and template for adaptation that is both adaptable and flexible enough to permit each adaptation to exist and succeed on its own terms, generating new theoretical and practical knowledge. On the evidence, adaptation is in itself a provocative practice when used to create theatre. It is doubly so if it incites interrogation of the theoretical imperatives of drama and reinvigorates practice and creates new forms of theatrical expression. I intend that this research project be of practical benefit to other playwrights in providing a workable model to use in the practice of adapting existing texts, both factual and fictional, for the theatre.

When citing particular film theorists I will be using the convention of providing an alternative reading for the [theatre] by using [].
3 CONTEXTUAL REVIEW

3.1 A context for theatre adaptations

The critical literature on the history, theory and practice of stage adaptations of novels and other poetic and prose works is not extensive. This is despite the fact that adaptation has been a common and popular form of theatrical writing since the advent of Western drama. Greek playwrights such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides made plays from existing myths and historical events, the subject material of much of the classical epic poetry. In the middle ages, the York and Coventry Mystery Cycles were adapted from the Bible. Perhaps the greatest adapter of them all was Shakespeare who was much indebted to Holinshed’s Chronicles and Plutarch’s Lives. Adaptations were common in Shakespeare’s day and all but two of his thirty-six plays (The Tempest and Love’s Labour’s Lost) are credited with being adapted wholly or in part from other sources, from history and from other playwrights who were his contemporaries. In his introduction to Adapting Classics, Michael Fry (1996) argues that in an age of legal copyright Shakespeare’s Othello would probably be billed as having been adapted for the stage by William Shakespeare from one of Giraldi Cinthio’s tales in Hecatommithi (Fry, 1996, p.ix). Shakespeare’s genius as an inventor and re-inventor was such that Sarah Cardwell (2002) observes:

And yet we do not refer to Shakespeare’s play[s] as … adaptation[s]; indeed, we often use the possessive form of the title … as if to assert the independence of the play[s] from any previous, related texts (p. 18).

Every age has been the age of adaptation, but none more so than the last one hundred years, through the advent of film. By 1908 film was fast becoming a narrative art form and a business and filmmakers were soon looking for the “proven property” of an existing and successful source story. Joy Gould Boyum (1985) amongst others claims that film makers found it necessary to not only borrow plot, characters and themes from literature, there was another reason. “Classic sources gave movies - that suspect, vulgar form – their own touch of class.” They were able “to borrow a bit of that work’s quality and stature” (Boyum, 1985, pp. 4-5).

Either influenced or challenged by film, many contemporary playwrights have turned to existing literary and documentary sources to fashion a number of significant theatre works over the past one hundred years. A few examples include Christopher
Hampton’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, John Steinbeck’s own adaptation of *Of Mice and Men*, Brecht’s *The Good Soldier Schwyck*, Joan Littlewood’s *Oh! What a Lovely War*, David Edgar’s nine hour marathon *Nicholas Nickleby*, Steven Berkoff’s adaptations of Kafka’s *Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*, Timberlake Wertenbaker’s *Our Country’s Good*, Peter Brook’s six hour epic *The Mahabharata*, and David Hare’s recent documentary theatre, *The Permanent Way* and *Stuff Happens*. The more obvious successes are in the musical theatre: *Show Boat*, *Porgy and Bess*, *The King and I*, *The Sound of Music*, *Cabaret*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Camelot*; practically the entire Cameron Mackintosh stable – mostly Lloyd-Weber’s *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Cats*, *Phantom of the Opera*, *The Woman in White*; John Adams’ operas *Nixon in China* and *The Death of Klinghoffer*. Some more recent adaptations are *Wicked*, the untold story of the witches from *The Wizard of Oz* and *Spiderman* which is a musical theatre adaptation motivated by the success of the film franchise adapted from a comic-book action hero. Closer to home are the examples of the theatre and television adaptations of Tim Winton’s novel *Cloudstreet*, and the opera *Bliss* adapted from Peter Carey’s novel of the same name. One notable recent example of the prevalence of adaptation is *Hairspray* which began life as an independent film by John Waters before being adapted to a very successful stage musical which was then adapted into a musical film.

**The success of music theatre adaptations**

It would seem from this inexhaustive list of musicals that the musical theatre has been much more successful than text based theatre in creating enduring works when adapting novels to theatre. Is this apparent success rate due to better choices or something inherently to do with the form of the musical and opera?

This was one of the questions raised in an ABC radio broadcast, *The novel art of adaptation*. We are discussing this broadcast because it raised most of the issues, questions and prejudices that surround the practice of adaptation in the theatre: that it is inferior and secondary to the source text, it lacks fidelity and originality, and it is pervasive and robs playwrights of opportunities to present original new works. There

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1 *The Deep End* on Radio National presented by Amanda Smith. The panel members were Michael Halliwell, (Associate Dean of Research and Lecturer in vocal studies and opera at the NSW Conservatorium of Music), John McCallum, (Lecturer in the school of media, film and theatre at the UNSW and theatre reviewer for The Australian newspaper), and Chris Drummond, (Artistic Director of Brink Productions in Adelaide).
was also discussion of why some adaptations are more successful than others and how a successful adaptation might be achieved. In the course of the discussion Michael Halliwell (2006) pointed out that opera (and musical theatre generally) has always been an adaptive art, that original librettos for operas are very few and far between, and that the creative teams have always turned to famous novels and plays for their sources. He went on to say that this trend was continuing with new operas based on the novels, *Sophie’s Choice* and *1984*, and the play, *A Streetcar Named Desire*. (Halliwell, 2006, ABC) A further example is the well known Australian play, *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, first produced in 1955 while the opera adaptation had its premiere in 1996.

Halliwell (2006) went on to explain that “the orchestra takes over the function of the narrator. So music gives access to the minds of the characters and situates them in the sonic world that’s created and the characters exist in music. On one level, they do not exist outside of the musical web they are engulfed in” (ABC). What can be drawn from his comment is that apart from adding a dimension, music theatre is at an extra remove from the original source than text based plays. He gave the example of Benjamin Britten’s adaptation of Melville’s *Billy Budd*, which he said was of necessity so simplified and compressed as to become an entirely new work. He added that in music theatre at least, “fidelity to the original work is not the fundamental issue” (Halliwell, 2006, ABC).

**In defence of play adaptations**

By comparison to music theatre, the list of significant play scripts adapted from antecedent sources over the past one hundred years seems limited. However, it is clear that there are some successful practical models of adaptation to theatre. *Living Newspaper* which was associated with the Federal Theatre Project (USA) in the 1930s produced significant theatre and a lasting methodology for creating theatre, without producing great play texts. Similarly, one of the most influential pieces of British theatre in the late 1920s was an adaptation of Robert Tressel’s socialist novel *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*. First adapted and produced as a play in 1928, it was given another successful outing in a “new” workshopped adaptation by William Gaskill and Joint Stock Theatre Company in 1978. It has since been revived in new productions in the UK every few years.
In his PhD dissertation and subsequent book, Michael Ingham (1998) takes up this distinction between play text and theatre and argues that “less commercially oriented theatre companies, writers and directors” such as Mike Alfreds and Shared Experience, 7:84, Steven Berkoff and more recently Théâtre de Complicité, “developed a story-based theatre that relied on the narrative skills of the actor to mediate source texts” (p. 16). A potentially significant aspect of these adaptation practices is that these alternative or “fringe” companies mostly used a playwright as a member in their ensemble-based approach to adaptation rather than commission a sole “authorial” playwright. They achieved renown more for the theatre they created - for their innovative approach to both the source text and the theatricality of their performance - rather than for the play texts their striking productions were based on.

**Capturing the “spirit”**

What these companies sought in their source material was not so much the story content as the opportunity to explore and create new theatrical forms, not bound on the one hand by the constraints of the form within the source text nor on the other hand by traditional “well-made-play” forms. This point was also made by Chris Drummond (2006) in the ABC discussion. Drummond was a collaborator (with playwright, Susan Rogers) and the director of an adaptation of Robert Dessaix’s (1996) autobiographical novel, *Night Letters*. It was not the story that interested Drummond so much - a series of reflective letters written by an incurably ill man from a hotel room in Venice. Drummond was more concerned with how the five or six narratives that the letters contained related to and over-lapped each other and how to adapt them theatrically. His solution was to unravel and separate the narrative strands and to look for points of intersection. For example, the letters though written from Venice recount the man’s experiences and encounters in Locarno, Vicenza and Padua, which correspond to Purgatory, Hell and a kind of Paradise - mirroring Dante’s *Inferno*. Recurring thematic concerns are mortality and disease, sexuality and seduction and the pursuit of bliss. The man’s storytelling ranges across three time zones as his musings in the present intersect with the stories of a sixteenth century Venetian courtesan and a nineteenth century Russian Baroness. These intersections became the clusters around which seven scenes were written. Similar to Halliwell’s comment above on the role of the orchestra, Drummond said the process of “externalising the internal world and the layering of the narratives was the key to finding the theatrical solution to the book” (Drummond, 2006,
John McCallum (2006), the third panellist, said that South Australian Theatre Company’s production was “a tribute to Dessaix’s book” and he reiterated that this “distilling … or adding a whole new dimension” was the only reason to adapt a novel. He argued there was no point “if it is just to tell the story again for people who can not be bothered to read the book” (McCallum, 2006, ABC).

The curiosity factor

McCallum is a critic who sees a lot of theatre and no doubt hungers for that special aesthetic experience but his reasoning would seem to be at odds with a sizeable part of the audience that attended the theatre production, Night Letters. Firstly, some of the audience would not know that it was adapted from another source and it would not make any difference to them. Secondly, a reasonable proportion of the audience would be in attendance out of curiosity, because they had read the book and wanted to see how it had been rendered; or thirdly because they had not read the book (yet) and wanted to see what it was about, to actually have the story “told” to them. McCallum would seem to be privileging one mode of telling over another when the challenge for the would-be adaptor is how to add another dimension without retaining strict fidelity to the source but capturing its spirit at the same time.

The test of an adaptation

The implications here are that the test of an adaptation is not its strict adherence to the “letter” of the source but more to its “spirit”, as claimed by Drummond (2006) for the adaptation of Night Letters, that finally it may have been more of an “analogy”, inspired by Dessaix’s novel rather than faithfully transposing it from one medium to another (ABC).
McCallum (2006) decries the simple re-telling of the story of a source novel in the medium of theatre, and asks why one would be bothered to do that? While he makes a general criticism of adaptations, which are merely faithful “transpositions”, (and seems to agree with Wagner’s classification system below that they are “typically puerile”), his specific complaint may be about bad writing, of an unsatisfactory “transposition” because the adaptor assumes that the novel has done half the work already. The bad writing may be symptomatic of a lack of understanding of medium-specific conventions, artistic values and techniques. It is possible though for an adaptation to be a successful, faithful “transposition” such as the multiple versions of Winton’s *Cloudstreet*, in which the novel is successfully transferred from one medium to another, where the “spirit” of the novel is captured in the play text, in the performances and production. McCallum may prefer to regard “analogies”, plays inspired by novels as being more original, however he was prepared to accept that the “transposition” of *Cloudstreet* produced a successful, innovative and satisfying theatrical experience and recently a television mini-series.

3.2 Why adapt?

The economic imperative

Ingham (1998) cites Peter Reynolds’ view that there are sound economic reasons for adaptations as well as aesthetic ones:

By choosing a play based on an existing text … something of the risk involved in commissioning new writing for the stage could be removed or at least moderated. If the text to be adapted was a novel, especially one already established as popular fiction or with a place in the literary canon … a potential audience might be supposed to already exist (Reynolds, 1993, p. 6 in Ingham, 1998, p. 19).

Both Drummond and McCallum (2006) acknowledged that this was a factor in South Australian Theatre Company’s choice of this particular novel by Dessaix as well as embracing the opportunity to create an exciting new theatrical work. And they suggested that it was no less true for Belvoir St. Theatre’s choice of Tim Winton’s *Cloudstreet*, arguably Winton’s best and most popular novel.

Neil Armfield’s 1998 theatre production of *Cloudstreet* was a critical and popular success, touring widely in Australia and with great acclaim to London, Dublin, Zurich and New York in 2001. And though McCallum admits that both *Cloudstreet* and
Night Letters are significant new works of theatre, he laments that each adaptation takes the place of an original new play by an Australian playwright. This concern appears to overlook the fact that the adapters of Cloudstreet are playwrights, the late Nick Enright and Justin Monjo and that Chris Drummond’s collaborator is also a playwright, Susan Rogers; and that these playwrights appear proud to include their adaptations within their creative oeuvre alongside works not sourced from other writers’ works. McCallum does not say whether he would have preferred a new, original work from Enright instead of his adaptation of Cloudstreet.

New forms and new meanings

Apart from the perceived economic reasons, Palmer (2004) suggests “that adaptation provides the cinema [and here theatre] not only with new texts, but with new norms and models” (p. 259). He continues by citing Stam, “that the cinema, like the novel has also become ‘a receptacle open to all kinds of literary and pictorial symbolism, to all types of collective representation, to all ideologies, to all aesthetics’” (Stam, 2000, p. 61 as cited in Palmer, 2004, p. 259).

In his study on adaptation in British contemporary theatre, Ingham (1998) analyses a number of case studies, such as Nicholas Nickleby, Our Country’s Good, and Les Liaisons Dangereuses. He argues that many of the stage adaptations in the UK in the 1980s and 1990s owe their critical and commercial success to their allegorical function in relation to the socio-political environment at the time they were produced. He acknowledges that this pertains to all good plays but that as social allegory, the adaptations “challenge rather than confirm the dominant socio-political discourse” (Ingham, 1998, p 426); and that they achieve this by offering a critique of present society and politics through the lens of the past. He gives the example of how the RSC’s production of Nicholas Nickleby not only “sharpened the political and ideological focus … of Dickens’s work … [drawing] inescapable parallels between the Victorian enterprise culture and the neo-conservatism of the Thatcherite right” (Ingham, 1998, p. 33). Ingham (1998) further argues that the adaptation “enables fresh meanings to emerge” (p. 421) and reinvigorates old forms and offers new ones by stretching “narrative possibilities in the theatre to accommodate the spatio-temporal requirements of the novel and milieu … widening the scope of storytelling in the theatre” ( pp. 430-431). This has broad implications for the theatre because it often demands highly
imaginative and innovative approaches to styles of production and performance. Ingham (1998) also reminds us that adaptations can and do make very good, innovative, exciting theatre:

People enjoy novels because they tell stories, and these stories…can come vibrantly to life again in a multi-levelled totally theatrical experience combining physicality and presence with narrative, music and spatio-temporal freedom in order to stimulate the mind and senses (p. 438).

Lack of originality

Underlying the question, “Why Adapt?” is the implication that adaptations of a source text lack originality. In drawing his conclusions after close analysis of sixteen case studies of both plays and musicals, Ingham (1998) claims the plays of “practitioners of novel transposition for the stage … merit the same level of critical recognition as dramatic art as plays not ostensibly derived from another immediate literary source” (p. 418). He goes on to argue that “the variety and quality of the plays discussed … provide ample refutation of the reactionary view that the stage adaptation is secondary and not primary art” (Ingham, 1998, p 418).

Lack of opportunity for original work

In response to the implied criticism of lack of originality, and a lack of opportunity for innovative theatre writing caused by a reliance on adaptations by leading production companies, established playwrights such as David Edgar, Timberlake Wertenbaker and Christopher Hampton clearly embraced the opportunities to work in styles different from the way they usually work and to reach wider audiences. They do not appear to think they were not doing original work or writing a real play. Ingham (1998) asserts that in the UK, despite the economic imperative to commission adaptations rather than new original works, “there is a strong case for arguing that many playwrights and companies have made a virtue of necessity by exploring and experimenting at both adaptation and rehearsal phases with approaches that have ultimately proved liberating and forward-looking” (p. 20). The panellists on The Deep End conceded that an emerging playwright, working as part of a creative team, could learn essential craft skills adapting a novel to the stage, skills they could then use in writing an original work not derived from an antecedent source.
This concern that adaptations of novels to the stage were stifling or inhibiting original playwrighting is not just restricted to Australia. It was widely canvassed in the UK in the 1980s after David Edgar’s (1980) version of Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* became a commercial success despite initial critical hostility. Edgar’s success was the harbinger of a spate of adaptations by other established playwrights such as Hampton’s *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, Brian Friel’s *Fathers and Sons*, and Pam Gems’ *Camille*. In response to his critics, David Edgar (1988) asserted that playwrights who adapted novels or other texts to the stage were “primary artists whose source material is other primary art”, and that the stage adaptation was “an ordinary play researched from a single source” (p. 143).

In offering a comparative analysis of a number of case studies of stage adaptations in British contemporary theatre, Ingham (1998) notes that this particular form of theatrical writing accounted for 20% of new theatre performances in the UK (p. 20). While it is best to be mindful that this is a statistical proportion of the number of performances rather than of new productions, it is indicative of the popularity and success of adaptations. Consequently the number of stage adaptations has continued to grow in the UK and Australia thorough the 1980s and 1990s and over the past ten years.

**All art comes from art**

Hutcheon (2004) refers to T.S. Eliot’s axiom that all art is derived from other art, something most arts practitioners take as a truism, and she suggests that “adaptation joins imitation, allusion, parody, travesty, pastiche, and quotation as popular creative ways of deriving art from art” (p. 108). She also refers to the historically established precedent of “borrowing and stealing – or more accurately, of story sharing” (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 109). It was only after the Romantic age that we learned to value the originary, the primary source. At an informal meeting of writers organised by the Australian Writers’ Guild in 1985, British playwright David Hare said in answer to a question about where ideas come from, “that good writers borrow, great writers steal”, his implication being that great writers make it their own, original.

Throughout history and even with today’s copyright laws, stories that resonate tend to find new modes of expression. Inez Baranay (2006) defended the growing genre of literary appropriation; of Jean Rhys’s using *Jane Eyre* as her point of departure for
Wide Sargasso Sea; of Alice Randall’s re-writing of Gone With the Wind from a slave’s point of view in The Wind Gone Wrong (p.2). She claims that “allusions, loans, thefts, developments, re-interpretations and re-creations of existing texts are a valuable part of the web of literature” (Baranay, 2006, p. 2). Julie Sanders (2006) supports the proposition that adaptation and appropriation are useful means of “finding new angles and new routes into something, new perspectives on the familiar, and these new angles, routes and perspectives in turn identify entirely novel possibilities (Sanders, 2006, p.158). Stephanie Harrison quotes Robert Altman in reference to Short Cuts, his film adaptation of Raymond Carver’s short stories: “In the end the film is there and the stories are there” (as cited in Harrison, 2005, p. xix). A similar sentiment was expressed by Susan Orlean, author of The Orchid Thief when asked about Adaptation, the film adaptation of her book by Charlie Kaufman and Spike Jonze (2002). She said that however different the film was, her book “still remained its own entity” (Orlean, 2005, ABC TV).

The local context

In the period from 2001 to 2006 La Boite Theatre Company in Brisbane became one of the leaders in this form of play writing in Australia, having effectively developed a “franchise” in adapting Nick Earls’ widely-read novels to the stage. Perfect Skin in 2006 was their fourth Earls venture following the earlier successes of 48 Shades of Brown, After January and Zig Zag Street. In 2006, La Boite found itself in the unusual position of having three-fifths of its repertoire provided by playwrights commissioned to adapt novels into plays: Earls’ Perfect Skin, Malouf’s Johnno and McGahan’s Last Drinks. This is one of the factors that caught the attention of the ABC’s The Deep End, that all the major theatre companies have engaged in adapting works of Australian novelists such as Tim Winton, Elizabeth Jolley, Patrick White, Randolf Stow, David Malouf, Peter Goldsworthy, Xavier Herbert, Richard Mahoney - just to name a few authors who have come in for the treatment in recent times. Is this prevalence of adaptations solely a matter of economic necessity, or does it indicate a deeper need? Sean Mee, the Artistic Director of La Boite Theatre Company claimed that audiences want the stories and insights delivered by these writers reprocessed and retold, and that culture evolves and gains depth by particular stories being retold in different forms and media.
3.3 What is [an] adaptation?

3.3.1 Introductory Overview of Previous Research

The following discussion of previous research lines up comments against each other or beside each other rather than striving for a synthesis of a coherent point of view or methodology. The comments or critical analysis examined below are in no way exhaustive. They are the theoretical works that provided me with fresh insights into my own writing practice and offered both practical and analytical tools to apply to the adaptations that constitute the creative works of this research project. The task of synthesis emerges through practice in the implementation of useful mechanical tools, and in the analysis of practice by applying particular lenses and theoretical approaches to interrogate both the practice and the production outcome.

As stated above, for the purposes of this study, adaptation is regarded as the practice of transferring a printed source text from one literary genre to the literary genre of a play text that will be performed as a piece of theatre – rather than a process devoid of essential aspects of playwriting. Tortajada (2004) confirms that it is necessary to make this distinction as “the term ‘adaptation’ is completely caught up in the web of its own erroneous assumptions” (p. 344). One of those assumptions is that the ‘process of adaptation” is not about the practice, the writing of a play version of the novel. As Cardwell (2002) notes the process of adaptation is usually taken to be concerned with “the different ways in which the adaptation expresses the same basic narrative as its source book … with what happens when one adapts … as it can be perceived in its end-product” (p.10). This problematic emphasis on the expression “of the same basic narrative” is the basis of most of the critical and theoretical writing about adaptation, and such an approach tends to employ “the methodology of comparison and the related notion of ‘fidelity’ (faithfulness to the source novel)” (Cardwell, 2002, p.9). As we shall see later, notions of “fidelity” come with their own web of erroneous or at least prejudicial assumptions and tend to lead to limited understanding or analysis of the actual practice of adaptation that is the main concern of this study.

Three approaches to the process of adaptation

Cardwell (2002) identifies three paradigmatic approaches employed by theorists to create a framework for understanding the process of adaptation: the medium-specific approach; the comparative approach; and the pluralist approach (p. 43).
**Medium-specific approach**

George Bluestone (1957) wrote the first major study of adaptation, *Novels into Film*. It proved to be a highly influential work. Bluestone (1957) was the primary advocate of the medium-specific approach and asserted that novel and film were “autonomous” and “unique”, essentially antithetical forms which “represent different genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture” (p. 9). Broadly, the theory states that each medium is unique with its own conventions, artistic values and techniques. Consequently the text produced in one medium must be different from a text produced in another medium. With regard to implications for adaptation practice, the theory points towards an approach emphasising genre differences: “a comparative study which begins by finding resemblances between novel and film ends by loudly proclaiming their differences” (Bluestone, 1957, p. ix).

**Problems with the medium-specific approach**

Bluestone (1957) argues “the film and the novel remain separate institutions, each achieving its best results by exploring unique and specific properties” (p. 6). However for the practitioner, his conclusions are contradictory. On the one hand he seems to be advocating an open-minded way of appreciating the adaptation as a work of art in its own right, while on the other implying an intrinsic superiority of the literary source text over its visual adaptation. Moreover, Bluestone’s methodology in understanding the relationship between source text and film relied on making adjustments to a shooting script of the film incorporating changes in the final print, and then comparing that text to the source novel to “record how the film differed from its model” (Bluestone, 1957, p.xi). Given Bluestone’s fundamental belief in medium-specificity, how can any written text be accepted as an adequate record of a film as experienced by its audience?

Other shortcomings of Bluestone’s methodology are noted by Elliott (2003) who points out there are, in fact, many points of commonality between the genre of the film and the novel, for instance in their reliance in verbal and visual or spatial effects:

Films abound in words – in dialogue, intertitles, subtitles, voice-over narration, credits and words on sets and props – and written texts form the basis of most
films. In the same way novels create visual or spatial effects through ekphrasis\(^3\) (p. 12).

Others have acknowledged that not only are there correlations between source text and adaptation (end-product), there are obvious contradictions between film making theory and film making practice to be negotiated; and other theorists have subsequently attempted to move away from genre and theory/practice binaries.

**Comparative approach**

Comparative theory has become the predominant conceptual paradigm since the 1970s. Comparative theorists overcame their antipathy for adaptations and the assumption that they were inferior to the source texts, and once they accepted that adaptation was possible, they could concentrate on the process, how it happened.

For example, in Cardwell’s (2002) explication of the methodology, “narrative deconstruction offered an analysis of both film and book … while semiotic analysis offered an even more suitable method for studying elements that are non-linguistic, such as lighting, mise en scène, etc …” (p. 52). This approach allowed for a more productive analysis of the differences between the two media, for the possibilities of convergence and for “faithful” adaptation.

In pursuing this more productive focus on the practical, and craft elements, Wagner (1975) contributed an important development in the comparative approach to adaptation theory by making a distinction between story, plot and discourse. Seymour Chatham defined discourse as “the expression, the means by which content is communicated. In simple terms, the story is the *what* in a narrative that is depicted, discourse is the *how*” (as cited in Desmond & Hawkes, 2005, p. 39). This is an important distinction as it helps to explain a practical mechanism for the application of the comparative approach; and to show how one adaptation - *Night Letters* for example - may be judged to have succeeded in capturing the spirit of the source text by recreating its discourse, while another adaptation which merely faithfully reproduces the plot of the source text may be considered unsatisfactory, because it fails to recreate the discourse.

\(^3\) Ekphrasis is defined as a “lucid, self-contained explanation or description” (New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary, 1993)
Categories of comparison

Comparative theorists also came up with a system of categorisation as a way of understanding an adaptation’s relationship to its source text. This is essentially an assessment of the extent to which the story elements that can be transposed from one medium to another actually have been transposed, and the manner in which the adaptor has chosen to recreate the discourse. Klein and Parker (1981) describe three different categories:

Most films … are literal, translations of text into the language of film … second … is one that retains the core of the structure of the narrative while significantly reinterpreting … the source text … a third approach is one that regards the source merely as raw material, as simply an occasion for an original work (Klein & Parker, 1981, p. 10 as cited in Cardwell, 2002, p. 60).

Other theorists derived their own terms to correspond to these categories. Wagner (1975) used the terms “transposition, commentary and analogy” (Wagner, 1975, pp. 222 -231). Andrew (1984) used correlating terms, “borrowing, intersection and transformation” (Andrew, 1984, pp. 98 -104). Regardless of the fine distinctions in terminology, these systems of categorisation allowed for the validation of adaptations that deliberately deviated from their source texts either to offer a commentary on or critique of them, or merely used them as the germinal idea or ordering principle for an original work.

Problems with the comparative approach

There are inherent problems with this approach. Within this framework the critic or theorist or reviewer still has to decide the degree to which the adaptation is faithful - based on what elements of the narrative have been successfully transposed, what equivalences have been found between the two media and what possibilities of convergence have been realized - without inquiry into the adaptor’s intentions. This approach raises questions. For example: if some or enough of these elements have successfully been transposed, why not some others or all elements? Why have some been omitted or “lost”? If convergence is possible, is it merely desirable or is it to be expected? Does this register of relative success or failure once again raise the spectre of intrinsic inferiority of the adaptation in relation to its source? If the adaptation is a
“commentary” or “analogy” and fidelity to the source is not the intention, how can this kind of comparative approach offer a complete methodology for analysis?

McFarlane argued that “the near fixation with the issue of fidelity” (McFarlane, 1996, p. 194 as cited by Cardwell, 2002, p. 53) constrained the system of categorisation designed to facilitate objectivity and fairness in studying adaptation. Furthermore, it can lead to the privileging of one category of adaptation over another. In defining his categories Wagner (1975) attempted to open the field of comparison. He argued that:

Transposition … [is] typically puerile … Commentary [is] an infringement on the work of another … Analogy [produces] another work of art … [that] cannot be indicated as a violation of a literary original since it has not attempted (or has only minimally attempted) to reproduce the original (Wagner, 1975, pp. 223 -227).

Wagner’s “analogy” or Andrew’s “transformation” are deemed by them to be most desirable because its aesthetic is less “conservative” and the adaptation is considered to be “autonomous”, “independent” and “original”. However, even here our attention is drawn to notions of hierarchy and the dubious valorisation of the source. This line of argument might lead to the conclusion that as an adaptation can never be faithful enough, it is preferable if it can be seen to be not faithful at all, and that respecting the source means leaving it alone.

Pluralist approach

Robert Stam is one of the foremost cultural theorists of the pluralist approach to adaptation. He makes an important contribution in exploring the buried metaphors and the negative moral undertones in the language of fidelity:

*Infidelity* resonates with the overtones of Victorian prudishness; *betrayal* evokes ethical perfidy; *deformation* implies aesthetic disgust; *violation* calls to mind sexual violence; *vulgarisation* conjures up class degradation; and *desecration* intimates a kind of sacrilege toward the ‘sacred word’ (Stam, 2000, p. 54).

Cardwell (2002) asserts that the shortcomings of the comparative approach with all its embedded moral undertones became more and more apparent in the 1990s, and theorists:

… began to distinguish the process of adaptation from the end-product adaptation … The theoretical framework adopted draws upon concepts
developed in film, television and cultural studies, and utilises traditions of ideological criticism and theories about identity, culture and history (pp. 69-70).


The writers in these pluralist collections wrest adaptation from the confines of literary discourse and relocate it in a cultural studies approach. The writers engage with a wide range of case studies of adaptations and the analysis is framed within an evaluation of the ideological implications of both the precursor text and the adaptation (end-product) as a whole within socio-historical, institutional and intertextual contexts. Whelan (1999) notes this approach “foregrounds the activities of reception and consumption, and shelves – forever perhaps – considerations of the aesthetic or cultural worthiness of the object study” (p.18).

**Problems with the pluralist approach**

While noting the conceptual advance represented by the pluralist approach Cardwell (2002) identifies problems with it. She argues that the desire “to challenge and overthrow” an outdated respect for text and author is ideologically driven rather than methodological:

Questions of aesthetics and generic development are subordinated to questions of ideology; and close analysis of style, tone, narrative structure, performance and so on is employed only in the service of making a wider political point … that sometimes the analysis of films themselves loses its proper place at the centre of discussion (p. 71).

Cardwell (2002) deplored the fact that while there were contributions on editing and framing, there was little attention given to aesthetic questions, “details of music, sound, pace and timing, gesture and performance… on the adaptations themselves as
independent artworks” (p. 72). In her conclusion on new directions she suggests, “the recent renewed interest in close textual analysis suggests potentially rewarding methodology. Most importantly, the approach taken to each adaptation ought to be suggested by the adaptation itself” (Cardwell, 2002, p. 73).

3.3.2 New Directions - The way ahead

Many of the issues raised in Cardwell’s conclusion are addressed in the essays in the Stam collections. In his introduction to A Companion to Literature and Film, Stam (2004) says the essays are primarily concerned with film studies, and with progressing adaptation discourse in particular. “In diverse ways they mingle the methods of literary theory, semiotics, narratology, cultural studies and media theory” (p. xv). Stam himself has become a much cited theorist, having re-laid a lot of groundwork in his introductory essay on “The Theory and Practice of Adaptation” in the second collection, Literature and Film; and his earlier essay (2000), “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation,” in Narramore’s collection Film Adaptation.

It is possible to overstate Stam’s influence on the basis of a few essays and multiple citations. However, the sheer scale and range of the collections he edited, two with Alessandra Raengo, seemed to excite an eruption of activity including the two new journals and two international conferences mentioned earlier (Section 2.2, pp.13 - 14), and diverse works all dedicated to the subject of adaptation. The catalyst for this outburst was Stam’s long overdue re-statement of the obvious:

One way to look at adaptation is to see it as a matter of a source-novel’s hypotext⁴ being transformed by a complex series of operations: selection, amplification, concretization, actualization, critique, extrapolation, popularization, transculturalization. The source-novel in this sense, can be seen as a situated utterance, produced in one medium and in one historical context, transformed into another, equally situated utterance, produced in a different context and in a different medium. (Stam, 2000, p. 68 )

Stam’s definition appears to be paraphrased by Linda Hutcheon, one of the recently emerged theorists in “The art of adaptation” for Daedalus:

When we adapt, we create using all the tools that creators have always used: we actualize or concretize ideas: we simplify but we also amplify and extrapolate; we make analogies; we critique or show our respect. When we do all this does it matter whether the narrative we are working with is ‘new’ or adapted? (Hutcheon, 2004, p. 109)

⁴ In his essay, “Beyond Fidelity: The Dialogics of Adaptation” Stam’s reference to hypotext is congruent with Chatham’s definition of discourse, discussed above.
**New analytical and practice-based impulses**

Subsequently, in *A Theory of Adaptation*, Linda Hutcheon (2006) takes as a premise that adaptation is ubiquitous, and argues for an increasing need for theorizing adaptation. As articulated earlier, much of the theoretical discourse on adaptation concentrates on novels adapted to film and television, but Hutcheon’s all-encompassing study investigates how adaptation works across all media and all genres including theatre, cover songs, video and computer games, and even theme parks.

Hutcheon (2006) initially quotes T.S. Eliot in asserting that all art is derived from other art, and then Barthes and Derrida in accepting all texts as being derived from other texts. She eschews “fidelity criticism” as unnecessary in the field of adaptation studies, especially given that New Criticism and post-structuralism have put the author’s intention to the sword as unknown, unknowable and irrelevant. This approach opens up productive new insights, particularly in their capacity to advance practice.

Despite invoking notions of the derivativeness of all texts from all preceding texts, Hutcheon (2006) seeks to limit the scope of what may be considered adaptation by using three defining principles. First, that an adaptation is only an adaptation if it announces itself as an “extensive transposition of a particular work or works” (p. 7); second, that the practice of adaptation “always involves both (re-)interpretation and then (re-)creation” (p. 8); and third, by invoking the notion of palimpsests (that is, the idea of one text being shadowed in our mind’s eye by our memory of another or others). From the perspective of its reception, she suggests “adaptation is a form of intertextuality … an extended intertextual engagement with the adapted work” (p. 8). “Therefore, an adaptation is a derivation that is not derivative – a work that is second without being secondary” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 9).

**Adaptation and appropriation**

Julie Sanders (2006) focuses on the relation between adaptation and appropriation. She acknowledges that in practice and in the effects they achieve adaptations and appropriations have much in common. Sanders makes the distinction that “an adaptation signals a relationship with an informing source text or original … [creating] a specific version … [while] appropriation frequently affects a more decisive
journey away from the informing source into a wholly new cultural product and domain … [which] may or may not involve a generic shift” (Sanders, 2006, p.26).

It is evident from the focus of her study that for Sanders, appropriation is a more general term and more expansive practice. Furthermore, she delimits Hutcheon’s dictum that adaptations must declare themselves as adaptations by claiming that:

Adaptation and appropriation are dependent on the literary canon for the provision of a shared body of storylines, themes, characters, and ideas upon which their creative variations are made. The spectator or reader must be able to participate in the play of similarity and difference perceived between the original, source, or inspiration to appreciate fully the reshaping or rewriting undertaken by the adaptive text. (Sanders, 2006, p.45)

Sanders (2006) explicitly states that it is “this inherent sense of play … and the connected interplay of expectation and surprise, that for me lies at the heart of the experience of adaptation and appropriation” (p.25). Sanders provocative investigation of “literary archetypes” and “alternative perspectives” closely surveys examples from novels, plays, fairy tales, Ovid and Shakespeare as well as the appropriations of contemporary novelists such as J.M. Coetzee’s rewriting of Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Peter Carey’s rewriting of Dickens’s and an historical account of the bushranger Ned Kelly, and Graham Swift’s rewritings of Faulkner and Chaucer amongst others.

Such reliance on well-studied canonical texts may provide a theoretician with a convenient way to focus her argument and select the most appropriate examples for close textual analysis but it is of limited or little use to the practitioner, particularly as many films and plays are adaptations of popular or commercially successful novels, true stories and historical events. Often, a significant proportion of the audience are unaware that the film play or TV series is an adaptation or they are unfamiliar with it. The value in Sanders’ work for the practitioner is in the strength of the case she argues for adaptation and appropriation frequently offering a commentary on a source text through taking “a revised point of view from the ‘original’, adding hypothetical motivation, or voicing the silenced and marginalized” (Sanders, 2006, pp. 18 – 19). Sanders (2006) is a persuasive advocate for adaptation and appropriation as a means of “finding new angles and new routes into something, new perspectives … and these new angles, routes and perspectives in turn identify[ing] novel possibilities” (p. 158)
Modes of existence

What seems indisputable across all theoretical approaches to adaptation is the acknowledgement, for good or ill, that things change when one text (or texts) is transformed, translated, adapted … into another text. Or as Casetti (2004) provocatively asserts: “the passage from text 1 to text 2 involves – always and most importantly – a transition from a ‘situation 1’ to a ‘situation 2’” (p. 83). Furthermore Casetti (2004) concludes that “consideration needs to be given not only to the text as such, but also to its conditions and modes of existence” (p. 83). The changes Casetti (2004) considers worth analysis are not how the texts compare structurally or in specific content; he identifies something deeper going on, “that the source text and its derivative occupy two entirely different places in the world scene and in history” (p. 83). He sums up: “Evidently, adaptation is primarily a phenomenon of recontextualization of the text” [my italics] (p. 83).

Casetti’s assertion is starkly illustrated by examination of the source text of Perfect Skin in comparison to the stage production of the adaptation. Broadly speaking, the modes of existence are a paperback novel of 353 pages, and a space-time filled with actors, lights, music, set, properties and costumes, puppetry elements, smoke and an audience which may or may not have read the novel, or may not even know of its existence. At an experiential level the effect of the change(s), the differences, could hardly be more profound between the conditions and modes of existence of the text, two completely different artifacts that can only be experienced or received or “consumed” in completely different ways. It is the experiential difference in modes of reception that often creates an ostensible disconnection in the audience’s mind prompting exasperated comments such as, “It wasn’t like that in the book” or “The book was better.”

Communicative situations

Casetti’s (2004) explication of these modes of existence is by way of the notion of communicative situations which he defines as “the complex, and often contradictory, interplay” (p. 83) of a text and a context, creating a matrix of overlapping frames. The text accretes layers of meaning in the “paper world” (a term he borrows from Schütz) of circulating discourses, the “intertextual frame” that overlaps an “existential frame” of personal and collective experiences in what Schütz calls the “life world”, and an “institutional frame” of accepted rules and protocols.
Casetti (2004) postulates that it is the way “a text and its surroundings” interrelate and work together that “bend the text in one way or another”, and that the determining factor is “the way in which the text appears as an event in the world” (p. 84). For example, Earls’ novel *Perfect Skin* is subject to a novelistic institutional frame. It is by turns social satire, comedy of manners, adult romance, an exploration of male friendship and the belated rites of passage of Generation-X growing up at last. However, despite its (at times) carnivalesque use of parody, pastiche and intertextual references to 1980s music, films, hair, clothes and manners, most readers would take the narrative at face value as being primarily situated in the life world. It may well be the case that for committed readers and students of Earls’ novels, the intertextual frame is activated and their reading of the novel may be determined primarily by the “paper world” of circulating discourses of what has been written and said about them, about him and by him. However in the case of the stage adaptation it is that the institutional frame of the theatre asserts its own dominant demands on the text of the adaptation – not least that it hold the attention in a particular real-time/real-space “life world”, which is other than the life world imagined by the reader or the paper world engaged by the novel/novelist’s fan/critical base.

**A new approach to adaptation – re-program the reception**

From a consideration of the existential, intertextual and institutional frames Casetti (2004) suggests a new approach to adaptation:

To adapt, to move from one communicative situation to another, entails a number of things, most significantly, to re-program the reception of the story, a theme, or a character, and so on. The second life of a text coincides with a second life of reception (p. 85).

Within the idea of re-programming the reception of the story, Casetti (2004) invokes as an additional step the notion of “negotiation” as a means of facilitating analysis of medium-specific discourse in relation to a wider network of social discourses. Casetti refers to the interplay of overlapping frames when discussing how an event appears in the world. However when considering the event as social discourse Casetti separates the frames and reconfigures each one as a “level” as a means of controlling analysis. For Casetti, negotiation occurs at a number of levels. At an intertextual level, every text “confronts itself” with other texts “while trying to maintain its peculiarity on the one hand, and to connect with the rest of the network, on the other
hand” (Casetti, 2004, p. 89). There is further negotiation at the level of reception where the text confronts the reader or audience and their expectations and previous knowledge. Casetti (2004) asserts that it is the tension between the intertextual and reception levels that “creates an interpretation” (p. 89). At the institutional level the text confronts rules and principles which are specific to a medium [here, theatre], renewing and exploring their viability. At a wider social level the text confronts itself with Casetti’s (2004) “life world” constituted of various groups characterized by particular practices, needs and processes of reception.

**Overlapping social worlds**

Where Casetti (2004) refers to overlapping frames of reference and levels of reception of texts, Schlossman (2002) develops the concept of overlapping social worlds for groups. In the practice of adaptation, one such group or social world is the creative artists involved in workshopping, rehearsing and performing the adaptation. The way that selected insiders of this social world interact with and interpret the adaptation, individually and collectively in order to present and perform it to an audience, is different from the various modes of reception of that audience, be it knowledgeable about the novel or not, or about theatre practice or not. Examination of the processes of negotiation of *Perfect Skin* (in Chapter 5 below) from commissioning brief, through rehearsal to performance, and of the levels and forms of discourse that the adaptation provoked, permits us to consider the specific needs of theatre generally whilst focusing on developing a suite of tools for adapting existing texts for the theatre.

**Post-structuralism versus Interpretive Relevance**

The post-structuralist, and (increasingly) post-postmodernist, post-fidelity-criticism theorists generally accept the proposition expressed that adaptation is characterized as “a situated utterance produced in one medium and in one historical context, then transformed into another equally situated utterance that is produced in a different context and in a different medium” (Stam, 200, p. 68). Stam’s concern is for how a given adaptation has rewritten its source text. Hutcheon concludes that adaptation is a re-interpreting and re-creating/re-writing; for Sanders it is the interplay of similarity and difference between the texts whilst for Casetti it is a matter of negotiating the recontextualization of the text and re-programming the reception of a story. Though they come at adaptation from different angles, what is important to these theorists is not
the fidelity of the adaptation to the source text but the changes that have had to be made because of a change in medium and the specific and deliberate narrative choices which follow.

**Intertextual approach**

Stam’s rigorous disavowal of fidelity criticism in favour of an intertextual approach has led to his becoming a leading theorist of adaptation studies. Citing the usefulness of Bakhtin’s “chronotope”, Stam (2005) argues for its suitability as a means of defining and analysing the “specifically cinematic [theatrical] articulation of space and time” (p. 27) which co-exist simultaneously and address issues of history and genre. Stam acknowledges Genette’s contribution in adapting Bakhtin’s concept of “dialogism” and Kristeva’s “intertextuality” to differentiate between five types of “transtextuality”: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality and hyperintertextuality. Stam (2005) finds the most appropriate fit for adaptation as the relationship “between one text, which Genette calls ‘hypertext’, to an anterior text or ‘hypotext’, which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates or extends ... by operations of selection, amplification, concretization, and actualization” (p. 31). Stam gives the example that different adaptation versions (hypertexts) of the same source (hypotext) may also reference earlier adaptations, and that all the versions and the source may cumulatively form a larger hypotext for the most recent adapter in a series. It is from this example that Stam (2005) extrapolates his “ongoing whirl of intertextual references … with no clear point of origin” (p. 31). Stam is being either disingenuous or intentionally provocative. Apart from terminology that invokes notions of intertextuality, the relationship between a hypertext and its hypotext is essentially the same as that discussed by Cardwell, Hutcheon, McFarlane and Kranz below; and as we shall see affirms the practical usefulness of the comparative analysis of an adaptation and its source to one another, back and forth, dialogically, according to the dictates and requirements of their specific media.

**Interpretive relevance**

As a counter argument to the potential excesses of that line of thinking, and in his quest for a rational approach to adaptation studies, Kranz proposes an alternative to what he deems the reductive extremism of a post-structuralist understanding of adaptation. Citing Robert Stam, Dudley Andrew, Robert B. Ray and Thomas Leitch as
significant adherents to a post-structuralist approach to adaptation studies, Kranz demonstrates how their fixation with fidelity actually drives them to theorize radical and ultimately empty solutions based purely on medium specificity and intertextual complexity. For example, Stam’s “intertextual dialogism” or “dialogical intertextuality” (terms he derives from Bakhtin and Kristeva) contend that “just as any text can generate an infinity of readings, so any novel can generate any number of adaptations” (Stam 2000, pp. 62-63). This is not particularly helpful in the actual practice of adaptation. In the case of this research project, invoking Barthes’ (1968) “The Death of the Author”, and theories of an infinite connection of texts to yet more numberless texts in ever-changing contexts with no clear point of origin, postmodernism and post-structuralism would seem to offer little practical guidance to the practitioner commissioned to adapt a bestselling novel by a living, well-known author who has clearly legislated and articulated legal and moral rights. In this context, Kranz’s middle way and Casetti’s negotiation at an intertextual level referred to above become a practical means of limiting or controlling analysis to avoid the endless study of infinite possibilities.

In the name of “interpretive relevance” Kranz recommends that:

We filter out the relativistic excesses of postmodernist theory, such as its attack on rationality, its denial of any objectivity (that is, its ironic totalization of subjectivity), and its assumption of the virtue of necessity of infinite ambiguity (with simultaneous demonization of the essential, hierarchical and probable) before using it to guide needed changes in adaptation theory (Kranz, 2007, p. 88).

For Kranz (2007), “the application of probability to the infinite play of signifiers” (p. 88) suggests that most producers, audiences, and practitioners acknowledge that the economic and artistic value of a well-known source text (why it was specifically chosen), far outweighs the value of most other intertexts, and has a more profound influence on the reception of the adaptation than some lesser known reference or event. Furthermore, audiences are more readily persuaded as to the meaning of an adaptation by an understanding of how and why the acknowledged source text has been changed rather than any number of other referential and reverential appropriations, quotations or allusions with little or no relationship to the source. An example in Perfect Skin is Earls’ homage to Tarantino’s film Pulp Fiction (1994). Like the character in the film played by actor John Travolta, Jon retreats to the bathroom to give himself a drunken pep-talk about having to take his leave of the amorous Katie
before things get out of hand. For most theatre audience members and readers, the intertextual reference to the film is lost and what they think of or remember is that it is the funny bit where Jon pisses on the cat.

In the further interests of interpretive relevance Kranz (2007) stresses the need for a second filter, “the rational attempt to be objective by trying harder to reduce subjectivity” (p. 88). Kranz (2007) claims that the consequences of adopting a post-structuralist or postmodernist stance on objectivity and subjectivity, even whilst acknowledging one’s ideological biases, involve “conceptual and methodological limitations” and a “failure to consider contrary evidence and critical opinion” in “hermeneutical endeavours” (pp. 90-91). However Kranz also accepts that post-structuralism provides valuable analytical tools in the practice of adaptation, and that postmodernist theory allows for the adaptation to interrogate, subvert and challenge the source text.

In conclusion Kranz (2007) argues for a compromise between extremes of fidelity criticism and the infinite oscillations of intertexts and contexts that Stam (2005) reduces to the contention that “almost all films can be seen in some ways as ‘adaptations’”, as “virtually all films … are mediated through intertextuality and writing” (p. 45). Stam argues that no useful distinction can be made between an adaptation and other films; but his assertions might be seen more productively as provocations that have re-kindled interest in adaptation studies rather than as an absolutist position. As we shall see later, Stam no less than Kranz or Hutcheon or Cardwell would agree that without a comparative analysis to a named or identifiable source text an adaptation can not be understood as a distinctive process, or practice or product.

3.4 How to adapt

Practical implications for the theatre of theories of adaptation of novel to film

It is beyond the reach of this study to examine all the possible practical applications of the extensive writings in adaptation theory of film. What may be useful at this point is to consider how the theoretical discourse on adaptation of novel to film impacts on the adaptation of novel to play, and what the practical implications are for adaptation for the theatre. As indicated above in Section 3.3.1 (p. 29), the critical
analysis examined below identifies and defines concepts from the theoretical works that provided me with fresh insights into my writing practice and offered both practical and analytical tools to apply to the adaptations of *Perfect Skin* and *Red Cap*. The task of synthesis emerges through practice in the implementation of useful mechanical tools, and in the analysis of practice by applying particular lenses and theoretical approaches to interrogate both the practice and the production outcome.

**Problems of time, location and language**

The practice of adaptation requires consideration of space, time and language, particularly as a novel-to-theatre adaptation involves the transfer from a purely verbal medium to an embodied, enacted form designed for performance. In one sense both novel and the stage are temporal arts in that both take time to unfold from beginning to end and there are usually two time frames at work in each. A play may take ninety minutes or nine hours to tell the story and a novel may be one hundred pages in length or one thousand. The time-span of the story is usually considerably longer whether it is over twenty-four hours or twenty-four years, though both novel and play are capable of ellipsis and summary, of description and commentary according to the conventions of each medium. But it takes longer to speak than to read a line of text and even longer to sing it. Consequently there has to be a radical process of distillation of the narrative of the novel. Compression involves cutting plot lines, removal of sub-plots, omitting events and characters, removal of psychological analysis of and by characters, conflating events and characters, transferring action to a smaller number of locations, simplifying language and cutting dialogue. Yet sometimes there is the need to add events and or dialogue to bridge narrative gaps.

When we read, the novel unreels in our unfettered imaginations at a pace controlled by the author by her choice of words that also focus our attention on specific details. We can stop reading at any point and reread or leap ahead to see who did it; we can see what progress we have made and how far there is still to go. But with theatre, we are locked in a virtual present that drives the story unrelentingly on even when it is flashing back to the past. We may be asked to make imaginative leaps about the way objects and spaces are represented but otherwise we are in a world of direct perception, presented in infinite detail and wide focus.
It is the purpose of this study to bring together such practical insights with the theoretical discourse on the problems of adaptation seeking concepts from theory that can be applied efficaciously in practice.

### 3.4.1 Comparative Analysis

Sarah Cardwell provides a powerful framework in her later paper, “Adaptation Studies Revisited: Purposes, Perspectives and Inspiration” (in Welsh and Lev, 2007, pp. 51-63). Cardwell articulates that too narrow a focus on fidelity invariably leads to adverse findings against the value of the adaptation, consequently reducing the possibility of responding to it more attentively. She states that this line of attack ignores the adaptation’s “own agenda, its artistic choices, its emphases and voice” (p. 55). To respond more attentively, and with Noël Carroll’s “sympathetic disinterest” (Carroll, 2000, as cited by Cardwell, 2007, p. 52), Cardwell (2007) advises considering the adaptation’s “artistic, and cultural contexts and its medium”, specifically locating it in terms of “its generic context, its authorial context and its televisual [in this case theatrical] context” (p. 55).

#### Generic Context

Following Cardwell’s line of thinking, the first task for the practitioner is to identify whether the play adaptation belongs to a specific genre of theatre making. The degree to which the adaptation complies with familiar genre conventions should allow the audience to draw conclusions about the interpretive approaches of both the script and the production.

#### Authorial Context

Cardwell uses the example of scriptwriter Andrew Davies in his television adaptations of classic novels by Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope and George Eliot amongst others, when she claims that “authorial context” raises audience expectations with regards to the adaptation. Over time, Davies’ particular tone and approach to these British television classic-novel adaptations have become so recognizable as to provide more of a marker and a marketing focus than knowledge of the source texts or their authors. This might be seen as an example of author-author conflict. In the practice of adaptation the writer, and the actors and director in the rehearsal process, may be confronted by the presence of a marquee author. Often there is an impulse to argue with the author, to challenge his or her privileged relationship to the source text.
Theatrical Context (Medium-Specificity)

Cardwell’s third practice-relevant context is to do with medium specificity, with performance identified as a defining characteristic. Her case study example is television whilst for my purposes it is theatre. As shall be evident from the analysis of the play script Perfect Skin in Chapter 6 below, it is the strategic deployment of medium-specific resources, rather than engagement with the source text, that gives formal shape to the adaptation, establishes its tone and guides or suggests the most appropriate style of presentation.

Rewriting the Narrative

If the adaptation is to be accepted on its own terms it must reach beyond the aura that surrounds the nexus of marquee writer and bestselling novel. Establishing a new framework or platform for the reception of the adaptation provokes a series of questions and as asserted by Casetti (2004) a series of negotiations (p.40 above). How does one rewrite the drama of the original narrative without writing a completely new narrative and without doing extreme violence to the audience or the source? How does one decouple audience expectations early enough with regards to the adaptation so that the re-programming of its reception is mediated through a relationship with the creators of the material in the new context and not to the existing narrative?

Cardwell points to some useful options in arguing that comparative study of texts in different media is a means of deepening and developing our understanding of the demands and rewards offered by each medium, and that this is particularly so in the “area of aesthetics: the study of the unique features of different art forms, those features that distinguish them from one another and constitute their artistic potential” (Cardwell, 2007, p. 59). Furthermore Cardwell urges us to embrace the boundary-crossing, transgressive nature of adaptations because by their very existence they “illuminate points of contention, raise questions and problems, and allow multiple perspectives to suggest answers” (Cardwell, 2007, p. 60).

Adaptation Proper

Brian McFarlane also provides craft-relevant concepts, invoking processes of what he calls “adaptation proper” (McFarlane 2007, p. 7). Citing the usefulness of Chatham’s “narrative kernels” and Barthes’ “cardinal functions”, McFarlane asserts that it is relatively easy to quantify what has been “transferred from the wholly verbal sign
system to the system of the audiovisual moving image” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 7). McFarlane theorises about film but his analysis pertains readily to theatrical adaptation. He goes on to argue that “adaptation proper” is more challenging and rewarding than quantifying transferred elements and requires a sound knowledge of the narrative strategies of the specific medium. The point he makes is that a film [here, a play] creates layers of meaning through significant elements that pervade a text synchronically such as mise-en-scène [or setting], editing [or cutting or stage focus], and the soundtrack [or sound-scape]. The audience’s experience or reception of all these elements occurs simultaneously from moment to moment as the causally linked events unfold diachronically, one by one.

3.4.2 The Mechanics of Narrative

Many of the contemporary adaptation theorists including Hutcheon and Stam advocate taking a narratological approach to analysis of how the story is modified in practice. In Stam’s study of “the mechanics of narrative” (Stam, 2005, p.32) he extrapolates three of Genette’s principal categories for dealing with time in the novel: “order”, “duration”, and “frequency”. Stam’s theoretical explication of these concepts with reference to adaptation of novels to film provides a powerful framework of tools for the practitioner. Two other major considerations in his analysis of the mechanics of narrative of use for the practitioner of adaptation are how to account for a novel’s “narrator” in the theatre, and the associated concept of "point of view". These terms are defined briefly below and broader discussion of their usefulness to the practice of adaptation is illustrated with specific examples in Chapters 7 and 10 in the analyses of Perfect Skin and Red Cap.

Order

“Order” refers to the sequence of events, or the plot, first defined by Aristotle in his Poetics as the artful arrangement of incidents which make up a story. The plot may arrange the events chronologically in a linear fashion from beginning to end, or it may jump back and forth in time, adopting a non-linear structure. The Russian Formalists made the further distinction between “plot” (sjuzet) and the “story” (fabula) in that the former is a literary device by which the writer orders the raw materials provided by the latter.
For the Russian Formalists (prominent amongst whom were Shklovsky, Jakobson and Bakhtin), the plot in the novel is not merely the arrangement of story events but also includes all the various strategies the author uses to delay and interrupt the narration such as extended descriptions, reflections, word games, digressions, even poetry and recipes.

Order becomes an important consideration in adaptation when the writer for the performance medium is granted the licence to regard the source text as fabula, the raw materials to be ordered according to the specific requirements of the new medium.

Duration
Stam (2005) defines “duration” as the “complex relationalities between discourse time - the time it takes to read the novel or see the film [play] – and those veristic imponderables about how long a fictional event “really” lasted. This relation defines the pace of narration” (p.32).

Frequency
“Frequency” is the third of Genette’s temporal categories assumed by film narratologists as a useful analytical tool. Stam (2005) defines it as “the relationship between how many times an event occurs in a story and how many times it is narrated (or mentioned) in the textual discourse”(p.33).

Adapting the narrator
Stam in writing about film, and Hutcheon in writing about adaptation across a range of media, argue that a complication in adapting literary narration to drama-based media such as film, theatre and games is their employment of a combination of “telling” and “showing” forms of narration. The verbal narration can include a character’s direct address to audience or camera, voice-over and most commonly, dialogue. These virtual and physical media also show us the characters situated within their fictional worlds. Theatre both tells and stages or enacts stories.

Point of View
Because of the multi-track and multi-form nature of film, and theatre to a lesser extent, Stam argues that the commonly used term “point of view” is ambiguous and problematic as every contributing element can assume a narrational point of view. The director of the play script of the adaptation, the actors as well as the characters, the
author of the novel and the writer of the adaptation all have different points of view and
different degrees of influence on the production. The contributions of the lighting and
sound designers may work in harmony or in tension affecting the tone of our reception
of an event. For example, if the stage lighting contracts at a moment when two
characters are about to kiss and it is accompanied by a musical sound, whose point of
view could the audience assume is pre-dominant?

 Turning again to literary theorists and to Genette in particular, Stam proposes
adopting instead the term “focalization” as the means of discrimination between the
narrator and how much he or she sees and knows:

“Zero focalization” occurs with omniscient narrators, those who know much
more than any of the characters. “Internal focalization” refers to the filtering of
events through a character…. That concept is usually further subdivided into
“fixed” (when limited to a single character) or “variable” when passed from
character to character…. “External focalization”, finally, occurs when the
reader is denied access to point of view and motivations, and restricted instead
to merely observing external behavior. (Stam, 2005, pp. 40 – 41)

Point of View - The need for commentary

Another practical consideration is Brian McFarlane’s (2007) assertion of the
unavoidable need for some level of commentary on the source text as an intrinsic
component of “adaptation proper”. He eschews “the decorous, undaring, step-by-step …
embalment” approach to adaptation “with one event from the novel remorselessly
following another, without any sense of shape or structuring, without any apparent
point of view on its material” [my italics] (McFarlane, 2007, p. 8). For McFarlane, if
the adaptation is to emerge on its own terms as something new whilst maintaining a
connection to its precursor, the adapting practitioner’s interested reading needs to be
evident in the play’s enunciation of the narrative through the choices made and the point
of view on the material. It is worth keeping in mind that in theatre and film, both
collaborative art practices, there are multiple creators who contribute to the
interpretation and execution of the adaptation. On the one hand McFarlane advocates
bold, intelligent and imaginative re-workings of source texts “to make something both
connected to its precursor and new in itself” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 9); whilst on the other
hand he also gives examples of so-called “faithful” adaptations (Bogdanovich’s film
version of Henry James’s novel Daisy Miller, and the Merchant-Ivory film adaptation of
Howard’s End by E.M. Forster), which he identifies as successful commentaries.
McFarlane’s seemingly ambiguous stance gives rise to a question for the practitioner of adaptation: “How overt should the commentary be to allow the adaptation to emerge on its own terms?” McFarlane offers no practical guidelines other than his almost Zen-like analysis of Bogdanovich’s film that has “enough … ‘commentary,’ making itself felt in the film’s enunciatory procedures … to lead us to feel we are seeing something new” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 9). By implication he seems to be asserting that in the first instance the practitioner does what needs to be done to make a good example of a work in the medium. It will then follow that “the film [play] has the right to be judged as a film [play]; then, one of the many things it also is is an adaptation” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 9).

**Rationale for violence**

If one accepts Foucault’s analysis of discourse as power, and as “a violence we do to things” (as cited by Selden and Widdowson, 1993, p. 160), then at one level every adaptation is an act of violence perpetrated upon a source text. By default, every adaptation is at some level a commentary upon a source text. This concept of violence is further supported if one applies Bloom’s (1973) theories of poetry to the practice of adaptation. Invoking notions of Oedipal hatred of the “father” and of “psychic struggle”, Bloom argues that the necessary “misreading” of the anterior text and an aggressive wrenching of its meaning are essential strategies in order to create space for the new interpretation (as cited by Selden and Widdowson, 1993, p. 153). Bloom is theorizing about the practice of poets but the adapting scriptwriter is in no less significant a relationship with the author of the source text novel.

### 3. 5 Investigating models of practice

Bookstores and libraries abound in how-to books for writing plays, and especially screenplays. Reviewing some of the available literature it soon becomes apparent that few give much guidance on the practice of transferring a source text into a dramatic text. Most devote only a few pages to it, almost as an afterthought and the tone is invariably one of forbearance, presaging failure.

Robert McKee (1998) allocates five out of four hundred pages on screenwriting to “The Problem Of Adaptation” (pp. 364-370). He asserts adaptation of literary novels
is “aesthetically impossible” on two counts. “One … no cinematic equivalences exist for conflicts buried in the extravagant language of master novelists … Two … when a lesser talent attempts to adapt genius … genius is dragged down to the level of the adaptor” (McKee, 1998, p. 367). Charlie Kaufman had great fun alternately satirizing and valorising McKee in his screen adaptation, *Adaptation*, in which an actor playing McKee gives one of his notoriously abusive and profanity-riddled seminars on screenwriting.

What is perplexing about McKee’s attitude is that so many films are adaptations and they do have an impressive success rate. Linda Seger (1992) lists some statistics in the preface to her book, *The Art of Adaptation, Turning Fact and Fiction into Film*:

- 85% of all Academy Award–winning Best Pictures are adaptations.
- 45% of all tele-movies-of-the-week are adaptations, yet 70% of all Emmy Award winners come from these films.
- 83% of all miniseries are adaptations, but 95% of Emmy Award winners are drawn from these films. (p. xi)

In her how-to book on the practice of adapting texts to film Linda Seger (1992) makes some useful distinctions between theatre and film. While she acknowledges that spatio-temporal issues, use of language, and the need to compress and edit the source text are common to both, she argues that theatre is “more thematic than film [and] does not need as strong a story line to work” (Seger, 1992, p. 36). She further claims that theatre is more concerned with exploring ideas and humanity, focusing on “the interplay of theme, character, subtext, and language, rather than on story” (Seger, 1992, p. 39). Seger argues that film needs goal-oriented stories about a sympathetic protagonist and with a clearly identifiable beginning, middle and end; while theatre allows for more ambiguity in both the narrative and central character. Seger is not a practitioner and the practical methods she outlines for translating story, character, themes and style into film are based on character-driven stories structured according to the three-act paradigm and derived from her earlier books *How to Make a Good Script Great* and *Creating Unforgettable Characters*. Her approach is that of problem solving and the solutions she offers to problems encountered in film are useful for playwrights as they are based on the application of the same craft skills and techniques. Although Seger discusses in detail the issues to be addressed in the practice of adaptation, she assumes the would-be
practitioner has a high level of writing skill, and she does not delineate a clear step-by-step method of adaptation.

Few playwrighting texts mention techniques for adapting source texts for the stage at all, and then only briefly. Perhaps what McKee and other experts on how-to-write-scripts are implicitly admitting in their neglect of adaptation practice guidelines is that it is difficult and problematic, and that each adaptation is its own special case. There has been very little else written on the art of adaptation since Linda Seger’s book was published in 1992. Though it remains the recommended text it is now considered out of date. Ben Brady published *Principles of Adaptation for Film and Television* in 1994. Drawing on his experience as a veteran television producer and writer from the 1950s and 1960s it has a narrower focus than Seger’s book. However, he generally espouses the same character-driven, three-act structure as Seger, Field and most script writing experts. Most playwrighting texts (and commissioning agreements) assume that the playwright will have mastered the craft skills and techniques of playwrighting before using this knowledge to approach the practice of adaptation through a process of trial and error.

**Playwrighting and playwriting**

It is interesting to note that although many American texts talk of playwrighting as *playwriting*, many playwrights point out the distinction; that the “wright” part in playwright derives from the same etymological root as the word “wrought”, meaning “hammered, beaten into shape” (The Penguin English Dictionary), which occurs after the initial writing phase. This has strong connotations of craftsmanship, of learning specific skills and working techniques, even of a long apprenticeship to achieve mastery. Writers of playwrighting and screenwriting texts like to mark out their territory in individualistic ways but they generally share several steps and common terminology in their approaches to writing and structuring an original work.
3.6 A model for playwriting

Playwriting: The Structure of Action by Sam Smiley (with Norman A. Bert)

Overview

It is useful at this juncture to give an overview of Sam Smiley’s (2005) approach to playwriting in *Playwriting: The Structure of Action*, as the methodology he advocates closely correlates with the one I have developed in my own practice over thirty years. Smiley (2005) observes that whilst every playwright needs a systematic working process, that it may vary from project to project, indeed that it usually does. “The stages presented here aren’t rules but merely factors in a sensible process that should help any playwright perfect a personal methodology” (Smiley, 2005, p. 20).

Smiley’s eight stages are defined briefly below and how they were adapted is discussed in the Introductions to the adaptations of *Perfect Skin* and *Red Cap*.

1. Creative Compulsion
2. Germinal Idea
3. Collecting Materials
4. Thinking Through
5. Rough Scenario
6. Final Scenario
7. Drafting
8. Revision (Smiley, 2005, pp. 21-56).

(1) Creative compulsion

Smiley (2005) identifies this as “a feeling, a need … to create” (p. 21) rather than an idea. He defines this stimulus as being inspired by an image, or situations such as “accidents”, “a discovery”, “a decision”, and “a deed” that may cause a character to change (Smiley, 2005, pp. 21-24).

(2) Germinal Idea

To use Smiley’s (2005) metaphor a germinal idea is like “an acorn … that holds complicated possibilities for life … contain the potential for dramatic action … and include one or more moments of change” (Smiley, 2005, pp. 24-25). Germinal ideas can spring from or be constructed around: a character or person, a place, incidents, conceptual thought, and a situation.
(3) Collecting Materials

This is a research stage that develops and explores all aspects of the germinal idea. It may involve socio-historical research and employ strategies of interview, brainstorming, discussion, travel to particular locations, review of other art forms, and improvisation with actors.

(4) Thinking Through

This is a preliminary process of ordering the possible sequence of incidents or events. Smiley (2005) argues that “simple scenario [making] saves revision time and deepens the quality of the play” (p. 34). It allows for trial and error testing of story elements: combining, cutting or adding characters and events, and playing with chronological order.

(5) Rough Scenario

Smiley (2005) claims this stage focuses on matching the story from the previous stage with other “qualitative parts of the drama” (p. 36). It is still in a rough form but it more firmly establishes the overall structure by applying basic story principles: balance, disturbance, protagonist, antagonist, goal, strategy, effort, obstacle, crisis, conflict, complication, substory, suspense, climax and resolution.

(6) Final Scenario

Smiley (2005) describes this as “a full and formal statement of the play” (p. 38), which develops and refines the work. Smiley acknowledges that not all experienced writers construct a final scenario but asserts that it saves time, as a first draft written without one usually ends up being “an opaque scenario in dialogue form and often requires total rewriting” (Smiley, 2005, p. 39).

(7) Drafting

At this stage the scenario is transformed into dialogue and stage directions. Smiley endorses imaginative and exploratory departures from the scenario but advocates staying mindful of the scenic structure and of writing in beats. He affirms that if the planning was thorough the dialogue usually turns out well.

(8) Revision

All good writing is rewriting and Smiley laments that not all writers think so or more importantly do not include rewriting in their practice. He suggests putting the draft
aside for a week or two before reading it through to conduct a review of the play’s thrust and fluency, character and dialogue, and a systematic analysis of structure by writing a one-line summary of each scene. Smiley advises the playwright to keep his own counsel and makes what seem like heretical suggestions to the playwright: that suggestions from others are to be considered as contributions to the analysis, not the blueprint for revision. This process of analysis and revision is repeated until the final draft is ready to submit for production.

3.7 A summary of useful analytical tools

As we have seen, most current adaptation theorists eschew the need for and the validity of fidelity criticism; and if McFarlane’s notion of “adaptation proper” is to be satisfactorily achieved so that the adaptation provides a “commentary” on the source text, then at one level a kind of “adaptive violence” must be done to the source text. The same theorists generally accept that there is a dialogic relationship, some level of intertextual interplay between the source text and the adaptation. Furthermore, it is apparent that analysis of the adaptation, which Hutcheon (2006) asserts must declare itself if it is to have what Krantz (2007) deems “interpretative relevance” (p. 88), cannot avoid comparison between the source text and the adaptation. When Casetti (2004) argues for a “re-programming of reception” (p. 85) of an existing story he acknowledges that the adaptation requires a level of “negotiation” (p. 89) if it is to achieve the appropriate “recontextualisation of the [source] text” (p. 83), which again requires comparative analysis. As noted above, Cardwell (2007) revised her earlier position on comparative analysis to argue that consideration is given to three “contexts” of the adaptation: “generic context”, “authorial context” and the “medium-specific context” (p. 55) of [in this case] theatre. And though Stam (2005) contends above that most films [plays] can be seen in some ways as adaptations, as they are “mediated through intertextuality and writing” (p. 45), his “interested reading of a novel” to produce an adaptation, his “circumstantially shaped writing” (p. 46), also requires comparative analysis to effectively apply the “mechanics of narrative” defined above.

Though these different positions and arguments revolve around particular aspects and interpretations of comparative analysis and are primarily aimed at other adaptation theorists, they have much to offer the practitioner in the provision of “analytical tools” to inform practice. These different approaches articulated by the
theorists above have been developed in order to answer the question that confronts both the theorist and the creative practitioner: “What principles determine the making of appropriate or relevant choices when adapting a source text?” The application and usefulness of these “analytical tools” in the creative practice of adapting texts to the theatre is analysed at greater length in Chapters 7 and 10 dedicated to the analyses of the creative projects, *Perfect Skin* and *Red Cap* below.

In the hands of the practitioner, comparative analysis is usefully employed to provoke investigation into genres, tone, performance and the medium-specific demands of theatre. Importantly, comparison allows the practitioner to ascertain different starting points for exploration of the narrative and to identify the gaps, omissions and flaws that exist in all texts, to give regard to the need for remedy, and to consider interpretive possibilities that may be critical of or comment upon aspects of the source. In short, comparison allows the practitioner a focused way of interrogating the habits, assumptions and ideologies that inform her own practice.
4 PRACTICE-LED METHODOLOGY

4.1 Methodological Paradigms:

4.1.1 Reflective practice

Theoretical context for problem solving in practice

Schön (1987) identifies that professionals, such as doctors, architects and accountants invariably encounter two types of problems or situations in their practices: those that lend themselves to “solution through the application of research-based theory and technique”, and those that “do not present themselves … as well-formed structures”. The latter are “messy, confusing” and “defy technical solution”. (pp. 3-4). He goes on to assert that “a problematic situation often presents itself as a unique case (Schön, 1987, p. 5) and that framing a problem is an ontological process, a kind of world making. Schön (1987) asserts: “It is not by technical problem solving that we convert problematic situations to well-formed problems: rather it is through naming and framing that the technical problem solving becomes possible” (p. 5).

Technical context for problem solving in practice

At about the same time as Schön was developing his theories on reflective practice, Syd Field, a Hollywood script doctor addressed the problem of how to make films (and their considerable dollar investments) more failsafe. In 1984 he developed a technique-based theoretical paradigm for the three-act structure of the well-made-screenplay. Field’s paradigm gave writers and producers a recipe for success. It was essentially an analytical tool that allowed readers and writers of screenplays to “name and frame”, to identify what story elements were required at which point of the story structure to create the architecture of a successful screenplay.

Field’s success with the studios and with writers and producers generated a cottage industry of scriptwriting experts offering practical solutions to writers’ problems. Each succeeding generation of screenwriters (in each decade), has needed to re-invent their version of the paradigm. Amongst the best known of Field’s adherents and successors are Linda Seger and Robert Vogler in the 1980s and Robert McKee in the 1990s. In recent times Australia’s Linda Aronson (2001) created her niche in providing guidelines for breaking the rules by analysing non-linear narratives, such as Pulp Fiction, Memento, Crash, and 21 Grams, each one a law unto itself, presenting
itself as a “unique case” (Schön, 1987, p. 5). Breaking a rule may establish new meaning and suggest new forms but it usually produces a unique model that does not lend itself to successful copying. However, in Aronson’s analysis of case studies in which rules were broken, there still exists the possibility of learning particular competences from a careful examination of artistry.

**Professional artistry**

The screenwriting theorists have identified elements of dramatic writing and how they relate to each other in time and space; sequential principles, craft skills and techniques that can be examined and developed with more certainty when creating story. The analytical processes they ascribe to when identifying problems with character, motivation, conflict, story, structure are useful tools in the reflective part of practice before rewriting. However, they have little to say about Schön’s concept of “knowing-in-action”, that creative, intuitive, artistic leap that playwrights are required to make in order to give character and story its “life”. There is an assumption that the practitioner has a certain aptitude or talent for the artistry of her practice.

Schön (1987) refers to “professional artistry” as “the kinds of competences practitioners sometimes display in unique, uncertain and conflicted situations of practice” (p. 22). Citing both Ryle and Hainer, Schön (1987) asserts that what is particularly striking and distinguishing about these competencies is that the practitioner may know more than he is able to say. Not only may he not know how or why he did what he did, he may not be able to hold in conscious thought what the specific doing revealed (p. 22).

Schön (1987) argues that “several levels and kinds of reflection play important roles in the acquisition of artistry” (p. 31). They include knowing-in-action, reflecting-on-action, reflecting-in-action, and reflecting-on reflection-in-action.

**Knowing-in-action**

Schön (1987) defines knowing-in-action as the “spontaneous skilful execution of performance” (p. 25) which is rigorous, involving fine judgement, decision making and appropriate actions without the practitioner being able to explain what rules or procedures were followed. This inability to be verbally explicit or adequately describe
practice pertains to many complex life-skills such as walking, playing the piano or driving a car, and at times, writing a play whether it be an original work or an adaptation.

**Reflecting-on-action**

Schön (1987) states that *reflecting-on-action* allows the practitioner to *construct* descriptions of our tacit and spontaneous knowing-in-action by, and then using specific language to describe “the sequences of operations and procedures we execute; the clues we observe and the rules we follow” (p. 25). But this is a relativist position and is bound to cause distortion or incomplete revelation as knowing-in-action is a dynamic process rendered static by observation and recording of rules and procedures and values. Our conjectures then need to be tested against the original performance in practice either by: modifying practice through adopting new action strategies to be more consistent with our espoused theory; or constructing a theory that is more consistent with the variables of our practice.

**Dramaturgy as reflecting-on-action**

Schön’s “messy, confusing” “unique case” is an appropriate description of most creative writing as it progresses through processes of trial and error, improvisation, invention, creative intuition, and followed by a process of *active reflection* on what works and what does not. This reflection-on-action is an analytical process which involves identifying problematic aspects of the script either by the practitioner herself or facilitated by a dramaturg or script editor. The new understanding and possible solution is often found in the dialogical interaction about the problem with other theatre professionals.

The emphasis of practice is in the doing, in learning by doing, in both developing practice and creating new works. Dewey argued that the differences between a student being *taught* and being *coached* are:

He has to *see* on his own behalf and in his own way the relations between means and methods employed and results achieved. Nobody else can see for him, and he can’t see just by being ‘told,’ although the right kind of telling may guide his seeing and thus help him see what he needs to see (Dewey, 1974, p.151 as cited in Schön, 1987, p. 17).
Reflecting-on-action may be a usefully employed strategy either at the end of a task or because we have paused in the midst of action to assess, or to think back on what we have done differently in our usual practice to produce an unexpected, surprise result. In both cases present action has ceased and our reflection has no immediate consequence on practice.

**Reflecting-in-action**

Alternatively, we can reflect-in-action, without pause, responding to the unusual situation as it presents itself and “reshape what we are what we are doing while we are doing it” (Schon, 1987, p. 26).

Schön (1987) confirms the process of reflection-in-action through a sequence of steps where routine practice produces a surprise which in turn leads to reflection-in-action, followed by experimentation that may either “produce expected outcomes, or it may produce further surprises that call for ongoing reflection and experiment” (p. 29) and so on. When this cycle of re-thinking and experimenting is performed by a skilled practitioner, reflection-in-action is spontaneously and simultaneously integrated into our ongoing knowing-in-action. Examples of this are musicians sight-reading a new work, or improvising together; actors improvising or trying new actions in rehearsal in order to come to a new understanding of the text; the apparent seamless to-and-fro of good conversation and dialogue in plays.

**Reflecting on reflection-in-action**

There are inherent problems with reflection-in-action as a process in practice-led research into the creation of a new work. Like knowing-in-action, it can be delivered spontaneously without the practitioner being able to say what he is doing. Clearly, reflection-in-action is an important and essential process to use in the midst of practice. But if one needs to examine practice for purposes of research or to extend one’s practice, it is essential to be able to reflect on our reflection-in-action and be able to produce a good verbal description of it. Schön (1987) argues for a further process of being “able to reflect on the resulting description … [as] our reflection on our past reflection-in-action may indirectly shape our future action” (p. 31).
4.1.2 Practice-led research
Definitions and assumptions
As a “reflective practitioner”, my predominant methodology is “practice-led” research.

Carole Gray acknowledges Schön’s contribution to recasting the nexus between research and practice. She argues that “practitioners may become reflective researchers in situations of uncertainty, instability, uniqueness, and conflict” (as cited by Gray and Malins, 2004, p. 22). These situations are commonly encountered in creative practice. Gray (1996) defines “practice-led” research as:

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

All creative work, including writing for the theatre, involves research. It involves strategies of investigation of facts and of different formal models, brainstorming and careful construction of plot and character, experiment, intuitive leaps and a lot of trial and error. None of this is haphazard but is based on the practitioner’s experience and the experienced input of other collaborators such as dramaturges, directors, designers and actors.

A research methodology that is practice-led implies that the practice leads the research and generates the theoretical analysis or exegesis. Extrapolating from Gray’s definitions above one could assume that the creative work produced in practice is a significant part of the thesis. Moreover, it implies that the creative work is privileged over an exegesis that provides a subservient analytical and explicatory function. As is evidenced by the Contextual Review and the discussion of methodology here, the practice of adaptation provoked rather than led to a field of research in order to develop analytical tools. These tools provide a theoretical framework which informs both the practice and the interpretive analysis of the creative work in the following exegesis. As Gray (1996) contends in her conference paper, Inquiry Through Practice: Developing Appropriate Research Strategies in Art and Design: “Theory informs practice and practice informs theory” (Gray, 1996, p 15). One could assume that the axiom of form being inseparable from content readily applies to this research in that Gray’s verbal roundelay above describes the back and forth, dialogic, intertextual relationship between
the creative practice and exegesis in practice-led research. The plays are informed by theory that illuminates and determines the analysis of the creative work that refines the practice that produces creative work which provides evidence of the theory and so on and so on.

This practice-led research employs a tripartite approach. It is comprised of the writing of the play, participation in the production and an exegetical component that analyses the effectiveness of the construction of the play adaptations as texts and in production. The focus in the exegetical phase is on comparative analysis and the development and deployment of analytical tools. These tools are derived from theoretical literature and a creative practice based on acquired professional artistry “learnt by doing” over a longstanding professional practice as actor, director and writer. The analytical tools were initially developed at the time of writing the adaptation of the first play, its production and a subsequent period of reflection. As identified in Chapter 3 above the tools draw on Cardwell’s “comparative analysis”: on close consideration of generic context, authorial context and medium-specific context; and on Stam’s “mechanics of narrative”: order, duration, frequency, the narrator and point of view. A third analytical lens is provided by an awareness of the significance of the commissioning brief and ethical considerations and obligations to the source text and its author and audience (often overlooked by theorists). This perspective grew from deliberations on the “reprogramming of reception”, “adaptation proper” and “interpretive relevance” (discussed in Section 3.3.2 above).

This tripartite approach yielded a template for adaptations that could be applied to the writing of the second play and its development for production. The second play’s exegesis (Chapter 10) analyses the effectiveness of the template and its analytical tools and the reception of the production in order to conclude the study with a workable model to use in the practice of adapting existing texts, both factual and fictional for the theatre.
5. PREPARATIONS FOR PROJECT 1: *Perfect Skin*

Context for Project 1

La Boite Theatre Company commissioned the adaptation of Nick Earls’ novel *Perfect Skin* as part of their 2006 subscription theatre season. The company had successfully commissioned and produced adaptations of a series of Earls’ novels, *48 Shades of Brown, After January* and *Zig Zag Street*, all adapted by playwright Phillip Dean. La Boite Theatre Company was seeking to reinvigorate the franchise by engaging a different playwright. However, as shall be argued later in the analysis of *Perfect Skin* in Chapter 7, the theatre company’s approach, constraints and expectations remained the same. The adaptation was commissioned in December 2004 and the rehearsal draft was delivered at the end of March 2006. Given the relatively short timeframe, the adaptation and the initial research study occurred concurrently. This meant that the theoretical reading and investigations into practice had to occur at the same time as the novel was being adapted. Consequently, as the novel was being adapted in practice, the study was focused and structured so that the research component could establish a framework for subsequent analysis.

5.1 Introduction to the Adaptation of *Perfect Skin*

It is important here to reiterate Smiley’s assertion that his eight stages are “not rules but merely factors in a sensible process that should help any playwright perfect a personal methodology” (Smiley, 2005, p. 20). That is, Smiley advocates that each playwright adapts the methodology to personalize it and make it his or her own. As useful as his methodology is for the writing of original new plays it requires being adapted itself in order to provide practical guidelines for the adaptation of source texts. The reason for this soon becomes apparent when one considers that the creative compulsion, germinal idea, much of the material that needs to be gathered, and one version of the scenario are all provided by the source novel. This is not to say that Smiley’s methodology is made irrelevant but that the first three stages: Creative Compulsion, Germinal Idea and Collecting Materials all require a reading of the novel with consideration being given to an initial process of Thinking Through in order to make some decisions about the story and its potential for dramatic conflict. These decisions would then inform a further stage of Thinking Through that directly informs what selection of materials from the source novel should be collected to construct a
scenario that would best comply with the medium-specific requirements of theatrical production. My adaptation of Smiley’s playwrighting methodology re-interprets and conflates his stages into the following steps which are defined and discussed further with reference to the adaptation of Perfect Skin:

(1) Reading the novel
(2) Finding the story
(3) Finding the conflict
(4) Collecting materials
(5) Constructing a scenario
(6) First Draft
(7) Feedback and Revision

5.1.1 Reading the novel

Reading for “pleasure”

The first step is to read the novel with no preconceptions and making no attempt to visualize it on stage. To read it for “pleasure” is to see if it gives pleasure, especially as there is the possibility that the adaptor of the work will have to live with the characters and their dilemmas for the next year or two. There is an inherent difficulty in this process if the novel has already been contextualized as having potential for adaptation. Consequently as one attempts this initial unencumbered reading of the novel, part of the brain is already consciously and subconsciously processing the narrative and its characters and structure. One cannot help being aware of story principles as they pertain to dramatic writing: set up, balance or normality, disturbance, protagonist and his goal, obstacles and complications, sub-plots, crisis, climax and resolution and looking for equivalences in the novel. It is important at this stage not to take notes or make notes in the novel so as to concentrate one’s attention on the reading for “pleasure”.

First impressions

Having finished reading the novel I put it aside for a day or two before making a few notes. These notes are not detailed but intended to jog memory; what I liked and did not like, and what particular things struck me and moved me, and any potential problems. For example, about a third of the way through my first reading of Perfect Skin, I found it diverting and funny, but I was beginning to wonder when the story was going to start. Story principles in drama and film assert that the story only starts when the protagonist is disturbed enough to take a different course of action. I was also aware
of a significant gap in the narrative and in Jon’s life. None of the characters has mentioned Jon’s wife Mel, mother of Jon’s baby, or of what had happened to her. We learn that Mel has died some months ago on p. 97 (about a third of the way through the novel), but Earls makes us wait until p. 150 (about half way) before he gives us a whole chapter on the Jon and Mel back-story.

First impressions are very important. In his introduction to *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell (2005) contends that aesthetic judgements made in “the blink of an eye … can be of as much value … as months of rational analysis” (p. 17). It is important to make a note of these *first impressions* in order to remind one of what lies at the heart of the narrative when one is engaged in deconstructing and re-constructing it. These are one’s hooks, equivalent to Smiley’s stages of “creative compulsion” and “germinal idea” discussed in Section 3.6 above.

**Constraints and limitations**

After reading and recording first impressions, one is usually involved in a lengthy and free flowing discussion with other interested parties including, in this particular instance, the artistic director of the theatre company, the associate director and general manager. The discussion focused on the story and its themes and on all the major characters and their relationships. These were analysed in depth and determinations were made about how essential each character was to telling the story on stage. Considering the possibility that the production might tour, La Boite theatre Company suggested four actors: two actors playing Jon and Ash respectively, with Wendy and Katie being played by the same actor, and with Oscar and George being conflated into one character.

I argued for five actors on the basis that Lily (Jon’s baby), and Flag (Katy’s cat) are such important characters in their own right that they needed to be realised on stage. Lily’s presence offered a solution to the problem of Jon’s narration. She would give him someone to talk to, someone who could not understand what he was saying so he could bare his soul to her and to the audience. Flag is pivotal to some of the most hilarious and memorable parts of the novel. My suggestion to have Lily and Flag theatrically realised through puppetry meant that I was able to justify having another actor to play Oscar, and that actor could also be the puppeteer as required. It also meant that the play
adaptation would incorporate an intrinsic non-naturalism that would have implications for the generic context of the production and the performance style.

**The theatre company’s and author’s expectations**

Having generally agreed on the narrative and the available resources, the discussion turned specifically to what sort of play was the preferred outcome. “What were the theatre company’s and the author’s expectations?” *Perfect Skin* was the fourth adaptation of a Nick Earls novel that La Boite Theatre Company had committed to produce. There was now a long established precedent of a series of successful adaptations, both financially and artistically, that reflected that the novelist’s, the audience’s, and the theatre company’s expectations were being met. The tacit understanding between Nick Earls and La Boite Theatre Company was that the adaptation would closely mirror the structure of the narrative of the novel and not be a commentary or critique of the novel, or its characters. Consequently, there were no requirements by the theatre company or Earls that he would expect or need to be consulted during the writing phase of the adaptation. Earls would not take an active interest in the adaptation until the last stages of production at the dress rehearsal. Such apparent freedom from authorial scrutiny conceals constraints and restrictions that have implications for determinations of the story and conflict, discussed below and more fully in Chapter 7 on the Analysis of *Perfect Skin*.

### 5.1.2 Finding the story

Though McKee (1999) devotes only five pages to the process of adaptation, he identifies the following stages:

1. Read the work over and over without making notes until you feel infused with its spirit
2. Do not make choices or plan moves until you’ve rubbed shoulders with its society, read their faces, smelled their cologne
3. Achieve a godlike knowledge and never assume that the original writer has done his homework (p. 368).

McKee stresses the point three times over that finding the story requires many readings of the novel in order to “achieve a godlike knowledge” of the characters and their world, inside and out. His third point indicates the need for the adapting writer to be aware that there will most likely be narrative gaps.
Making notes in the novel as one reads a second and third time delays the need to make choices or plans even as it helps to deconstruct “its society”, to separate the faces and voices, and begins to construct a broad and deep knowledge. Slowly working through the novel, underlining and making notes in the margins begins the process of deconstruction that will reveal the “mechanics of narrative” referred to in Section 3.4.2 of the Contextual Review (p. 47). The underlining and making notes also slows down the reading and gives time for reflection-in-action, making spontaneous decisions and reflecting-on-action, thinking about how an event relates to the whole as it is unfolding. By the time the novel is annotated in detail from beginning to end it is on its way towards adaptation into dramatic action.

In the 2002 Spike Jonze/Charlie Kaufman movie Adaptation, the Charlie Kaufman character marks different sections of Susan Orlean’s book The Orchid Thief with different coloured highlighters. In structuring the interwoven Raymond Carver short stories in the film Short Cuts, Robert Altman used different coloured five-by-three cards for the different stories and put them up on the wall in a possible overarching scene order. He was able to examine and adjust the structure of the dramatic action just by looking at the progression of the coloured pattern the cards made and moving them if there were too many of one colour together.

Having identified five major narrative strands in Perfect Skin I decided to insert coloured post-it tabs using a different colour for each narrative strand. On each tab I wrote a brief descriptive title of the dramatic action. For example, on p. 75 a purple tab with the title “BOOK CLUB - Dinner Date Riff #3”, immediately reminds me of George and Jon’s third conversation about Jon going to dinner at Katie’s place. By the end of my third reading the book bristled with multi-coloured tabs giving a very graphic indication that although there are only twenty-two chapters in the novel there are many more incidents and events that make up the overarching narrative of the novel. Deciding which selection of events would best serve the story of the adaptation can be facilitated if there is a clearly defined conflict.

5.1.3 Finding the conflict

A lack of conflict in novels is the most commonly identified problem confronted by adaptation practitioners. Linda Seger (1989) argues that the reason that there is a lack
of conflict prevalent in novels is that they are mostly narratives about internalised dilemmas. This is an accurate summary of *Perfect Skin*:

> The novel takes us into the psychology of the character. We learn how they think and feel, what they value. We see how they grapple with issues. And we get insight into their insecurities and obsessions and concerns....In most novels, the conflict is inner rather than relational (p. 136).

Seger distinguishes narrative writing from dramatic writing, which charts the course of a clear, usually relational conflict from beginning to end. In *Perfect Skin*, Jon does not have an opponent or antagonist so the possibility of a dramatic conflict is not immediately apparent. The central relationship in the novel is the emergent romance between Jon and Ash but as neither is seriously interested in pursuing a love relationship their attraction for each other is allowed to drift. Creating a more dramatic scenario where none exists in the novel would mean changing or at least skewing the story considerably. Jon’s only real conflict is in the sub-plot relationship with Katie who disturbs his passivity by actively pursuing him.

In *Making a Good Script Great* Seger suggests a strategy for overcoming the problem of a lack of conflict in adaptation: “One way ... of translating novels into scripts is to ... reverse the plot and subplot lines” (Seger 1989, p. 137). Seger goes on to argue a case for making the interior life of the protagonist a smaller subplot and developing or expanding a usually more relational subplot into the major plotline. This was not likely to be a successful strategy for *Perfect Skin* as Katie is not as important a “love interest” to Jon as Ash is. However, the Katie/Jon/Flag subplot has a much more clearly defined and developed dramatic conflict with a clear beginning, middle and end. Thinking through the story options, the sub-plot was used to provide nodal or anchor points for the much less dramatic main story. This possibility then became a guiding principle for the subsequent stage.

### 5.1.4 Collecting materials

To facilitate this “thinking through” analysis, and using my coloured tabs as a guide, the main events in the Jon/Ash plot and in the Jon/Katie/Flag sub-plot were transferred onto separate, coloured five-by-three cards. A card included the page numbers of the event or incident, a one line title, and a dot point description of the physical and dramatic action. At the bottom of the card, links were noted in red to any
other scenes, events or dramatic action that might affect or be affected by the action in this scene. This is a particularly focused process of sifting through collected materials that a writer might ordinarily pursue in researching an original work, except that in this instance (as David Edgar posited) the research is from a single source.

5.1.5 Constructing a scenario

The next step was to interweave the two strands of events on the different coloured cards and to analyse how the two narratives sat in relation to each other. Laying out the cards or pinning them on a wall or simply making a list of the scenes on a single page allows one to “see” the shape and pattern of action, or to use Smiley’s (2005) concept, engage further in “thinking through” (p. 34). It was apparent that there was a satisfying pattern of dramatic Katie scenes interrupting the narrative of the boy-meets-girl scenario. The Katie scenes also provided a dramatic thrust to the overarching narrative. Without Jon’s interactions with Katie, and given his history of avoiding difficult issues, he might have taken forever to drift into a relationship with Ash. Conveniently, Jon always sees Ash on the same days as he sees Katie so we are able to compare his experiences with the two women. Jon invariably learns something about himself in the Katie scenes, which makes him behave differently with Ash, and try to be more open and honest with her. The interleaving of these two strands provided a narrative and dramatic spine for the adaptation. The final process in constructing a scenario was to interpose the other three narrative strands around the narrative clusters arrived at above.

5.1.6 First draft

The novelist, playwright, screenwriter and acerbic Hollywood memoirist William Goldman wrote many original screenplays and adapted several novels including two of his own, Marathon Man and The Princess Bride. He agrees in principle with Smiley, Seger and McKee on the bulk of the work being done before the script writing begins:

In any adaptation – in any screenplay, really – the make or break work is done before the writing actually begins. The writing is never what takes the time. It’s trying to figure out what you’re going to put down that fills the days (Goldman, 1984, p. 311).
Once there was a running order of scenes, drafting was primarily a matter of mining Earls’ text. Earls’ characters are articulate and witty so determining to use as much of his dialogue as possible involved judicious editing as the characters often argued circuitously and at great length. In a novel if the character and the banter are engaging it may not matter how long and by what route a conversation charts its course. In the theatre the action is both constrained and driven by characters pursuing objectives, and dialogue is a dramatic action. Characters speak for a purpose, to achieve a particular goal, so in the theatre they need to be more strategic, and often more direct than they are in a novel.

The practice of scripting a play involves much reflecting-in-practice, running dialogue through one’s mind, often speaking it aloud to feel how it sits in the mouth and to hear its rhythms. Striving to be as economical as possible in the storytelling, means always moving the story on and making sure the dialogue is crisp and efficient, particularly when it is meant to be comic. Making choices about what characters say and do in any one scene is influenced by reflecting-on-practice, by consciously identifying what it is that characters want, how important it is to them and what they are prepared to do to achieve their goal. It is also useful to continuously and consciously evaluate how one scene relates to another and to the whole, even as the draft is being written.

5.1.8 Feedback and revision

It is the purpose of this section to give a brief overview of the process of development of the script through six drafts. Sean Mee, the artistic director of La Boite Theatre Company at the time, was the dramaturg and his written notes on the first draft informed our first one-on-one dramaturgy session. The quantity and quality of his feedback on story structure, character and dialogue is too detailed to deal with here but many of the detailed notes were implemented in the second draft. Solutions to problems were often found by referring back to the novel. The system of coloured tabs was to prove an ongoing quick reference and “index” to the novel.

The second and third drafts were developed in workshops with actors and the play’s eventual director. The workshops were set up to explore both the script and to try out staging conventions. The play was read and discussed. Individual scenes were
analysed and some were “tried out” on the rehearsal floor. This process was repeated scene by scene to the end of the play. Some scenes were omitted as unnecessary and many scenes were edited. A final dramaturgical session with Sean Mee and the director consolidated the discoveries made in the workshops and clarified which issues still needed to be addressed in subsequent drafts of the script.

The fourth draft was the initial rehearsal draft. The dramaturgy on the fifth draft was embedded in the rehearsal process. It was determined by the actors’ interpretations and the production’s needs and in constructing the actors’ performances. The fifth draft was the final rehearsal draft, arrived at by the end of the first week of rehearsals. This is the text published by Currency Press though the script continued to be edited and revised up until the opening night. The performance text is consequently the sixth draft. The proof of the effectiveness of the adaptation is finally in the production and its reception by an audience.
6. PLAYScript: ADAPTATION OF *PERFECT SKIN*

**ACT 1**

**Prologue**

*A man carrying a baby and a big bag full of baby stuff. Perhaps a folding cot. Jon with Lily.*

The baby and bag are taken from him. While he is being dressed in a surgical gown, a body covered with a surgical green paper drape is wheeled on.

**Scene 1 (a)**

*The Surgery.*

*An ear exposed through a gap in the surgical green paper drape.*

**JON** You’ll have to lie very still. You’ll hear some zapping noises, and something that sounds like a vacuum cleaner. That’s just to suck up the smoke that we get when we zap the cancer with the laser. Can you feel this? No? Can you feel this? And this time if you could try not to shake your head. It could be a bad habit to get into if I’m laserng your ear and I have to ask you questions. Skin can heal itself. When you injure skin it not only knows that it has to grow to fill a defect, but it knows when to stop. And that’s not easy. The skin is always waiting. Waiting for an attack and ready to fix up the damage.

**Scene 1 (b)**

*Ash appears at the periphery of Jon’s vision, distracting him. It’s his memory of meeting her this morning.*

**ASH** Excuse me. I was looking for number 267…

**JON** There’s another section to the road, just over the creek. The number you’re looking for is probably over there.

**ASH** Oh good. I was worried for a second.

**JON** Three easy left turns away.

**Scene 2**

*Lunch room at work.*

*George tosses Jon a salad roll like a quarterback.*

**GEORGE** Salad roll, large.

**JON** Would you treat your own lunch that way, Porge?
GEORGE Would it ever be a salad roll, large? They Gladwrap them good and tight, Jon Boy, just for throwing. *(Biting into one of three pies in front of him.)* Lentils.

JON You’ve got the healthy food pyramid totally under control.

*Wendy enters and George hands her a salad roll.*

WENDY Jon, your running clothes are still in the change room.

JON Yeah, sorry. I had to move a bit quickly when I got here, didn’t I?

WENDY You’re really into this running now, aren’t you?

JON I pass more people than pass me now. I get the chance to be amazed at just how slowly some people can run.

*Oscar enters and claims the last pie, which he eventually eats with a knife and fork. Produces a very small phone.*

OSCAR Hey, check this out. Pretty cool.

GEORGE Oh god, (why couldn’t you get one the size of a phone?) Nanotech as virility symbol. A definite step beyond the big car for the small-penised man.

OSCAR Hey, I’m a small man. A small phone works for me. Who’s going to look at me and think there’s a big penis?

GEORGE This phone is the new millennium penis. The ‘wow’ penis. It’s all about wow factor. And big things don’t have it. Big is passé now. It’s all about neat little things with flair, presentation, cutting edge applications.

JON What, the penis that’s also a corkscrew and nail clippers?

GEORGE No, that sounds like the Swiss-army penis. And those applications aren’t exactly cutting edge. I’m thinking more about slinky contours, a funky range of colours.

WENDY How about we vote for penises in all colours and move on to the next agenda item? Because improving the penis is probably beyond us. For a start, you’d have to try to attach it to some kind of brain. And if it turns out that’s not biologically possible, some delaying device would be okay. A warning signal even, so you knew there was, like, a minute to go.

JON Or a seven second delay, like live radio.

WENDY Now there’s a very male time frame. Why does it so often get treated like speed reading? It’s not better if it’s faster. That only means you get to
roll over and sleep sooner. How do you think it is for women, reaching their prime at thirty-five when you reach yours at eighteen? You were all appalling at eighteen. No reasonable woman went near you.

GEORGE As opposed to now, you mean?

WENDY Good point. Nice phone, Oscar. That’s what I meant to say.

OSCAR Thanks Wend.

WENDY While we’re on the subject of phones, Jon I got a new SIM card for Mel’s mobile so you can have your own number.

JON No. Look, it’s fine. I only use it for baby emergencies.

WENDY Well, do you want me to do anything about the lease on the BMW?

JON No. Just leave it.

WENDY Okay. Let’s deal with the big item. Patient numbers have been down a little this month and last. But it’s easily as busy as this time last year, when we had two specialist dermatologists. So it’s probably time to be looking seriously at getting another dermatologist in to take some of the load off George. What do you people think about that?

The others look at Jon.

JON Yeah. I’m happy if you start looking around.

George and Oscar nod.

WENDY Okay. I’ll leave you to check budgets and billing in your own time. Get back to me if there’s a problem. (To Jon who is leaving) And childcare rang to say the runny nose emergency is over. So you can take Lily back there tomorrow. How is she?

JON We’ve been having fun. Lots of rolling round sucking our feet.

WENDY Could be teething.

JON Do you think so? She seems pretty calm most of the time.

GEORGE She is six months.

JON Yeah, I know. And that’s kind of hard to believe, isn’t it. Anyway, my strawberry naevus is probably back from this morning and ready to go.

Jon goes. A collective sigh of relief from the others.

OSCAR That was brave of you, Wendy
WENDY The practice has needed another dermatologist since Mel’s been gone. It hasn’t been fair on George.

GEORGE It hasn’t been fair on anyone. Still, he took it pretty well.

OSCAR Better than I expected.

WENDY Yeah. But how is he really?

GEORGE I don’t know.

WENDY Don’t you ask him?

GEORGE Shit no.

OSCAR He takes your head off.

WENDY Not even at your book club thing on Wednesday nights?

GEORGE We never talk about it.

OSCAR He just always says he’s all right.

WENDY Maybe it’s time we all moved on. Especially as our two o’clock patients are probably here.

Scene 3 (a)

Jon’s place.
Jon administering to Bean who is fractious and unsettled.

JON Please go to sleep, Bean. (Sings a bit of Lemonheads’ ‘Big Gay Heart.’) You can join in any time, by the way. Didn’t you like your dinner? (To the tune of ‘Big Gay Heart’ sings) ‘Mashed pumpkin-i-in. Please don’t eat my mashed pumpkin.’ A book I have says this is a critical age for communication so what would you like to talk about? What about the word ‘coincidence’. Have we done that one before? Well today, quite by coincidence I met that student twice. The one I told you who asked me for directions this morning when I was on my run, and then she pulled up outside that decrepit house where I usually park the Beemer.

Scene 3 (b)

Ash standing hands on hips looking at the decrepit house. Jon joins her.

ASH It does look a bit more condemned than I’d hoped.
JON There were students living in it last year, and it looked just as condemned then.

ASH \textit{(Laughs politely)} It belongs to a family friend. They’re putting units up. Some time.

\textbf{Scene 3 (c)}

\textit{Jon is drawn back to Bean who’s grizzling a little.}

JON Come on, Bean. Why aren’t you asleep? Anyway, then after work I go to Coles. And you know how when I lose my list I usually buy toilet paper. So I’m standing there, thinking about the cupboard under the sink, trying to visualise its stock levels…\textit{(He sings along to the muzak, 10CC’s The Things you Do For Love.)}

ASH Can I help you, sir?

JON Yeah, I can’t see any Designer Collection grey…

ASH Designer Collection grey? Toilet paper has names like that?

JON You have to put thought into toilet paper. If you’d seen my bathroom, you’d understand. Peach, for instance, would send out all the wrong signals, design wise.

ASH Really?

JON ‘Complement your bathroom’, it says here. Peach would be a radical departure for me.

ASH You read toilet paper packets? Hey, it also says, ‘Try the unexpected and be adventurous. Use colours and objects not commonly found in bathrooms.’ What’s that about?

JON I don’t want to know. But it’s possible I could be a creature of habit. People might’ve said that once or twice.

ASH So, is the running a habit, too?

JON Yeah, it’d happen most mornings.

ASH I might see you out there. I run a bit myself. I’m Ash, by the way. Ashley.

JON I’m Jon.

\textit{An awkward silence. He looks into her shopping basket.}

JON No one can eat that much sour cream.
Ash throws a six-pack of peach toilet paper in Jon’s shopping basket.

ASH Vibrant and contrasting – you’ll thank me for it.

As if they suddenly realize they don’t actually know each other, they split.

Scene 3 (d)

Jon rocks Lily. Ends up on the sofa with Lily lying on him, her head on his chest.

JON Some coincidence. She had to buy groceries, I suppose. It’s not that improbable that she’d find herself late afternoon in the nearest supermarket. As though it’s any of my business. It’s not something I’d ever tell the others. Not that it’s a secret. And I know we need a new dermatologist and that George has been covering for me. So what was with the looks? I didn’t think my life would be like this. I assumed everything would be sorted out long before I was thirty. And by thirty-four I’d be years into marriage, I’d have two children, all would be going well and … I thought my big stresses would be how long the grass got between Saturday mowings and people not turning the lights off when they left the room. It was wrong from the outset.

(He sings to Lily, to the tune of ‘The Things We Do For Love.’) Please, please, please, please, please, sleep, please.

Scene 4

The Surgery.

Oscar is giving Lily the once over.

OSCAR Teething. See that little incisor about to come through?

JON Just teething?

OSCAR A life threatening meningitis would be quite a way down the list. Haven’t you even read one of those groovy best-sellers, written by some cuddly paediatrician with a British regional accent?

JON Yeah, I’ve got one of those. I just –

OSCAR Teething. There’s no evidence of anything else. She’ll be fine. You know what to do for teething?

JON Yeah, I’m not sure about taking her to childcare though. You know how paranoid they get about anything being contagious.

OSCAR So much for my professional credibility.

WENDY (To Jon) You’re first patient’s here. When you get the chance.
OSCAR I can take Lily for a bit.

JON Thanks. I’ll get her port-a-cot from the car.

_Oscar takes Lily and goes. Wendy makes herself a cup of tea. Jon stops to talk._

JON Your sister’s email address, the ktnflag part, what’s that about?

WENDY Say it carefully and you get it. K T N flag, Katie and Flag. Flag is her cat.

JON Flag. As in bit of cloth up a pole.

WENDY I did tell her it already stood for something.

JON Why Flag?

WENDY To which Katie’s answer is, why not? Have you noticed they’re sharing an email address?

JON I was trying not to.

WENDY How is she going to turn things around when she does things like that?

JON She’s not a football team having a bad season.

WENDY Really? You think Katie’s okay?

JON Sure. There’s nothing wrong with Katie. Maybe she’s not looking for a human partner. Anyway, I thought there was some guy…

WENDY There always _was_ some guy. There rarely _is_ a guy. The guys don’t last. The last guy was months ago. But something she said a couple of days ago makes me think her radar’s picked up something on the horizon. There must be some okay guys out there. Katie, in her own way, is quite a catch.

JON You could say that with more conviction.

WENDY Katie is one of the smartest people I know. She has a doctorate in Jungian psychology, and she’s gone halves in an email address with a cat. He’s holding her back, Jon.

JON It sounds like you think she should drop him.

WENDY She spends far too much of her time talking cat-talk. But you never heard that from me. I’m notoriously anti-cat, apparently. Katie’s okay though, really? Isn’t she? You’re a guy. She’s okay, isn’t she.

JON _Leaving_ Sure.
WENDY Why’s Katie sending you emails?

JON She said we should do coffee, at your barbecue a couple of weeks back.

WENDY Oh.

*When Jon has gone George pops his head in.*

WENDY Jon is doing coffee with Katie.

GEORGE Really? Does Katie still have a thing for the eighties?

WENDY As if I would ask her..

GEORGE The music we can go with, just, but why does Katie still have eighties hair?

WENDY I think she thinks it’s okay.

GEORGE It’s like the hair Meg Ryan had in the early part of *When Harry Met Sally*, except now it’d be from the movie, *When Harry Met No-one Because the Only Single Woman at the Party Had Eighties Hair.*

WENDY Well, she has managed to line up a date with Jon.

GEORGE Jon and Katie? On a date? It might work.

WENDY I’m staying out of it.

GEORGE I probably won’t.

**Scene 5**

*A park at St Lucia.*

*Jon in his running gear, coming to the end of his run. Ash goes past, stops and starts doing stretches.*

ASH You were being smart and warming down, weren’t you?

JON Not that I’m aware of.

ASH I get a bit competitive when I see someone ahead of me.

JON Sure. I pass people sometimes. Of course some of them get a bit pissed off and take a swipe at me with their walking frames.

ASH Where were you yesterday? Did you run?

JON No. It didn’t work out yesterday.
ASH: Do you know if there’s any running group around here?

JON: Yeah, there are plenty I think.

ASH: But you’re not into that?

JON: Not really. I spend a lot of time with people so I tend to run by myself. Actually I’ve only been doing it a few months. It’s pretty casual. Non-competitive.

ASH: Groups don’t have to be competitive. I usually run with people. It’s not bad.

JON: So where are they?

ASH: No, before. I’ve just transferred here. To do honours.

JON: Well I’m not sure I’m a group runner. I don’t have enough event related clothes to wear. And I don’t think we can run together. You’ve no idea what it’ll do to my self esteem.

ASH: I’ll be gentle with you. Promise.

_She spits expertly. Jon spits but a long gob of stringy saliva loops out of his mouth on onto his clothes. He has to use his fingers to break it away from his mouth._

JON: Perhaps I’m teething.

_Ash is bent over in stitches of laughter._

JON: Damn seagulls.

_Lights flash and the electronic tone of car doors unlocking._

ASH: Is that your BMW?

JON: I always run with the keys in my hand. I didn’t mean to press. I probably press all the time, and spend my whole run locking and unlocking the car.

ASH: Mine looks a bit incongruous parked behind that. But at least it goes with the house, I suppose.

JON: The BMW isn’t actually mine. I kind of inherited it when some things got sorted out.

ASH: So you’re not the MLB on the personalised plates?
JON  Personalised plates are so…eighties. I think she got them as a twenty-first present from a bunch of people she’d stopped liking by her twenty-second. Something like that. Something very MLB.

ASH  You’ve got a baby seat in the car. Does that mean you’ve got a baby?

JON  No, I’m just prepared for anything. I’ve got snow shoes in the boot. Maybe I’ve got a baby.

ASH  Could have been the previous owner. MLB. But people don’t usually leave baby seats behind.

JON  You probably still have a lot to unpack. And I’m going to be late for work if I’m not careful

ASH  So. Running tomorrow.


Scene 6

Jon’s place.
Jon with Lily, taking photos of her, and getting changed for his date with Katie.
The café is set up during this scene.

JON  How dumb did that sound? Maybe I’ve got a baby. As though there might be some intrigue about the issue. What the hell was I saying? And what an attractive baby she is too, in her silly flowery hat and her perfect skin. (Feels Lily’s gums) There is something tiny and sharp in there. (Sits her up to take a photo) Smile. Not that straining to poo face. Just a quick smile first. (Blows a raspberry on Lily’s tummy. She whacks him and gives a gurgly laugh. Jon takes the photo.) Nothing like physical comedy is there. (Pulls the hat over her eyes. She rolls backwards, waving her arms) Why didn’t I just tell her? Maybe it’s all the months I’ve gone without meeting new people. You forget how to conduct an adult conversation.

Scene 7

The café.
We see Katie’s hair over the top of a newspaper, all foofed up and kept there with a limp, hot-pink bow. Jon watches as she fights with the newspaper, folding it into what looks like a half-made pirate hat. He takes her surprise.

JON  Hey there.

KATIE  Hi. I’ve ordered already. It seemed like that kind of place.

Jon gestures to a waiter who looks like George.
JON  It is that kind of place. Latte please.

KATIE  *(Finally gets rid of the newspaper.)* Damn thing.

JON  My mother used to fold it that way for fire starters.

KATIE  What?

JON  Old newspapers. She used it to start fires. *(Pause)* In the fireplace.

KATIE  Oh. We never had a fireplace.

JON  It’s to do with coming out from England. My parents looked around for ages for a house with a fireplace. You’d think that, after the first couple of dozen didn’t have one, they’d have worked it out.

KATIE  Yeah.

JON  They don’t have one now though. They’re in a flat.

*Silence*

JON  How was your weekend?

KATIE  It wasn’t bad actually.

JON  Mine was pretty tedious. And then to top it off, running with someone this morning, I spat all over myself.

KATIE  But how are you going really? With everything? How are you going?

JON  Fine. I’m going fine. The Bean gives me plenty to do, though. Want to see some photos?

*Katie looks at them making appropriate noises.*

JON  Look at that stare. Don’t you think that suggests high intelligence?

KATIE  I’m sure it does. I wonder what she’s thinking about. Can you remember anything from when you looked like that?

JON  Yeah, it was about seven-thirty this morning, but I don’t think I was thinking the same things.

KATIE  I can’t believe you spat on yourself. That is so… unco. Did the guy you were running with notice?

JON  It was an unmissable amount of spit. I tried to put it down to a seagull, but that was never going to work.
KATIE Hey, since we’re sharing, how about this? *(Rummages in her bag for a photo.)* Here’s Flag.

JON Which is an interesting name for a cat.

KATIE I just liked the sound of it really.

JON You’re aware that it’s a noun, though? That out in the real world it’s got some kind of meaning attached?

KATIE *(Taking back the photo)* Do you have any pets or anything?

JON I used to have dog called Elvis, which out in the real world means big fat dead mega-star often sighted in Seven-Elevens. *(Katie just nods)* My daughter is named after a flower, but I seem to have got into the habit of referring to her as a legume. So I can’t be too picky about nouns, can I?

KATIE I guess not.

An awkward silence. *Katie slowly shreds a tissue under the table.*

KATIE Wendy says things are a bit quiet this month for you. At work. Or did I say that already?

JON Yes. No. Quiet. At work.

**Scene 8**

*The Surgery*

*George brings coffees.*

GEORGE Hey, how was the date?

JON Date? There was no date.

GEORGE You did go, didn’t you?

JON It wasn’t a date.

GEORGE If it wasn’t a date, why would Wendy mention it to me?

JON It wasn’t a secret. Did she mention it in any particular way?

GEORGE Should she have?

JON She might have. If Katie said anything to Wendy afterwards, she just would have been calling to tell her she works with a fuckwit.

GEORGE Can’t see why she’d bother to do that. Wendy’s known you for years.
JON  It wasn’t the best lunch.

GEORGE  What do you mean?

JON  I think Katie doesn’t get out much. I talked a lot, and she didn’t. So I talked more. I even told her about spitting on myself today.

GEORGE  You sure know how to get them horny.

JON  It’s a long story. And entirely without horn. Look, you tell me, everyone tells me all the time. Get out and do things. Even if it’s only lunch. And lunch was just lunch. You know lunch?  It was no date. It was just a sort of coffee-friend thing to do.

GEORGE  Is that a new category?  Coffee friend.

JON  Yeah. It’s a nice, supportive, non-date category. I’ve been on dates, you know, and they weren’t like today.

GEORGE  No, you’ve been out of the loop a while. My guess is you were on a mid-thirties date. It doesn’t work the same.

JON  No, no. We showed each other photos. If that’s a date this entire demographic sucks. What about even a minor undercurrent of sexual tension?

GEORGE  Hold out for it, Jon Boy. I want you in there batting for us. The guys who hold out for dates the way they used to be when we were young.

JON  Look, I’m so not in the market for dates. If I was I wouldn’t want the photo-swap date. (Pause)  What you’re suggesting is the beginning of middle age. We can’t be so bloody old we accept that’s a date.

GEORGE  I didn’t tell you the half of it. I didn’t mention the dinner-at-her-place option. The twee nibbly things from the deli du jour or the good glory-box crockery or the ice bucket. I didn’t say candles, and I didn’t say Celine, or Kenny G or Easy Listening format.

JON  What?

GEORGE  I didn’t say Sinatra.

JON  Sinatra?  Tell me that you’re fucking joking with this?

GEORGE  Or maybe even some Elvis. One of those love ballad albums.

JON  George, these are bad jokes. You are being evil to my mind. There could be no Elvis.

As though in Jon’s mind’s eye, Ash goes running by. He watches her.
GEORGE  Nik Kershaw, or Paul Young.

JON  Out the door.

GEORGE  Or Haircut 100.

JON  Shit, Porge. I wouldn’t have fucked anyone who played Haircut 100 in the eighties.


JON  Porge, quit it with the eighties. I’m not feeling well.

ASH  *(To Jon)*  Do you want to come up for some water?

GEORGE  Anyway, I’m shitting with you. Do what you want. I think we’re the generation that’s getting to invent the mid-thirties date. Think about it. Thirty-something and single used to be aberrant. Maiden Aunt territory. Now it’s what most of us seem to be, for one reason or another. And a lot of us don’t score enough dates to know much about what’s what, anyway.

**Scene 9**

*Ash’s house.*

*She brings water in two plastic cups. Gives one to Jon.*

*George watches from the sidelines.*

ASH  I think these are Waterford, or something. I’d show you around the place but this is the best bit.

JON  As long as the wiring’s okay and you don’t go through the floors.

ASH  I get it rent free through a family friend. They’ll build town houses. Or units. Eventually. They’ve got a dive-boat business in Cairns.

JON  Is that where you’re from?

ASH  Well, Atherton.

JON  As in Tableland?

ASH  My family’s in tea. Halliday Tea.

JON  Halliday Tea? I don’t buy a lot of tea…

ASH  We’re too small to be a household name but we have our own home page.
JON  Really?

ASH  Would that conflict with some strange, far-north sensibilities? And now I suppose you have me pegged as some tableland hippy chick.

JON  Never been to Atherton Tableland. I have seen some hippies though, and I’ve got to admit they tend to have a lot more hair. And a different approach to personal hygiene.

ASH  Which leaves us with chick.

JON  Yeah. I hope it does. It’s going to spin me out if I’m wrong there.

ASH  I might give you that one. Anyway I’ve been in Cairns for uni, doing psychology and sociology. I’ve transferred down here for honours. And maybe convert it into a Masters.

JON  So are you going to get other people in here?

ASH  I don’t know if the place is really up to it.

JON  Do you know many people round here?

ASH  No. But uni starts next week, so… It’s probably good to have a quiet week or two before getting into that.

JON  Yeah. If you wanted to do something in the meantime, we could have coffee. Or something. If you wanted. Look, I could just give you my details and then you could call, or whatever. If you had time on your hands.

George goes

ASH  Sure.

JON  I’ve got it all on a business card. How about I give you one?

Jon rummages round and finds one. Adds his home number.

JON  Doesn’t have my home number on it.

ASH  Lots of ways of contacting you. Hey, your mobile’s not on here either.

JON  Oh yeah, it’s not mine, actually. It’s a work one, but I just seem to have it for now. For baby emergencies.

ASH  So there is a baby.

JON  There is a baby. You should meet her. I think you’d get on.
ASH Yeah, we probably would. So how about the weekend?

JON I’m sorry?

ASH The weekend. How about the weekend? Coffee, lunch, baby, something? Is that still on?


ASH Lunch?

JON Okay.

ASH The weekend?

JON The weekend.

Scene 10

*GEORGE Welcome to book club, Bean. What have you been reading?

*JON *(Off) Don’t get her too worked up or she’ll never sleep.

#GEORGE Nag, bloody nag, that’s all I hear from you.

#JON *(Off) I’ve set Bean up to sleep in your bedroom.

GEORGE Hey, are you going to that thing on Saturday night?

Ash goes. George now has Jon’s attention.

JON At Katie’s?

GEORGE No.

JON Oh. What thing?

GEORGE Katie’s?

JON Just some dinner party she’s having. What are you doing?

GEORGE A College of Dermatologists thing. Of which you aren’t a member, so a stupid question.
OSCAR  Katie’s nice.

GEORGE  Yeah.

OSCAR  So what is it? You and a bunch of Jungian therapists?

GEORGE  Or just you?

JON  I’ve no idea. I don’t even know the collective noun for Jungian therapists.

GEORGE  But you bandy Jung’s name about all the time.

JON  Yeah, but I’m faking it. You know that.

OSCAR  Not that they’ll be talking shop on Saturday, necessarily, if that’s the kind of people who are there.

JON  Maybe I shouldn’t have said yes. I’ve only ever read *Synchronicity*, because it was thin, and I don’t really think that’s going to be helpful.

GEORGE  Hey, we’re talking about books. That’s a first, talking about books at book club. Too bad Oscar’s going on a date.

OSCAR  It’s not a date.

JON  George calls anything a date. I wouldn’t worry about it.

OSCAR  It’s just a poetry thing. I’ve got my own event on in a few weeks. All new material, so it’s good to see what everyone else is doing. And to be supportive. I think I do mine on the twelfth. You’ll be there, won’t you?

JON  Oh, sure.

OSCAR  *(To George. Patting his black turtleneck)* Do you think this is the look?

GEORGE  *(After a pause)* I think the top really works for you.

OSCAR  Ah, thank you. I was thinking it was good for a night of poetry.

*We hear a car pull up. Maybe Lily’s asleep now and Jon goes to put her down.*

OSCAR  That’ll be Justin. Um, I should be going now, I think...

GEORGE  Wait, Oz Man. You don’t want to look anxious about poetry.

OSCAR  Right, right. Relaxed. I’ll be relaxed. I’ll be…

*The doorbell goes and Oscar almost runs off.*
(Returning) He got an Arts Queensland grant, didn’t he?

You should see his new stuff. Prepare to be entertained.

Last time he wore hair extensions and sat in a cardboard box surrounded by dead flowers. I can’t say I completely understood the poetry, but it did seem very angry and people seemed to like that.

But sit up the back. It’s a wet show.

Lot’s of spitting. My kind of show.

So this Katie thing, are you sure it’s a dinner party?

That’s certainly the impression I got. Six or eight people. Or seven or nine, even.

Did she say that?

Why would she?

It’d only be fair. The signals you send out make it clear what’s going on. Is it just you? Is there any suggestion of intimacy…?

Fuck, no. No intimacy. I don’t need to have that sprung on me. Give me a break.

Okay, I’m just saying, be ready. She will be sending signals, and you have to read them.

Here’s what I think, right? She’s a coffee friend, and coffee friends can invite people round to dinner parties to make up the numbers.

I’m glad to hear that in the absence of socially responsible signalling, there’s still a sophisticated conceptual framework underlying this.

What’s wrong with the coffee friend concept? That stuff can work. I’ve got a running buddy now too.

A running buddy? Who’s your running buddy?

She lives near uni. Right where I park my car.

Good. Convenient.

She happens to like to run laps of uni at the same kind of time as I do. And she likes to run in groups.

So there’s a group of you?
JON Well, there’s just the two of us at the moment.

GEORGE A running buddy and a coffee friend. It’s sounding very compartmentalised, this life of yours.

JON Which isn’t a problem, is it?

GEORGE No. Not unless she also becomes a coffee friend. Or there’s some category beyond that.

JON I guess you’re always so free with your advice because you’ve got your life so neatly worked out. It’s only running. Nothing more.

_Jon goes. George sings a few bars of “I’ve Got You Under My Skin”._

Scene 11

_The park._  
_Jon with Lily in a stroller. Waiting. Checking his mobile._

JON I’m glad I didn’t tell George I was seeing Ash for lunch today as well as going to Katie’s tonight. Running–buddy wasn’t such a smart way of putting it – even if it is only running. It’s just the kind of thing he mightn’t keep to himself. And I’m not ready for it to be public. Hey, Bean, if she cancels, coffee, baby, something, lunch, what say we go harass the ducks?

_Ash is there._

ASH Hey, I thought I’d go all out with the regular clothes. I even wore a dress. (Lifting Lily out of the stroller and onto her hip) Let me take a look at you. Aren’t you nice? I’m Ashley. Can you say that? Ash-lee.

JON Words are probably still quite a few months away. But I’m sure she appreciates the introduction. She’s Lily by the way. If I haven’t told you.

_Ash plonks Lily’s feet on the table, lets her dance, stamp._  
_Lily thumps at Ash’s breast, grabs at the straps of her dress etc._

ASH She talks. What did you say that was again?

JON You’ve got to watch her. There’s lots of discovery going on, and Bean’s not too aware of boundaries.

ASH She’s okay. Why do you call her Bean?

JON It’s what a friend called her the day she was born. The birth canal is merciless. Fortunately her head is much less kidney-bean shaped than it was.
ASH: So who does she take after?

JON: Not like anyone. I don’t think. Just like herself. Hey, Bean? And I think that’s fine. It’s good if she gets to do her own thing.

ASH: Yeah. I hadn’t thought of it like that.

JON: So what are you doing at uni exactly, that you had to come down here?

ASH: You’re not allowed to laugh.

JON: You can’t say that. Not if you’re going to tell me a thesis topic.

ASH: Okay. I’m looking at the psychology and sociology of calendar-driven retail.

JON: Calendar-driven retail?

ASH: Sure. My working title is ‘Christmas retail cycle times as seen from the perspective of Tickle-Me-Elmo.’

JON: You can’t tell me this is the bit where I’m not allowed to laugh.

ASH: Here’s the thing with Tickle-Me Elmo. What we see now is the fad Christmas. If you’re a manufacturer, you pitch your brilliant, new idea into the pre-Christmas market. Hype it as hard as you can. And the smart thing to do is target the under-sixes. They’re much better networked than they used to be and no-one likes to disappoint them. So in 1997, they all wanted Tickle-Me-Elmo. It cost sixty bucks then, but the black market price hit several hundred. In 1998, they were twenty-nine ninety-five. Their time had passed.

JON: So, if Lily was a few years older, and I’d bought her one in 1997 I’d be a present buying god, but if I’d bought her one in 1998 I’d only be showing her how past it I was.

ASH: Exactly. Might as well get her Monopoly.

JON: I might still buy her Monopoly, in a few years. Is that a problem?

ASH: That Christmas is fads away. But enough about me and Elmo. What do you do with the laser company name and the medical degree?

JON: Laser surgery. But not generally the cosmetic things you see advertised. Mainly we end up treating skin cancers and sun damage and acne scarring, spider veins things like that.

ASH: What about tattoos?
It’s a strange thing but tattoos are not that straightforward. Occasionally you’ll see a bizarre response, where the laser changes the tattoo ink to a different colour instead of making it go away. I’m being boring, aren’t I?

No, No. It’s strange that a cancer can be easy to get rid of and a tattoo’s harder.

People think skin is easy, that it’s a really simple organ. Probably because it’s on the outside and they can see it. It’s much more subtle than they realise and most of it’s not on show. It’s got quite a few layers and different cell types. Laser’s good because it takes that into account. You can shave off layers microns thick or just target particular things.

Jon’s mobile phone rings. He has to retrieve it from Lily’s bag. Lily’s talking.

I’m sorry…Yes it is…No, she died…a few months ago, actually…Yes…yes…I’ve got to go.

Jon busies himself with Lily.

Tough business you’re in. I hope you don’t get too many calls like that.

Sorry? What do you mean?

Calls about patients who have died. I wouldn’t have thought that happened often with laser surgery.

No, no. It doesn’t. That was something else. Shall we get something to eat?

Yeah. Good idea.

Scene 12

Jon is bathing Lily. Getting her dressed.

I wish I’d taken that new SIM card for Mel’s mobile. Who do you take after? You’re your own person, hey Bean? With your own nose and own chin. What am I doing, Bean? It’s been years since I cared if I was boring someone. I hadn’t expected I’d like her. I thought she was too good a runner to have much of a personality. But I do rather compartmentalise the world, don’t I? Maybe it’s just all the talking to George lately, but it was operating more like a date than I’d expected it to. Oh, yeah, you’re at the oldies tonight, and I’ve got a dinner with a bunch of Jungian therapists. Let the fun begin.

Scene 13 (a)

Katie’s place.
The actors playing George and Oscar help set up like a couple of evil elves.
Katie wears too much make-up, large earrings and several bangles.

Jon hands over a bottle of wine.

JON Australian champagne equivalent.

KATIE Oh, how nice. You didn’t have to do that. I’ve just opened some wine. Would you like a glass?

JON Why not? Thanks.

Katie gives him a glass of wine and sits him in an overfilled sofa.

JON That’s nice. Is it all chardonnay?

KATIE Um, yes, is that okay? It’s unwooded.

JON It’s very nice. And chardonnay is good.

KATIE Pistachio? Vine leaves stuffed with semi-dried capsicum and capers? They’re from Angelo’s. You know Angelo’s?

JON No.

KATIE The new deli at West End?

JON Not really my side of town.

KATIE Oh.

JON But I’m sure they’re great. They look great.

The cat arrives and jumps up on the sofa to check Jon out.

KATIE Flag!!

Jon pats the cat. As he bites into one of Angelo’s creations, Flag stretches his claws into Jon’s lap and starts kneading, causing Jon to almost choke.

JON Mmmmuuh!

KATIE Don’t worry. It’s only a problem if you don’t have a couple of layers of fabric.

Jon winces as Flag prongs him in the groin.

KATIE Um, no, Flaggy. Be nice to Jon… Oh, god, music. (She crosses to the player.) I’ve forgotten to put music on. (George hands her a CD) Ah ha. (George sings ‘Love Me Tender’) So what do you think of Elvis?
JON He was the best dog I ever had. Melissa suggested the name Motherfucker. One time my father had to call it in for dinner. So then she suggested Elvis.

KATIE Oh. Yes. Well, Flaggy likes you. He wouldn’t play if he didn’t like you. He’s not a big Elvis fan either.

JON I’ve got nothing against Elvis. A lot of that old stuff is great. And it’s an embarrassing name to call your dog. We’d go out for a walk and he’d run off and I’m standing there shouting Elvis, Elvis. Not a good look.

KATIE I hadn’t thought of it that way. Linguini con…what’s Italian for prawns?

Scene 13 (b)

Katie sits Jon at a table set for two and different music plays. George sings Sinatra.

KATIE You know, I really like some of this old stuff too.

JON Yeah. It’s timeless. Some of it.

KATIE It’s so good I’m getting to know you properly now, when, all these years, you’ve been Wendy’s friend. Who would’ve guessed this kind of thing could start happening?

Jon chokes on his food and has to go to the bathroom.

JON You’ll have to excuse me.

The lights change to background noises of Jon snorting and coughing.

Scene 13 (c)

When the lights come up, they are back on the sofa. Katie is pouring dessert wine.

KATIE There’s desert wine. Oh, Jon, I just want you to be happy. Should I have bought you a cigar?

JON I’m not sure that’s what my happiness is depending on.

KATIE No. I just thought, people are into them at the moment. Separate thought to happiness. You have to move quickly.

JON Right. I don’t smoke. So no cigars was perfect.

KATIE Excellent. (Awkward pause. They drink.) You’re not always an easy person to read, you know that? You showed me baby photos. You have to realise that. (She gets up and changes the music to Men Without Hats, ‘The Safety Dance’. ) Not many people have this album, you know.
JON  I’m not used to drinking this much.

Scene 13 (d)

Jon goes to the bathroom. Unseen by Jon, Flag follows him. We lose Katie.

JON  This is all too difficult. I have to go home before anyone’s dignity is seriously on the line. Apologise for the misunderstanding, anything I’ve done wrong and leave.

Jon starts to pee and Flag gets curious.

JON  Haven’t seen a lot of men, hey Flaggy? Flag be careful there. I know I’ve still got a young man’s prostate, but what’s happening is not all that impressive. Okay, Flag, stay right there, no sudden movements – no Flag! Shit!

A splash and desperate miaowing. Then the cat is running around the room chased by Jon. He pins the cat to the floor using two bath towels, wrestles it to the sink and gets the water running. The cat goes crazy in Jon’s hands and escapes out the window. Jon uses the towels to mop up the urine and water and tosses the towels out the window. He replaces the towels with fresh ones and leaves.

Scene 14

TheSurgery.

WENDY  I don’t know what we’re going to do.

GEORGE  Katie can get herself … worked up, if you know what I mean.

WENDY  Katie said it’s only because she’s a bit worried about Jon. And maybe I’m a bit worried about her.

OSCAR  Where did Katie get the idea that Jon -

GEORGE  I think we might be about to find out.

George and Oscar make themselves scarce as Jon arrives.

WENDY  Listen Jon, Katie phoned yesterday. This is going to sound kind of weird…she thinks you might have urinated on Flag. I know. It’s all very embarrassing. You know what Katie’s like… got this idea…

JON  Yeah, I know. He just followed me in there. It wasn’t intentional.

WENDY  Oh god, Jon. I told her no way. You didn’t do that sort of thing.

JON  Of course I don’t. But I’d had a couple of drinks. And he moved very quickly. It was the fucking cat’s fault.
WENDY  The cat’s fault?

JON  Totally. I was standing there, directing my stream, not concentrating particularly well perhaps, but it is something I have done a few times before. But I don’t think Flags seen a lot of men in that position.

WENDY  Men not concentrating particularly well?

JON  Urinating. The standing up version. He got a bit excited and he sort of jumped me. And I tried to clean him up…

WENDY  Now, wait a second. I think you’ve missed a bit.

JON  The bit where I pissed on his head? Or the bit where he waved his paws round in it first, trying to catch it? (Wendy starts to laugh.) Or the bit where I had to chase him round the room to catch him?

WENDY  Katie’s had some bad dates before, but as far as I know, you’re the first to piss on her cat.

JON  I didn’t know it was a date.

WENDY  Call it what you want. You think you know someone…

JON  Oh, god, Katie was so intense and she kept topping up my wine.

WENDY  Well, you pretty much have to piss on people’s cats if they’re intense and they give you wine.

JON  Do you have to keep saying that?

WENDY  I think I do. This is a once-in-a-life-time opportunity. Hey you should get a ping-pong ball to put in your toilet at home. I used it with Patrick when he was toilet training. It’s great for the aim. Be glad you’ve got a daughter.

JON  Thanks.

WENDY  That’s okay. Oh, sorry, one other thing. I get the weeing bit and the extenuating circumstances – but I think it’s affected Katie’s judgement…What I’m saying is…I’m sure, when we tell her the rest of it, she’ll realise she’s got this wrong. Katie thinks you steal things. She thinks you went back to her place yesterday morning and took a couple of towels.

JON  Okay, I caught a cab home and I did go back early to get my car.

WENDY  Katie thinks she heard someone in her bushes round dawn, and then a car driving off. Your car. And when she went to change her towels late yesterdays, she noticed two were missing from the cupboard.
JON Obviously the only reason I agreed to go to dinner was to pick myself up a couple of towels.

WENDY Exactly what I said. I’m sorry. Anyway she’s getting bars on the windows now.

JON Who wouldn’t be, with all this towel thieving going on?

WENDY I said she was way out of line asking if I thought you were somewhere in the kleptomaniac spectrum, or if it was just a personality disorder.

JON Thanks. I know I have to apologize to Katie, but I’m assuming Saturday night is something we can keep to ourselves.

WENDY Jon, you went over to my sister’s place for dinner and you urinated on her cat. Was there one day in your life when you would have kept that to yourself if it had been someone else?

JON I was thinking it was a dinner party. I was caught unawares. I’m not ready for nights like that.

WENDY Jon, that bit about not being ready is fine. I don’t plan to go there. The bit I want to tell people, let me put it another way, the bit I’ve been telling people is the urinating bit.

Scene 14 (b)
*A transitional moment with George and Oscar involving ping-pong balls.*
*Jon ends up with a ping-pong ball which he takes into the next scene.*

Scene 15

*At the café.*
*Katie is making a row of nervous little rips in the front page of The Courier-Mail. Jon arrives late.*

KATIE Hi. I got you water. I didn’t get you coffee though. It would have gone cold. Could have. Depending on when you got here.

JON Water is fine.

KATIE Yes. So… how’s work today?

JON It’s usual self. No ping-pong balls in the in tray today so that’s good.

KATIE I didn’t know you played table tennis. Just as a hobby, or…

JON Not very often, actually. It’s a long story.

KATIE Snorkels. Sometimes you see them in the tops of snorkels. Is that it?
JON  No, it’s an old joke. And not a very good one. It involves the biophysics of lasers. Wendy might have told you.

KATIE  Um, no. It’s okay. Don’t worry about it. And Flag’s all right. In case you were wondering.

JON  Good.

KATIE  I think he liked you. He was a bit funny on Sunday though, but I think cats can detect anxiety. They can detect lots of things. They’re quite perceptive.

JON  I think I’d heard that.

KATIE  I’m sorry about mentioning the towels. To Wendy. And the noises I heard in the bushes. There are some big dogs in my part of town. All I can say is, I was distressed at the time. My bathroom was in a bit of a state and Flag wasn’t himself. He spends time in there now and he didn’t used to before. Maybe I’ll just have to adjust to that.

JON  I’m sure it’ll be okay.

KATIE  Yes, but I don’t want you to think I’m spreading allegations about you all over the place.

JON  No, I wasn’t thinking that for a second.

KATIE  That’s good. Thank you. Thank you, Jon. But it was wrong of me to think it and to say it to Wendy. And it’s been playing on my mind. So I wanted to see you. To clear the air.

JON  About the towels?

KATIE  Yes.

JON  Consider it clear.

Scene 16

Lily is teething again. Jon walking the streets at night with Lily in a stroller.

JON  I seem to have completely got away with it. I feel like a bit of a bastard with all the lying, but nothing would’ve improved if I’d told the truth, to Wendy or Katie.
I should pay more attention to what I’m saying. Kids take things in, even early on and I don’t know, but I’m terrified of the moment when you’ll know enough about life to understand.
I found it impossible to explain to Wendy’s kids why Mel wouldn’t be coming round any more. Why it was just me and you instead. Wendy told them Mel’s gone away. And their dad’s the only person they know who goes away. To Mt Isa with work – so they’re assuming Mel’s gone to Mt Isa. That’s fine. Lots of skin cancers in Mt Isa. How the fuck do you explain this stuff? I haven’t told a new person for months. It’s just too big. I don’t have it down to a tellable size, so I don’t meet people. That’s how I work. So people shouldn’t muscle in on my runs and play with my baby and tell me their thesis topics. And make me like them and want to see more of them. But it’s still so hard to tell people. Ash. I mean Ash. Telling Ash. She’s become a test of this, and some measure of how little I’ve travelled these last six months.

Scene 17

St Lucia campus. Jon, Ash and Lily taking a walk. The sound of camera shutters.

ASH I hadn’t expected this. The big dresses and the old cars and guys in tails.

JON You haven’t been on campus on a weekend before?

ASH No.

JON Three wedding parties is about average. People meet at uni so they often come back here to take their wedding photos.

ASH Yeah?

A pause. Ash looks askance at Jon. Lily turns to look at some screeching birds.

JON Rainbow lorikeets. Too quick for you, hey? Going by the kicking, Bean thinks some ground time would be popular.

Ash and Jon sit under a tree. Lily is wriggling and rolling around, grabbing hold of a ring on Ash’s finger.

ASH (To Lily) Go on. Bet you can’t get it off. (Looking round) It’s a bit surreal sitting in the middle of all this, watching it in triplicate. You turn up, having your special day, and it turns out it’s special in the same way as everybody else’s.

JON They’re probably not even noticing each other.

ASH Wearing clothes you’ll never wear again, spending all that money, standing in front of people and declaring things, like you’re giving a guarantee that you’ll never change your mind. Sorry, I’m rambling. As if I’d know.
JON  No, I know exactly what you mean. People complicate things far more than they should.

ASH  There’s too much pressure to be in relationships sometimes. If you’re not going out with someone, people assume you want to be and that you’re depressed that you aren’t. It’s fine if it happens but, you know, I don’t think you should kill yourself trying to make it happen.

JON  Yeah. My parents look at my friends and can’t believe how many of them are still single. They probably figured that some time at uni, or not long after, we’d all get our shit together and embark on the next phase. Career, marriage, children. I don’t know a lot of people with the whole set. My parents will never get it. They met in the fifties. There have been far too many shifts in expectations since then.

ASH  I’m really not convinced the sixties meant all they say it did.

JON  Absolutely. Highly overrated. Anyway, I don’t think the sixties were invented till the eighties, when all those people started turning forty.

ASH  So what were they like?

JON  How would I know? I was born in the middle. For me the sixties were about teething and sphincter control.

ASH  But back when you were here, were you doing any of what you’re doing now?

JON  No. I wasn’t introduced to laser until a few years ago, in England.

ASH  So you didn’t even study it in the first place.

JON  No, I started out as a GP. It’s a very useful degree. You’d be surprised.

ASH  Okay. Tell me something useful.

JON  From my degree?

ASH  Yeah.

JON  Okay. Let me show you something. This was a big one.

He moves to sit facing her, cross-legged with Bean in his lap. He takes Ash’s hand and makes her index finger point to just above his right eye, to the edge of the eye socket.

JON  Feel here. (Moving her finger to the other side) Then feel here.

ASH  Hey.
JON There’s a notch on one side but not on the other. I noticed that when I was young. And I thought something was wrong, and they weren’t telling me about it. And then I started reading the kind of story where a child – has a mark that means something

ASH They’re a witch or an alien or there’s been some terrible incident.

JON Exactly. The sign means that something’s going to happen. One night, someone is going to come for you. Which didn’t make it easy for me to sleep. And a notch, seemed definitely abnormal, plus it was only on one side. Definite alien.

ASH You poor thing being so scared about it.

JON Then I did anatomy at uni. Totally normal. It’s where the supraorbital nerve goes through, either through a notch or a foramen – a hole. I’ve got a foramen on the right side, and a notch on the left. It’s just normal asymmetry.

ASH Let me have another feel.

*They both lean forward. She puts her other hand on his shoulder. They are very close, looking at each other intently.*

ASH Don’t want to jab you in the eye. *(Feels both sides again)* Well, there you go. Wonder what I’m like?

*She sits only part of the way back and checks her own eye sockets.*

JON And.

ASH Wait. I’ve got two sides to do. Hey. Tell me what you think.

*She takes his hand and guides his finger to her eye. He moves in closer and puts his other hand to the side of her head.*

JON On the right I think you’ve got … a notch. And on the left… a foramen.

ASH That’s what I thought. A mirror image of you.

JON I think our parents could still tell us apart though.

ASH Very funny. So what does it mean?

JON Oh, both of us can probably expect a visit from aliens.

ASH *(Whispers)* Oh no. Not the anal probe.

*They are still close, his hand now on her shoulder, looking at each other. It’s as though they might kiss. Could kiss. But he sits back and breaks the mood.*
JON Anything but the anal probe.

ASH It’s amazing. It feels so obvious, when you feel it. It’s surprising what you don’t know, just because of skin.

JON Most of the time it’s probably a good thing. Our bodies would look pretty bizarre without it. And there’d be a lot of distraction. Facial muscles, laid bare, would look very mechanical. It’d take all the real, subtle purpose out of expression. There’d be no mystery.

ASH And there’s just not enough mystery in the world, is there?

JON No way. We spend far too much time trying to make things obvious and not enough appreciating the chance to discover them slowly.

ASH Yeah, I think I know what you mean. Skin is good for that. It’s expressive but it doesn’t give it all away.

Lily gurgles for attention.

JON I think Bean knows what you mean.

Scene 18

Jon’s place and the Surgery.
Jon changes Lily and puts her in a baby capsule.

JON What does Ash think is going on? Where does she think the source of the other half of you is, and does she wonder why she hasn’t been told? What am I doing? How do I get to be playing this game without thinking it through?

Jon dials the mobile.

JON Hi, Wendy. I’ve been expecting a patient to call me back and they haven’t. I wonder if you’d mind checking my emails.

WENDY Hang on and I’ll go to your room. (She now appears at a computer and on speakerphone.) Okay. What’s your password?

JON Oh yeah, I’d forgotten about that.

WENDY Too many letters.

JON um, it’s B,I,G,B,O,Y.

WENDY And you think that by spelling it I won’t know what your password is, bigboy?
JON     Well, they have to be six letters long and I needed to have a word I’d remember.

WENDY  And ‘dahlia’ or something would’ve been beyond you.

JON     Definitely. I’d never remember dahlia.

WENDY  Bigboy. Short for big boy who’ll never grow up. You all probably have passwords to do with your penises. And you think it’s so subversive. Okay I’m in. You’ve got a few. But I don’t see anything like what we’re looking for. (George appears at Wendy’s shoulder. Oscar in the background, disapproving.) A couple of notifications of web-site updates. Looks dull. One for a laser. There’s one from Katie. No title. Let’s have a look. And it says, ‘Jon, I know the timing’s not right, but I can’t keep it to myself any longer. I’m developing strong feelings for you and there’s no denying it…etcetra, etcetra…Please, please tell no-one. Particularly Wendy.’…So, what do you want me to do with that one?

JON     Probably better leave that for me to take a look at later.

WENDY  Sure.

JON     Do you think there’s any chance we can keep that Katie one to ourselves? It’s not the same as weeing on the cat, is it?

WENDY  No, it’s not. It’d be the kind of thing I’d normally carry to my grave, except…

George is trying to stop himself laughing.

JON     Um, are you alone at the moment?

WENDY  No, George is standing right here. Heard the whole thing.

GEORGE  I thought you’d done enough to put her off by pissing on her cat.

JON     What?

WENDY  I’d have to say I thought the same. Perhaps you really do have to steal from her as well.

Jon hangs up and Wendy and George fade from view.

JON     I have to fix things with Katie. I know I have to fix things with Katie, and soon.

Scene 19

Ash’s place.
Jon with Lily in the capsule. Ash emerges wearing baggy overalls the colour of a sack.
ASH: Hi. What’s the time?

JON: Sorry, I’m early…

ASH: Early’s fine. You had me thinking I was going to be late. It’d be pretty sad to be sacked from a bagel joint on my first day.

JON: I thought we could have lunch before you start work, maybe.

ASH: Yeah, good. As long as I can go in my… um, overalls.

JON: It’s a nice look. Heavy work. Bagels.

ASH: I’m sure this wasn’t the pair I tried on. What do you think?

JON: Well, they’re very gender neutral.

ASH: That’s good to know. At least they’re not expecting me to use sex to sell bagels. They’re practically species neutral. Let’s go.

JON: I haven’t told you everything. I haven’t told you about Lily’s mother.

ASH: That’s okay. I figured she had one.

JON: Yeah. Here’s what happened. It’s a complicated situation, and I won’t try to get into the whole thing right now, but… The beemer is her car actually. MLB, the number plates, they were her number plates, Melissa Brand.

ASH: Yeah…

JON: It’s complicated. I’m giving the car back when the lease runs out.

ASH: To Lily’s mother?

JON: No, to the company, the leasing company. There’s an amazing amount of stuff you have to sort out, so it’s easiest if I just keep it till the lease is up. It’s her phone that I’ve got too. She was a dermatologist. She was one of the other partners in the practice. We met at uni. But she died when Lily was born.

PAUSE

ASH: Oh. I didn’t think that was what you were going to say.

JON: Yeah. It was unexpected.

*Lily poops loudly.*
JON I just changed her. But I knew there’d be more. Sometimes you can tell.

ASH That’s so awful.

JON Um, yeah. But it happens you know. There are a few days there that will probably never make sense, but I’m on top of things now. It’s different, of course.

ASH Yeah.

JON But the immediate issue is that poo smell, which will kill us if I don’t do something about it.

ASH Sure.

_Jon busies himself changing Lily. Between deep breaths._

JON I’m feeding her the blandest diet in the world. And somehow it gets incredibly putrigenic in there. Not all the time. Sometimes it’s okay. We’re doing okay. I’m okay now, really. I’m doing okay.

ASH I thought you just broke up or something

JON I didn’t tell you. It’s not an easy thing to tell. So you don’t tell people, in case they can’t get past it.

ASH Yeah. Oh god.

JON The last few weeks running together and things, that’s been so good. Because you didn’t know. Because you didn’t spend the whole time being careful or treating me like I was abnormal. So, if it’s okay, please don’t change that now.

ASH All right.

JON Plus, whatever she’s done in this nappy, needs to be disposed of, and I’m talking toxic waste facility, a long way out of town.

_Jon has just finished changing Lily._

_Lily poos loudly and long._

_End of ACT 1_
ACT 2
Scene 1 (a)

Katie’s place.
Jon with Lily in her baby capsule.

So what’s the right way to fix things up with Katie? (He’s handed a bunch of flowers and a card.) A medium-sized bunch of something multi-coloured, non-committal but friendly. And a card, a non-committal card, an “I’m sorry, but it’s just not happening, it’s not how I feel” kind of card. (Writing the card) Katie, you matter to me as a friend, but I don’t think it’d work any other way. And I don’t want to complicate things and risk the friendship. So… Why do I feel like such a bastard? (Lily makes a noise.) Okay, such a gutless bastard. Her car’s there. And there’s a light on down the side. Just leave these here. Then home for dinner.

Jon sneaks up to the front door. He sets the flowers down by the door and sets the card against them. He starts to sneak away when Flag flies out of the darkness and ends up under Jon’s foot. We hear a crunch and Jon falls over. Flag stumbles away, falling over, getting up and struggling on as Jon crawls after him. Flag falls into a hole left by someone’s unfinished gardening. There’s a spade by the hole.

It’s okay, Flag. It’ll be okay. (He reaches into the hole but Flag tries to bite him.) I’m going to lift you out now. I’m going to lift you out on the shovel to protect your spine. And then we’re going to work out what the hell we’re going to do.

Just as he lifts Flag out of the hole, slumped semi-conscious on the shovel, Katie’s outside light goes on and she open her front door. When she sees Jon and Flag she screams. Jon runs towards her holding Flag on the shovel with his free hand.

No, no, it’s fine. I’m just protecting his spine.

Katie screams and slams the door. Through the window we see her go to the phone and speed dial.

Katie puts the phone down and disappears. Jon puts the shovel and Flag down next to the flowers.

Come on Flaggy. Don’t worry, mate. I haven’t killed you. His breathing doesn’t sound good. Maybe he’s just puffed from running across the garden.

Katie approaches the window, holding a huge knife and glares down the blade at Jon.
KATIE And I don’t want to know what sick things you’ve done with my towels, you bastard. *(She goes back to the phone)* Yeah, he’s still here. Shall I call the police? Okay… But I’m keeping the knife.

*(To Jon)* And you’re not a kleptomaniac at all. You’re a straightforward psychopath, like the rest of them. *(Goes)*

JON Katie, the hole was already there. The gardener next door must’ve done it. It was an accident. Honestly. But for now the main thing is getting Flag some help. Oh bugger, there’s blood coming out his nose… Try and keep your head from rolling about like that, Flaggy… How in the world did it get to this? It was just coffee. Now I might have killed half her email address. Run, Jon. Flee! Flee is good. Retrieve the flowers… No, leave the flowers, take the ‘thanks but no thanks’ card.

Wendy arrives.

WENDY Jon, hi. How’s it going?

JON Wendy, let me explain. This is a total accident. You have to understand that.

WENDY I’m listening.

JON I just dropped over here, visiting, in a totally normal way.

WENDY To see Katie?

JON Well, yeah, kind of. And you know that cat game where they tag you? Flag’s not as gifted as Katie thinks. So he sort of got under my feet. And I stepped on him. A bit.

WENDY And you happen to have killed her cat? Accidentally.

JON Possibly. I have to admit that. He’s not well.

WENDY That’s pretty bad luck, Jon.

JON Well, it’s worse luck for Flag.

WENDY Look I’m going to have to ask you to stop talking now, or I could seriously wet myself. My pelvic floor hasn’t been the same since I had Patrick. *(To the closed door)* Now, Katie, don’t you think it’d be better if the three of us could talk about this? On the same side of the door? *(To Jon)* Are those back legs doing much? If you’ve transected his spinal cord the vet’s probably not going to be too interested, and we might as well use that hole next door…

JON Don’t even say that quietly.
WENDY  It might be an idea to check though.

*Jon kneels next to Flag.*

WENDY  Just a quick medical check, Katie. I asked Jon to do it. *(To Jon)* I’d skip checking sphincter tone if I were you. She’d be likely to take it the wrong way.

JON  Don’t make me laugh, Wend. I’m going nowhere near his sphincter. Okay, his lower limbs withdraw from pain, so that’s good. And his tail moves. I figure it’s fractured ribs and a possible pneumothorax.

WENDY  Possible pneumothorax?

JON  Yeah, Flag is in trouble here. I have done a bad thing. We’ve got to try to fix it.

WENDY  Sorry, it’s just not what I was expecting to be doing tonight. And Katie has so lost it. Where did she get that knife? Okay, Katie, I’m coming in. Push the sideboard away and put down the knife. It’s all a misunderstanding. It’s an accident. *(With that Wendy eases the door open and enters with the flowers and card)* And look, Katie. Jon came over here to bring you flowers. That’s why he was here.

JON  Yes, yes, that’s why I came over. See? To give you flowers. Nothing to do with Flag.

WENDY  *(Off)* And now, you two can take Flag to the vet hospital, so you can finish sorting this out.

*The light changes. In the darkness we hear Jon.*

JON  Shit, Lily! I’m sorry, Lily. I’m sorry. I was only going to be a minute. I can’t believe I left you in the car all this time.

**Scene 1 (c)**

*Jon returns with Lily in the car capsule. Katie appears in the doorway with the flowers.*

JON  We’ll go in my car. You can look after Flag and I’ll drive.

KATIE  You were bringing me flowers?

JON  Yes, um. Let’s get Flag sorted out now though. That’s the important thing.

KATIE  You were bringing me flowers and just leaving them on my doorstep? That’s sweet.
JON  This could be a tension pneumothorax here, Katie. You do know what a tension pneumothorax is?

KATIE  I’ll just get his blanket. He’ll be better wrapped in his blankie.

She thrusts the flowers at Jon and tears back inside. Jon is about to remove the card.

WENDY  (Off) Flowers are a nice thought, Jon. I wouldn’t have picked you as a flower kind of guy.

Jon leaves the card. Katie returns with the blanket and wraps Flag up delicately.

KATIE  Flaggy, it’s your blankie. Your favourite, sweetie. The one Mummy got you from Acapulco. You’re going to be okay.

JON  If we’re leaving Wendy to lock up, she could put the flowers in water.

KATIE  No, it’s okay. We’ll take the flowers with us. Flaggy likes flowers.

JON  Where should we go? Is the vet near the PA Hospital the nearest one that’d be open?

KATIE  That’s where Flag always goes. Poor little guy. We don’t have your very clever night vision, do we? Jon doesn’t eat enough carrots, hey Flaggy? He brought us some nice flowers though. We like flowers, don’t we? We sometimes wait years between bunches of flowers, don’t we Flaggy? And there’s a nice card to cheer us up.

Katie looking at the card by streetlight.

JON  Um, Flag’s eyes…the light might not be a good idea…

KATIE  The vet’s not going to examine him in the dark, Jon. Now don’t be embarrassed. (She reads the card) Oh you bastard. You maybe kill my cat and then you give me this to read?

JON  I didn’t…I’m sorry.

KATIE  I thought that’d make me feel better. (She sobs) I thought we were getting on so well. But the card…

Katie wipes her face with the corner of the blanket.

JON  I know. I know what I said in the card. I just don’t want to mislead you. It’s too easy to give people the wrong idea and cause harm.

KATIE  Yeah. (Pause) Um, everyone tells me you make jokes about my hair.

JON  What?
KATIE  Eighties hair.

JON  What?

KATIE  It’s only because my ears stick out a bit. I wanted to cover them.

JON  Why don’t you take, Flag. I’ll take Lily. And just leave the flowers.

KATIE  I’m not desperate, you know. I might have turned thirty and be single almost all the time, but I’m not desperate. We can’t all be as together as bloody Wendy.

JON  Yeah, I know.

KATIE  So you didn’t say the eighties hair stuff?

JON  We’ve got to focus on Flag tonight, Katie. I don’t think it’s a night to get into personal issues.

KATIE  Eighties hair.

She begins to sob into the blanket again. Lily starts crying and Jon produces tissues and starts wiping her nose.

JON  No one’s as together as bloody Wendy. Certainly not me. And I know you’re not desperate. Katie, your hair’s fine.

KATIE  Really?

JON  Yeah, it’s fine. I like your hair.

KATIE  Do you like the eighties?

JON  Sure.

KATIE  Good. Cause I think they’re pretty good too.

Jon automatically wipes Katie’s streaming nose too.

JON  Come on, give it a good blow.

Scene 2

The Surgery.

GEORGE  (In his newsreaders voice) It’s Flag, Jon. Katie just called to say he could still go either way.
JON Look… Quit the voice. It was an accident.

GEORGE Yeah, I’m sure it was. Gotta hand it to you. You know how to turn’em down. You’ve got this dating thing so under control.

JON It wasn’t a date.

GEORGE And she knows it now, doesn’t she. (Another voice) Hi, honey, just turned up to trample the livestock.

JON I never called anyone honey. Not in my whole life.

GEORGE And until last night you could’ve said I never killed a chick’s pet to put her off.

JON You bastards. You’re all so insensitive.

GEORGE I admire you for this. You were actually making a move to sort things out. There might have been a time when you would’ve juggled two chicks… Sorry, one coffee friend, one running buddy.

JON This is not about juggling. I just didn’t want to be misleading people.

GEORGE Yeah, I know. I’m sure it’s just envy on my part. You and that sleek runner’s body of yours. It’s a weapon.

JON Yeah, yeah. I’ve got to get to work now. Make some positive contribution to the world.

George goes. Jon runs into Wendy who laughs when she sees him.

WENDY I’m sorry. Last night was the strangest night I’ve had in my life.

JON I’d be in my top ten too. Do you think it’s stranger than going round to someone’s house for dinner and pissing on their cat?

WENDY The hole, the shovel, that was special. That’s what made it for me. I shouldn’t say that, should I? Flag’s really not well.

JON No. How is Katie today?

WENDY Mental. Don’t call her.

JON Do you really think I was going to call her? I’m hoping she’s all right from afar.

WENDY Well, let’s see what happens to Flag. Is anyone ever going to tell her he’s just a cat?

JON Yeah. What a disaster.
WENDY: Hey, George says you’ve got a running buddy.

JON: Yeah.

WENDY: I thought you ran with a group.

JON: This might surprise you, but we don’t have a roll-call or anything. It’s just running.

WENDY: So there are lots of you then?

JON: Not lots.

WENDY: So how big would the group be at its biggest?

JON: Still mainly the two of us. Me and the running buddy. You know the buddy theory of exercise? Makes you better at sticking to the routine.

WENDY: You were already sticking to the routine.

JON: Well, maybe it gives her a routine. She’s a postgrad student, from up north, and she prefers to run with people.

WENDY: And she’s butt ugly, right?

JON: Look…

WENDY: Too easy. Way too easy. I’ll take that as a ‘No, she’s not butt ugly’.

JON: She’s got a runner’s body, I suppose.

WENDY: You poor, powerless man. A young woman comes along and forces herself on you like that…Your pants are so on fire.

JON: No-one forced anyone. It’s a series of coincidences.

WENDY: You just happen to be seeing Katie at the same time as you’re running around with some mystery woman. I hope you’re not leading her on the same way as you did Katie.

JON: I just wish people would stop reading things into this. And thinking they have the right to interfere in my life.

WENDY: Whatever. Having someone to run with is nice. And let’s face it, it wasn’t going to be one of us. (Pause) How are you really?

JON: Don’t think I’m stalled or anything. I’ve got Lily and things are moving along okay. I know it seems odd to start running with someone and then see them practically every day, but that’s how running works. You do it
practically every day. So it’s not as complicated as George might like to think. I’m fine. Really. And I’m going. *(Jon starts leaving)*

**WENDY** George doesn’t mean…

**JON** I know he doesn’t mean.

**WENDY** It’s you that we’re thinking about. You know that, don’t you? With all this interfering…

**JON** It’s not interfering. But don’t make too much of this running. Please.

**WENDY** Okay. But sometimes you have to tell us what to make of things. This last six months, it’s all been different for us too.

**JON** Yeah, I know.

**Scene 3**

*Jon’s place.*

*Ash is playing with Lily on the floor, holding on to her hands to help her stand. A storm is building.*

**ASH** So what were you doing round there with flowers in the first place?

**JON** It was all to do with this big misunderstanding we’ve got happening. So I went over there to clear it up.

**ASH** Couldn’t she have misunderstood the flowers, too?

**JON** No there was a card with them. I was going to leave them on her top step.

**ASH** You were going to just leave them and run off? That’s not very brave.

**JON** I never said it was an act of bravery. I thought it’d work better that way.

*Ash gives Jon a look. Settles herself cross legged and sits Lily on her thigh.*

**ASH** There we go. Enough of that standing. *(To Jon)* You had me worried before. When you called and told me you were out hurting animals and having knives pulled on you. I thought you must have some sort of dark side.

**JON** Yeah, the call was my other side warning you. If people ignore the cat crushing, they get a horse’s head in their bed.
ASH  Well, that’s something to watch out for.

JON  I’m sure you’re quite safe.

ASH  You feel bad about the person with the cat, don’t you?

JON  It’s not as if I haven’t had my share of unrequited interest in people. I know what it’s like. You feel like such a loser.

ASH  It’s difficult, the love business.

JON  Fortunately I don’t think the L word came up. I headed that one off at the pass.

ASH  I meant generally.

JON  Yeah, but when is it the love business? When is something more than just a dumb crush or infatuation? I don’t know where the boundary between love and major enthusiasm lies.

ASH  If you’re thinking boundaries, that’s probably not it. You could maybe think of when it gets you physically, so it’s sort of beyond reason. When you feel it in the pit of your stomach and you get… what’s the name for it when your heart goes fast?

JON  Tachycardia.

ASH  No.

JON  I obviously wasted six years at uni.

ASH  Palpitations. It’s palpitations.

JON  Tachycardia means fast heart. A palpitation is a sort of subjective thump when your heart suddenly does something you’re not expecting it to.

ASH  Has anyone ever told you you might be a bit pedantic?

JON  Oh, yeah, but it doesn’t bother me. I’m fine with it. And I can control it, you know.

ASH  Well, you loved Mel.

Pause. Jon picks Lily up.

JON  Yeah.
Scene 4

*Jon talking to the sleeping Lily.*

**JON** Tonight it’s me who can’t sleep. Another storm cell, but so far away there’s no noise. The house is quiet. I’d like Ash to still be here. I don’t know if that’s smart. It’s like the weather on the night Mel moved out last summer, two weeks before Christmas. She left work early and I got home to a message on the answering machine. She said, ‘I always thought we’d be happier than this.’ She’d gone to think, to spend time alone. I wasn’t to call her on her mobile. She couldn’t say when she’d be back. If she’d be back. I wasn’t sure how to handle work the next day, how to tell the others. But Mel turned up. In new clothes. And again the next day, in new clothes. The one time I went to speak to her, I’d said no more than her name before her hand was up, signalling me to stop. I remember conversations I had with her in her absence. Rehearsals for fast talking, for anger, for distress, for my own clear-headed leaving. That I didn’t love her.

She turned up at home. She apologised. That didn’t work for any of the things I had ready to say to her. She cried and I said none of them. We went out to the nearest pub, the RE. We listened to a band, bought a jug of beer, then another. And I looked at her that night, took a fresh look at her, as best I could. I can remember Mel saying, ‘Hey, that girl singing, she’s young enough to be our daughter, just about.’

That was fifteen months ago, maybe slightly more now. Lily, you were conceived that night, almost certainly. We didn’t make you out of love. We got so tired of arguing, we had a truce one night and made you out of beer.

I can still remember the strange horror of the answering machine message when I’d thought, ‘Oh my god, it might actually be over.’ The weight that lifted, and the weight it dropped on me. The times on that sleepless night that I wanted her to come back, and the times I didn’t. And she did come back, and we agreed to try again. She was gone two days. And we told absolutely no-one. No-one knew but us. So now no-one knows but me.

Scene 5

*George’s place.*

*Jon with the sleeping Lily in the car capsule. Ash has Lily’s bag.*

**ASH** I should’ve called first. I know I’m going to be in the way.

**JON** You know can drop in anytime. And tonight’s just a Wednesday night thing with a couple of people from work. They’ll be pretty happy with you being here. But they could get a bit excited. They get out less than we do and don’t meet a lot of new people. So if I use the term ‘running buddy’ to put you in context, don’t be surprised.
GEORGE: Hi. I didn’t realise Bean needed to come with her own personal minder.
*(George registers their expressions)* Faux pas. This must be your…

ASH: Running buddy. I’m the running buddy.

GEORGE: George. *(Shaking her hand)* I’m the George.

ASH: Ash.

GEORGE: Girls at book club, Jon. It’s new but it could work.

ASH: You told me this was casual. You didn’t tell me I should have read a book.

JON: You’ve been reading books all afternoon at uni.

GEORGE: Over-qualified.

ASH: Sociology. What book are you doing?

*Oscar emerges to greet Ash.*

GEORGE: I’m doing a philosophy degree so I’m doing some Hegel. Oscar, doing poetry. Mainly his own. It’s new, but it’s performance-based.

OSCAR: Hey, I’ve got my thing on this Friday, remember. You’ve got to be nice about poetry this week.

GEORGE: His event at that West End bookstore, where we get to see exactly what Arts Queensland gets for its grant money.

OSCAR: I think you’d like it, Ashley. It’s very sociological. Very influenced by the icons of our temporary consumerist digital society.

ASH: Sounds good.

GEORGE: Jon? You?

JON: Seuss, Doctor, Green Eggs and Ham. It’s a bit performance-based too. But at least it’s quick. Did it a couple of times this afternoon.

GEORGE: The Bean. Do you think she gets it? Green Eggs and Ham?

JON: No. She still gets mush for food, so the basics elude her. It’s up to me to broaden her diet before she can work out what it’s about.

OSCAR: Which is?

JON: I see it as being about the diminishing willingness to take risks with age. To leap into the unknown. The grumpy old guy with the silly hat keeps
insisting he doesn’t like green eggs and ham and you know what? He’s never even tried them. Then he does, and…

GEORGE He loves them. I remember now. I’m sure the Bean gets it. She’s just pre-verbal, so it’ll be a while before she can tell you.

ASH I didn’t think book clubs were like this.

GEORGE I don’t know. That’d be the first time we’ve got heavily into a book. Or the second, at most. You better come in while Jon’s dropping the Bean off in the spare room.

ASH So how long have you known each other?

GEORGE We were friends at uni. I suppose that’s where it started. I guess we would’ve known each other since 1982.

OSCAR You guys had a thing happening in the eighties. The shirts. Remember the shirts?

JON I don’t think we’re going there tonight, Oscar. No eighties stories.

OSCAR These guys had these shirts. I didn’t even know them then, but everyone knew the shirts. No, Jon, I think Ashley needs to know.

GEORGE Even if you copied.

JON 1982, as I remember it was the year shirts stopped buttoning up the middle. We couldn’t afford the ones in the shops. So George bought some curtain off cuts and designed one that buttoned up diagonally. And I’m much sadder than that. I not only copied the idea, I gave it my own spin. George’s shirt wasn’t bottle green, with a row of big way-off-centre gold buttons and gold piping, and epaulettes. And I thought it was superb.

ASH But you both look so regular now. And that’s all so…

GEORGE Duran Duran? Flock of Seagulls.

ASH Except for the hair, very Flock of Seagulls.

GEORGE Jon, you owned the Flock of Seagulls album. Chock full of hits, I think you called it.

JON I did not. You’re lying now, making it up.

GEORGE Don’t come over all nasty and anti-eighties again.

OSCAR There should be a museum of the eighties. Shirts like that shouldn’t be forgotten.
JON     Maybe I should’ve kept mine in case anyone does a musical about the Napoleonic Wars.

GEORGE  You could even have a section on eighties hair. There are people we know who’d go for that.

ASH     Me for one. Eighties hair can be hilarious.

GEORGE  Oh, it’s tragic, the desperate attempts we made to turn ourselves into objects of desire.

OSCAR   I remember Jon in those skinny ties at Mount Stephens General. You were a bad man in those days, chasing young nurses.

GEORGE  Those were the days. Skinny-tie, bad-man days. Why didn’t I have them?

JON     Trust me, Porge. They weren’t the days. The way I recall it there’s not much to be nostalgic about.

GEORGE  You’re not telling me these are the days, and I’m not even aware I’m missing out? I can’t recall anything I’ve done I’d call close to halcyon, ever. And you know that moment where you suddenly realise your body’s on the slide? Where you start getting the odd inexplicable ache or pain…

JON     No.

GEORGE  Yes you do. I think I had it in the middle of last year. One day it was like my whole body just fell. Clunk. And there I was, older. We’re getting older Jon Boy.

JON     Don’t scare me, George. I’m assuming these are the days. And those weren’t. I’m assuming the days are starting any day now.

ASH     So am I. That’s what I came down here for. I’m here for my days. If it turns out I missed them by ten years, I won’t be happy.

GEORGE  Sweet youth. You can afford to be glib. Until you hear that clunk, hey Jon?

JON     That’s crap. It doesn’t have to be that way. I run. I get twinges because of running but other than that, I’m fine.

Scene 6

The Surgery.

GEORGE  I liked your running buddy.
JON  I figured we’d get round to that.

GEORGE  Well you will go bringing her along…

JON  She doesn’t know a lot of people. Bringing her along doesn’t mean anything.

GEORGE  Then don’t go crazy and make it look like it does. I was just saying I liked her. Smart kind of girl. Knew how to put shit on you about that skinny-tie phase. Even if it finished when she was about ten.

JON  Started when she was about ten. (George laughs) Look, she’s in her twenties or around that. This is not some Lolita thing.

GEORGE  Well, no. There’s a critical difference as far as the age issue goes. Yours is technically an adult. People might think you’re a dirty old scum-bag but they’d be way out of line if they mentioned Nabakov.

JON  Thanks for the support. It’s not like that anyway.

GEORGE  Why not?

JON  You’ve got it wrong. It’s not happening. That’s actually the best part about it. There’s no pressure to make it happen.

GEORGE  Don’t have to squish any of her pets…

JON  (Leaving) Hey, they’ve got to learn.

GEORGE  Such a waste if it’s not happening. Some young pony takes an interest and you let her down.

JON  This isn’t about an interest. You don’t get it and don’t waste your time trying to.

Scene 7

West End book shop.
Jon, Ash and George assemble. A microphone pops, a yowl of feedback.

HOST  (Recorded) Welcome everyone, to the latest in our series of experimental performance poetry, Words Let Loose. One of last season’s success stories is back to let loose with his newest and boldest. Back with the fruits of his labours from an Arts Queensland grant. Please make welcome, Oscar Long and his… Millennium Suite.

Oscar surges forward in a glittering, gold-embroidered gown. He strikes a pose and shoots bright yellow fans down from his sleeves into his hands. He snaps them open and shut, and places his head between them. He hisses to the four points of the compass,
rotating with a slow and practiced elegance. The poetry begins in a rush of words, staccato and spitting.

OSCAR

Yes children
The forest is large and all of it
Forest

There is no playground there
No swings, roundabout, monkey bars
No unfettered pleasure in any
Of its brightness

There are paths that are not paths
Not paths that are paths
Paths to nowhere and
To rectangular corners and
To reckoning

There is the appearance of
Creatures and
Food
Bright in small orbits
Harvestable

But look
While you gorge yourself
On golden globes of possibility
Even while leaves are still
The wind gone
Danger sets to tap
Any shoulder

Oscar twitches among dialects, sweeps low with his fans. His gown slips open revealing Mickey Mouse boxer shorts. He rattles on and the sweat runs off the gold make-up on his cheeks. George leads applause.

GEORGE

There’s been a lot of rehearsal at our place this week. I know the score.

OSCAR

Death that stalks
On jelly legs is
No less death
Even in bright lines

Death comes in
The colour of your children’s clothes
With a sad smile
And from any portal

And all is gone
On the third chance
All untoward and
Unavoidable

Play while you can
Embrace the moment and
Play
Some days there is no
Smoking gun
Only life and
Death

Oscar digresses into machine noises, chopping with the closed fans, swinging his arms, flapping the open fans like wings. George leads applause.

GEORGE I hope you’re keeping track of what it’s about.

JON It’s about something?

GEORGE There’s not a scrap of poetry in you, is there?

OSCAR Go checking
Take all your hands and mouths and
Get to work

This bird will brook you
No fair clutch of eggs
Should you delay

Their pleasure’s simple
In the cup-shaped hand
But hurry

Collect them as a child might
This season
This season quick
Just before breakfast
And they will give you
Life

Oscar comes to a big finish with much spitting and shouting, and freezes with the fans open in front of his face. Oscar disappears during the applause.

JON Wow.

GEORGE Yeah.

ASH I don’t think I got all that. What was it about exactly?

JON It was poetry. There is no ‘about’ in poetry.
Sometimes there’s an ‘about’. Plenty of times. And he seemed such a quiet person the other night.

Lurking deep in all of us there’s some scary performance piece waiting to be poetry slammed out.

Oscar joins them, still in his costume.

Like it Oscar. Very non-traditional. Very…

Political?

Very political.

And very powerful. Very powerful.

Good, very good. So a success then?

Oh, absolutely.

Of course it’s still evolving. I’m still reaching out with some of it, trying to get in touch with the other side of me

I was wondering about the significance of the costume.

I just saw this in an op shop one day, and there’s so much gold. George thinks it might be from The Mikado.

And what’s your other side, exactly?

The other side. The other. The side that is the other.

This is a big thing of Oscar’s. You should be able to hear that he’s got inverted commas around ‘other’.

Oh, that other. The side of you that represents the outsider side.

But with the inverted commas quite audible.

And how does the costume represent the other?

That’s a good question, Ashley, since the choice is mostly about what it doesn’t represent. It doesn’t represent every regular day of my life. I mean, look at Jon. Imagine him just the way he is, but with a tie.

I can do that.

That’s where I am most of the time. But, just a bit more stylish. No offence.
JON Since when did I take offence?

OSCAR You’re always taking offence. Anyway, I can’t explore the other from
the everyday. There needs to be more…let out. It’s got to be bold. It’s
got to be unafraid to be honest. I have to liberate myself to allow the
words to surge out of me. And from there, you see, the poetry begins.

ASH And the section about ‘the golden globes of possibility’, is that to do
with getting in touch with the other, or is it something specific?

OSCAR Both. I can be bold. Unafraid. Honest. And it’s about risking the loss of
innocence. In the end, the struggle is heroic. But let’s eat. It really takes
it out of you up there.

GEORGE Oz, the gear. You haven’t changed.

George shepherds Oscar away.

OSCAR I’m on a roll, Porge. Don’t stop me now.

GEORGE It’s a different world beyond that door, Oz Man.

Scene 8

Ash’s place.
At her door.

JON He’s very metaphorical, isn’t he? At work he’s quiet. That side doesn’t
come out.

ASH You never know what people have got going on beneath the surface.

JON Until you give them a Mikado costume and a bit of encouragement. You
have to realize tonight’s not indicative of what goes on in my life.

ASH I’m aware of that. I must’ve eaten too much. I’m not feeling very well.
Are you okay.

JON I’m fine.

ASH Maybe it’s not the dinner, then. Maybe it’s the six bananas I had for
breakfast and the four I had for lunch.

JON Maybe we should get you some food.

ASH I liked the bananas. I’m sure I’ll be fine. (She puts her arms around him
and hugs him.) Thanks for tonight. Might see you tomorrow then.
Yeah. Lily’s at my parents tonight, so we could run before I pick her up. Eight, eight-thirty.

Good. Eight, eight-thirty.

Yeah.

They have stayed close, but it’s as if Jon is frozen. She breaks the mood.

Okay. Well, I’ll see you.

I don’t understand tonight, the end of tonight. What happened. I don’t even know what kind of situation it was. If it was a situation. Why didn’t I cross those last few inches between us? I’m not sure what I was waiting for, if I was expecting some kind of sign. I don’t know what to do anymore. Who am I trying to kid? I never knew what to do. Eighty percent of the time you’re just hoping you won’t look like an idiot.

Ash’s place.
Jon arrives with a packet of Halliday Tea behind his back. Ash is barefoot.

I really don’t know that I’m up to it today.

Is it more of what was wrong with you last night?

Yeah.

Do you think you should do something about it?

I’ve always been a bit allergic to MSG. So, last night’s dinner, maybe? Why don’t you run without me?

No, it’s okay.

Well, do you want a drink or anything?

That’d be good, thanks. Hey, I’ve got something for you.

He holds out the packet of tea.

Where did you get that?

I thought you might like it. Something from home.

But I left home.
JON: Oh. I ordered it on the Internet a couple of days ago.

ASH: I’m sorry. I’ve never been caught off-guard by a packet of tea before. I was feeling a bit wobbly. And suddenly there’s this tea from home.

JON: The glories of the Internet.

ASH: Yeah.

*She opens the packet, holds it to her face and takes in the aroma of the leaves.*

JON: It landed on the front steps at dawn. With this Lily-sized thump. Next thing in my dream, the Bean is tumbling down onto the first of too many steps. I had to get up and go to her room. I needed to show myself she wasn’t there. That it wasn’t her.

ASH: See, you are pretty good with her. Even when she’s not there.

JON: Thanks.

ASH: No, I mean it. In a good way.

JON: I think I have to be. Since there’s just me. If you know what I mean?

ASH: So what was it like? Dealing with Melissa’s dying, and the time after? That must have been very difficult.

JON: What?

ASH: What was it like?

JON: Um…

ASH: No-one’s asked you that, have they?

JON: What do you mean?

ASH: No-one’s directly asked you. About what you’ve been going through.

JON: They ask me how I am. All the time.

ASH: That’s not the same.

JON: They’re there for me. I know that. I can talk about anything I want.

ASH: But you don’t, do you?

JON: I could if I wanted to. There’s all this bullshit about talking. It doesn’t fix things, whatever people say. Sometimes there are things you can’t explain. When you’ve got to keep it to yourself. Work it out yourself.
ASH And present this calm, coping exterior.

JON What’s wrong with coping?

ASH Nothing. I’m talking about the exterior. People who show everyone everything’s working on the surface, while they hide beneath and try to work things out.

JON What are you on about?

ASH It’s what you were saying last Saturday, about skin. How the exterior stops the interior being seen. I don’t know what gets in, but you don’t let much out.

JON What kind of pop-psych stuff are you reading for this degree?

Pause

ASH (Shrugs) All right. My mistake. You’re obviously totally fine then.

JON Sorry. Sorry about the pop-psych thing. (She just looks at him) But if you’d like to re-interpret my life in terms of Tickle-Me-Elmo I’d be very keen to hear that. What I’m saying is, I don’t really get what you’re saying.

ASH You have friends. You’ve been through – correct me if I’m wrong – what could reasonably be called a significant loss. I don’t know why you don’t talk to them.

JON I talk to them. All the time. But in a particular way. It’s not as easy as it seems.

ASH I’m sure it isn’t.

JON How? How can you be sure? How can you know? Look, this is how life works…Sorry, that’s really patronising.

ASH Good pick up. Tell me how life works.

JON I’ve known George half my life, and the others almost as long. Over time you fall into a way of interacting with each other, and supporting each other. And that kind of talk isn’t what I want them for. I want to be okay. I want them for when I’m okay, though I know they’d be there, whatever. I don’t want to change the way I relate to these people, remake all my relationships based on how I deal with Mel’s death. I know it’s tough for the others too, but I’m not ready for all these conversations. Not yet. And if that’s selfish, they’ll let me be selfish. They’re good that way.
ASH I had this idea that you could tell me things. You told me about Melissa
days ago, and ever since then you’ve steered conversations around her.
You have to tell me what I’m supposed to do. Otherwise I won’t know
how to talk to you. I’m sorry if that’s not like George…

JON No. No, don’t be like George. I’ve got one of those already. Okay. This
is how weird it was. Fuck. Okay. Mel and I didn’t actually get on.
(Pause) We didn’t tell people. So that adds to the mess. How can I tell
them about it now? And how can I talk about any of it without getting
into that? It makes it hard. Too hard, to be honest.

Scene 11 (a)

Jon’s place.
Jon’s putting Lily to sleep. Ash is there, waiting in another room.

JON I’ve known Ash three weeks and three days. And I lie awake at night
thinking about her. She’s more than ten years younger than me, for god’s
sake. I’ve no idea what she wants, what she’s thinking, what her life’s
about. Everything from the time of Mel’s death is too strange and extreme to
explain, and I still don’t get it myself. For several weeks it was like
driving in fog. Blank. Intense. Too big to make sense of. None of it’s
even medium-sized, so where and how would I start the talking to make
the process of talking do some good? I’m doing it again. Running the
tape through my head, being my own audience of one.

He becomes aware that Ash has come to the door.

JON Even now Bean scares me when she sleeps. It’s like it’s reckless of her.
And I have to watch and watch. Just in case. How dumb is that?

ASH I don’t think it’s dumb.

JON Are you okay?

ASH It’s just my headache. Have you got anything I can take?

JON Yeah, probably. Let me go and look. It’s just, you know, a regular
headache?

ASH Yeah…

She starts to speak, then goes down on her knees, doubling up on the floor.

JON What’s happening? What’s really going on? You have to tell me.

ASH Um…(Takes a sharp breath) It’s a period thing, I think.

JON What?
ASH  I used to have trouble. I went on the pill and it got better. I’ve been off it for a while now and it’s getting worse.

JON  A period thing?

ASH  Yeah, not a headache. I was planning to keep it to myself but…

*Ash curls up on the floor. He touches her.*

JON  You’re cold. *(Covers her with a towel.)* Have you got anything to take for it? Anything at home?

ASH  You know I don’t have any money. How could I get something to take?

JON  Okay.

ASH  Sorry.

JON  Don’t be. Let’s get this sorted out. I’m going to call Roscoe. He’s a gynaecologist.

11(b)

ROSCOE  There you are. She’s fine, Jon. She wanted me to tell you. And that it’s primary dysmenorrhoea.

JON  So, like, she’s collapsed on my bathroom floor and it’s just straight period pain?

ROSCOE  It sounds a bit better when you say primary dysmenorrhoea. It’s sometimes bad in young, thin healthy women. Occasionally you end up having to look at other possibilities, but not usually.

JON  Thanks. That’s good isn’t it? I’m sorry I got you round here for…

ROSCOE  Not a problem. It needed something done about it.

JON  I called you because it seemed like it was going to be gynae, and, you know, you’re the best. Who else would I hassle about Saturday evening period pain?

ROSCOE  They’re taping The Bill for me at home so, glad I could help.

JON  Do you want a drink? How about a scotch?

ROSCOE  Sure if you’re having one.

JON  Sure. Why not.
ROSCOE  Black Label. That’s a nice one. Don’t go opening it on my account.
JON    I’m sure it was due to be opened.
ROSCOE So how have you been?
JON    Pretty good.
ROSCOE  Good.
JON    It was tough for a couple of months there but things are starting to fit into place. Lily’s doing really well.
ROSCOE That’s good to hear.
JON    Roscoe, Mel…these things happen.
ROSCOE Yeah…Ashley’s going to come and see me next week. But she’ll be all right for now. She’s in bed. I thought that was better than the floor.
JON    Thanks for coming. I really appreciate it. I might have over-reacted a bit, but she looked pretty bad and I didn’t want to mess around.
ROSCOE Any time. If you’ve got any worries, call me. Good to see you looking all right.

11(c)

*After Roscoe has gone. Jon checks on Lily.*

JON  The Black label was for you, Roscoe. Bought for the day Mel and you, Bean, would have been discharged from hospital. A thank you gift for seeing us through it all, making sure everything went to plan. Mel’s death had nothing to do with you, Roscoe. It really was just one of those things. I’ve never seen anyone respond so quickly. It simply didn’t work. And the scotch just sat there. I haven’t seen Roscoe since the funeral. I should have talked to him months ago. I should have talked to him tonight. I keep forgetting there are other people apart from me involved in this.

*Jon checking on Ash curled up in his bed. He watches her sleep.*

**Scene 12**

*Jon’s place.
Ash wakes up.*

JON  So how are you today?
ASH Not bad. That guy last night, the doctor...what he gave me is working pretty well. I'm so embarrassed.

JON Don’t be, not about last night. Be embarrassed about the way your hair is sticking right up off the top of your head.

ASH Oh, my god. I must look awful.

JON No, you don’t look awful. I was kidding.

ASH This is so strange, sitting in here in yesterday’s clothes, eating toast.

JON It’ll work out fine if you’re careful with the crumbs. Now, I’ve got to put in an appearance at the welcome home morning-tea party for the cat I squished.

ASH Do cat’s like morning-tea?

JON No. But why don’t you stay around?

ASH Are you sure?

JON Let me put it another way. All the Lily things are done at the moment, so if you could…

ASH Babysit? Sure. Playing, stories, things like that?

JON You’ve got it covered.

Scene 13

*Katie’s place.*

*Wendy meets Jon. George is there.*


JON How’s Flag?

WENDY Recovering.

JON I don’t imagine he’ll be particularly pleased to see me.

WENDY There might be a bit of ground to make up. I’ll let Katie know you’re here. *(Goes)*

GEORGE You should see the catering out there, Jon Boy. It’s like Flag fought in a war, we’re so happy he’s home.

JON No half measure with our Katie. I’m sure she’s been up all night baking.
As Jon gets settled with a drink, Flag is in his lap and kneading away at his pants.

GEORGE You should try these pikelets? They’re still warm.

JON Pikelets? I haven’t seen a pikelet for years.

GEORGE Pikelets are back.

JON Easy on the trousers there, Flaggy.

GEORGE There’s a lot of thought behind this catering.

JON Good of you to notice. Katie will be pleased.

GEORGE We’ve, um, Katie and I, got coffee scheduled for Wednesday. I’ve completely come to terms with the eighties. Unlike some people. So why not?

JON Maybe you could start by coming to terms with Flag.

GEORGE You have a good time there, boys. The rest of us will be out on the deck.

Jon moves Flags paws to the arm of the chair twice. Each time Flag moves them back to Jon’s pants. Then looking at Jon madly, prongs him in the penis.

JON Good fella. (Sees Oscar) Oscar, you’re going to have to help me. The cat hates me. He’s got me pronged about midshaft at the moment.

OSCAR What?

JON Stop laughing. If we get this wrong I could blow a corpus and I might never fly straight again. So how about I distract him and you sneak in and whip the claw out?

OSCAR Okay.

JON And be discreet. Pretend you’re down there for Flag.

OSCAR We’ve never got on.

JON Put that aside, Oz. Help me here.

Oscar goes down on his knees, manoeuvres in close.

OSCAR Actually it’s hard to see exactly which claw…We’re going to be okay though, I think…

JON No writhing, please. No more writhing, Flaggy. We’ll be there any second.
OSCAR  Why do they make them so fluffy? Okay, got the claw…and here we go.

*Oscar pops the claw out just as Katie enters. Katie screams and grabs Flag.*

KATIE  Oh my god. You bastard. When is enough ever enough for you?

JON  Katie, it’s not what you think.

KATIE  No it never is with you, is it Jon? You’ve always got some excuse, some rationalisation, because you’re never actually responsible for anything. Perhaps it’s about time you grew up. You could’ve told me sooner you weren’t interested, instead of letting me make an absolute idiot of myself. At least I took the risk of letting you know how I felt. And you were probably making jokes behind my back. You’re a coward. And cruel. Stay away from me. And stay away from my cat.

**Scene 14**

*Jon’s place.*

*Ash wearing one of Jon’s T-shirts.*

ASH  I haven’t been completely straight with you either.

JON  What do you mean?

ASH  I was going out with the guy who handles the distribution of our tea, runs the website, things like that. It ended a few months ago. So when you surprised me with the tea yesterday, I thought it was something to do with him.

JON  You told me about the home page. It wasn’t too hard to click in the right boxes.

ASH  That’s what I should have been thinking. My family practically had us married off. So it was like, ‘You’re going to do what? Dump the golden boy, move to the other end of the state? What’ll you do for money?’ It turned into bit of a mess.

JON  So what’d you say?

ASH  I’ll get a job. You’ll never hear me asking for money. So here I am, wearing your T-shirt, and sponging meals off you. I can’t even have a period now without your help. And then I hassle you about not opening up, and I tell you none of this.

JON  You could have told me.

ASH  Hey, I have now. It hasn’t been an easy time.

JON  I know.
Pause

ASH Do you think she’s getting another tooth?

JON Who?

ASH Who? How many people round here don’t have the full set? Lily.

JON Um, I don’t know. Look we’ve been seeing a lot of each other…

Pause

ASH And?

JON What do you mean?

ASH We’ve been seeing a lot of each other and… I should be paying for more things?

JON No.

ASH But? Could it have been a ‘but’?

JON No, give me a chance. Um, I’m not sure…

ASH That’s evident.

JON You turned up at a strange time for me. And my mind was on other things. We haven’t …I didn’t think…I’d always run by myself. I know it’s a good idea to get into a routine when you exercise with people.

ASH You’re slipping back to that non-direct approach again.

JON What?

ASH You’re talking about exercise theory.

JON How many weeks did it take you to tell me why you came to Brisbane?

ASH At least it didn’t start off as a story about car number plates.

JON You could have told me that other stuff sooner. It wasn’t such a big deal. Relationships end.

ASH I knew that was bugging you. I knew you’d think I should’ve told you.

JON Fuck. Look, I’m sorry. Of course it was a big deal. I just…please, I can really do without the number plate stuff again. That’s all to do with the person I married having died.
ASH: Do you think I’d forgotten that? How is anyone supposed to deal with you? I just forgot how to handle you for a second, okay?

JON: Handle me? What are you? A zoo keeper?

ASH: Shit, Jon, do you even know how temperamental you are? How carefully people treat you? How nothing gets sorted out?

JON: Well, there goes the careful handling. This is nice and direct.

Ash: I’m really sorry that the person you married has died. I’m sorry that you didn’t like her. And I’m sorry that you don’t really know how to deal with that, and that no-one ever talks about any of it. (Pause) What am I doing? I’m sorry I’m saying all this now. It’s none of my business.

JON: Don’t say that. I’ve made it your business. It’s your business now more than anybody else’s.

ASH: I think I’ll go home.

JON: What? Don’t go.

ASH: No, I think I will.

JON: Don’t leave. Please.

ASH: I’m not leaving. I’m just going home. Because right this minute you are shitting me off. Hugely. I’m not up to this conversation. If we’ve been seeing too much of each other, you can pick a different day to tell me.

JON: No, you’ve got it totally wrong. I don’t want to see a minute less of you.

ASH: Really?

JON: Really.

ASH: Okay. Okay. But I think I should go home, for today. I’m going to take my tablets, watch some TV, go to bed early…

JON: I don’t know that you should…

ASH: Don’t tell me what I shouldn’t. And don’t ask me to stay, and don’t offer me a lift, and for god’s sake don’t offer me money for a cab or I’ll fucking kill you.

JON: Kill me? Is that just the cab one or all three?
ASH  Don’t. Being your…friend is very strange. You’re the only person like me that I know. You get me. People often don’t. Most of the time, I think I get you.

JON  You don’t have any food. Wait.

ASH  Sit, good girl, sit.

JON  That’s not my dog voice. That was my sincere for-fuck’s-sake-you-need-food voice.

ASH  Two kilos of grapes. Thanks. I can’t imagine what you had in mind with two kilo’s of grapes.

JON  They’re bite-size. Totally ready.

Scene 15

Jon’s place.
Jon walking the floors with a wailing Lily. He does the Panadol and teething gel routine, then puts her in her capsule.

JON  I wish Ash had stayed, Bean. Was I supposed to follow? I don’t think I always avoid conflict, or the tough issues. What was I going to tell her, anyway? All this talk about talking and we don’t talk about what’s happening with us. And I didn’t raise it in case I’m getting it totally wrong. Neither of us exactly has our shit together tonight, Bean, do we? What say we go for a drive? See what it looks like out there. (They go outside) Look at the streetlights. Look at the trees in the dark. Look at the cows. Just kidding. Look at the no-traffic. Can you get that kind of thing yet? An absence. Other than an absence of comfort and trust connected to teething. Which, by the way I do not cause.

Scene 16

Ash’s place.
Suddenly we are at the scene of the conflagration. Flashing lights, smoke and roaring flames, crackling timbers. Firemen connecting hoses etc. Jon abandons Lily.


Jon charges blindly into the smoke. Ash being wheeled out on an ambulance trolley being administered oxygen.

AMBO  We’ve got her. Mate, we’ve got her.

JON  Oh, thank god. So she was out?

AMBO  She was on the floor near the back door.
JON I’m a doctor. Maybe I can help.

AMBO You’re a doctor?

JON Yes. I’m a fucking doctor. Let me help. Please.

AMBO Smoke inhalation. No apparent burns. She’s not conscious. Heart rate’s one-fifty. Just checking her B.P.

JON Pupils?

AMBO Normal. We’re about to get her off to the Royal quick smart.

**Scene 17**

*In the ambulance.*

Jon’s nightmare. Jon with Ash’s body on the trolley. She’s covered with a green paper drape, her face covered with the oxygen mask. Distorted sirens, mad driving noises, the ECG monitor pinging.

JON I take the stethoscope and listen to Ash’s chest. It’s hard to hear with the sirens. They get a bag of fluid ready. It’s years since I had to find a vein. Keep it still. Don’t go deep. Nice and steady. I connect the drip. It runs. She’s got quite a tachycardia going. No. Fuck. They’re ectopics. On top of the tachycardia. Jesus, Ash. Don’t do this. Have you got gear for cardiac things? Her blood pressure’s down. Have you got any lignocaine? If this gets more unstable we could be in trouble. Have you got a defibrillator? One of the defib paddles goes on the sternum. The other… Ash might be going to die. I’ve seen this before. Holding Mel’s hand. Watched the monitor go all wrong. Don’t do this. Ash. Please don’t do this. Lily. I left Lily in the car and there’s nothing I can do. I watch the monitor. I get ready for it to get worse, and demand that I try something. I imagine defibrillating. I imagine it failing. Mel. Ash. Jolting and dying there. Sometimes it works. I imagine it working. I remember the routine from uni. I’ll need the lignocaine first. The couplets settle down. Peter out, like a storm passing. Ash’s fingers squeeze my hand.

*Ash is taken away. Jon phones while getting into green paper hospital gown.*

JON George, it’s Jon. I need you to do something for me. Are you awake? I need you to go and get Lily out of my car… You’ll have break a window. Now. I’ll give you the address.

**Scene 18**

*In the hospital.*

*Ash on a drip, half sitting up.*

ASH You’re wearing a hospital thing.
JON  That’s because I stink. No, it’s routine. To do with infection control. Even though every bug on my skin got smoked out hours ago.

ASH  What happened?

JON  A fire. It was probably your wiring. You were lucky to get out really. And there were a few scary moments in the ambulance when your heart was doing things it shouldn’t. But they sorted themselves out. Shit, even seeing you in a hospital bed scares me. I hate this stuff, you know?

ASH  Yeah.

*She cries. He hands her some tissues and puts his arm around her.*

ASH  You stink. You stink like my mouth tastes.

JON  Just because I wasn’t sick enough to get bathed.

ASH  Oh, Jon. My life is fucked.

JON  It’ll be okay. You’re okay. And I want to do whatever I can. So it works out for you here.

ASH  Um…I’m only here for a year. I don’t know what’s happening, but I don’t think I’m in love with you.

JON  That’s all right.

ASH  Is it?

JON  I don’t think that’s what either of us was looking for. So it’s fine.

*She puts her arms round him, snagging her IV line on his ear.*

ASH  So what are you looking for?

JON  I’m looking to get through each day, I guess.

ASH  You’re already good at that. What’s the next phase?

JON  I’ve been leaving that to work out later.

ASH  This time I’m not going to say, ‘Sometimes you seem to be leaving a lot till later.’ *(He sighs deeply)* Sorry.

JON  Let’s not go back to sorry. It led to such a crappy night. *(She laughs)* Yes, maybe I do leave things. And maybe I do keep things in. It’s not so much what’s happened, it’s the future I have to think about more. The past is the part I can’t change. That I have to find a place for. And that hasn’t been easy, and it’s not going to be easy, and you and everyone
else can’t tell me it’ll be otherwise. (*She looks at him but doesn’t say anything.*) Sorry. You’re not trying to tell me that… There are things I haven’t told people specifically because they were Mel’s friends too. So maybe I can tell you sometime.

ASH  Go on.

JON  What?

ASH  Tell me.

JON  Now?

ASH  I get bored in hospital.

JON  It was my idea not to use contraception, even when Mel was clear about the timing. So the pregnancy, Lily, was my idea. And birth killed her, killed Mel. I couldn’t face the fact that our relationship might end, and the last thing I made us try to fix it killed her.

*Ash bursts into tears.*

JON  See what happens when I tell someone the worst five percent of what I feel?

*Ash coughs. Jon passes a cup for her to spit up the sooty mucus. She inspects it.*

ASH  How long does this go on for?

JON  I do laser skin surgery. I’m next to useless with this stuff.

ASH  You couldn’t know what was going to happen that night.

JON  No, I know.

ASH  But I can see why you couldn’t tell your friends. Not yet anyway. So try the risky things out on me first, if you want to.

JON  Thanks. So let me take a risk then. Let me tell you some of the best five percent. I know you’re not in love with me. But I might be in love with you. So does that wreck everything?

ASH  No. Not at all. Shit. I’m so messed up about all this stuff. I should come with warning signs. Ages ago you said how these things got confused easily.

JON  They’re clear today.

ASH  So don’t you run away now. It’s a good kind of thing to know today. Even if that sounds a bit selfish.
JON It doesn’t.

ASH I’m glad you told me.

They kiss. The others are there watching. One of them quickly becomes a nurse.

NURSE Oh, I’m sorry. Your heart rate just went up on the monitor.

ASH It’s like school in here. You can’t get away with anything.

NURSE Sorry. I had to check. (Goes)

ASH Don’t ask me what that was about. Not just yet. Did I mention I was kind of messed up?

JON I think you might have. And we both know I’ve had a good go at being messed up myself from time to time.

ASH I want to go home. Fuck, I don’t have a home, do I?

JON We can find you a new place. And we’ll buy you some clothes. And don’t argue, please. I don’t want to argue again, just yet. You owe me nothing. Just tell me what you need.

ASH I need one of everything and two of some things. I could have died in that house. And I didn’t.

Epilogue

Lily is brought to Jon.

JON In my whole life, Bean, I’ve only told two people that I was in love with them. I told Mel. We were drinking red wine and cooking pasta in the kitchen of our flat in Cambridge, and all of a sudden I didn’t care about the cold, that it was winter, how we both wanted to come home. And I told your mother that I loved her. And what happened to that? Where did it go? What did I actually feel that night? I can’t remember. Today. My second time. Ash. In the instant I worked it out, I told her. It just came out of me, unreasoned and unstoppable and I heard it the same time she did. But it sounded right. Because it felt true. More than true. Alarming even. The best kind of alarming. It’s been years since I kissed a different mouth. I wasn’t ready to be kissed. I’m still not ready, but I’d do it again right now. I don’t know what happens next. But I’m not afraid now. Not afraid to be loved and even not loved. And of course I love you, Bean. What say we go harass the ducks? (As the lights fade, Lily poos loudly.)

I just changed you.

The End
7. ANALYSIS OF PERFECT SKIN

In completing a stage adaptation of Nick Earls’ novel *Perfect Skin* and claiming copyright of the play script I have located myself in a particular relationship with the source text. In the context of adaptation studies, the extent to which the play script and the performance of it are my work remains contestable, not least because theatre making is a collaborative art form and almost everyone involved in the production made significant contributions. This is an important aspect of adaptation to be expanded upon later. What is not in question is that the text of the adaptation is derived from the novel and as such has a direct relationship to the novel, or it might even be said to have a fluctuating interrelationship. Imagined in a virtual post-structuralist world one text might be seen to be merging with and emerging from the other text – a textual manifestation of the chicken and egg paradox – except that Nick Earls and I, and many other readers of his novel actually know which text came first and which is the adaptation. Furthermore, most of these readers cannot help but compare their reading of the novel to their experience of the staged adaptation of the play.

There is no doubt that when a text of a novel is “recontextualized” in a theatre adaptation and produced on the stage “that the source text and its derivative occupy two different places in the world scene and history” (Casetti, 2004, p. 83). The play script and production of *Perfect Skin* declare themselves as adaptations of Nick Earls’ novel of the same name, as required by Hutcheon (2006). As argued above in the Contextual Review, Casetti’s approach to adaptation, which involves “reprogramming reception of the story, a theme, or a character, and so on” (Casetti, 2004, p. 83) and Kranz’s (2007) focus on interpretive relevance require some level of comparative analysis in the assessment of the play script and production. As summarised in Section 3.7 of the Contextual Review (p. 55) the analytical tools considered most useful to the practice of adaptation and its subsequent evaluation have largely been derived from Cardwell’s (2007) consideration of “generic context”, “authorial context” and “medium specific context”, and from application of Stam’s “mechanics of narrative”. The analysis below also gives due consideration to the implications of “narrative gaps” identified in McFarlane’s (2007) assertion that “adaptation proper” must provide a commentary on the source text. The analysis gives particular weight to the narrative gap created by an “absent character”. Additionally, it emphasises the importance of the constraints
imposed by the “commissioning brief” on the practitioner, an element overlooked or ignored by most theorists.

7.1 Comparative Analysis

7.1.1 Generic Context

Applying Cardwell’s line of thinking requires identifying whether the play adaptation belongs to a specific genre of theatre making. The degree to which the adaptation complies with familiar genre conventions should allow the audience to draw conclusions about the interpretive approaches of both the script and the production. This is particularly germane to the positioning of the stage adaptation of *Perfect Skin* vis-à-vis the novel. For example, Earls’ *Perfect Skin* is a Generation-X novel, a comic hybrid that is part social satire, part romance, and part belated rites of passage of a Generation-X male growing up. The events in Earls’ novel may draw on and refer to popular film and television genres and pop music but it is generically a novel in the classic realist mode. As Catherine Belsey (1980) notes, classic realism is "still the dominant popular mode in literature, film, and television drama … in its representation of the world of consistent subjects who are the origin of meaning, knowledge and action" (p. 67). It arguably remains the dominant mode in popular mainstream theatre; the *Perfect Skin* stage adaptation, however, sought to disturb this genre location.

The move from the novel to the drama brought into play comedy sub-genres such as situation comedy, and the comedy of manners, and the romantic comedy, the most common verbal forms of comedy in the stage adaptation; and the physical comedy of Jon’s slapstick encounters with the cat. Other script and production choices (of having some actors “knowingly” play more than one character, having the baby and the cat represented by puppets openly manipulated by the actors, and in one scene having the cat embodied by the actor/puppeteer), all convey a sense of the unrealistic, of disruptive elements in Jon’s otherwise naturalistic and rational account of events. On reflection, the genre conventions of puppetry and multi-role playing may have had an unsettling effect on the coherence of Jon’s narration (providing a commentary on the novel), by highlighting the unreliability of Jon’s narration and exposing flaws in his character. Analysing metaphorically, the audience may have come to see Jon as a manipulator of the truth, untrustworthy and even unlikable. Could this disruption of the audience’s desire for empathy with Jon (based largely on their reading of the novel or
their experience of other adaptations in the franchise) have undermined the success of the production? Perhaps, but it is the purposeful use of these medium-specific performance devices that should – ideally at least - be significant here rather than reference to the source novel. The difficulty of achieving this “open-minded” reception is illustrated in another example from Cardwell.

7.1.2 Authorial Context

Cardwell uses the example of scriptwriter Andrew Davies in his television adaptations of classic novels by Jane Austen, Anthony Trollope and George Eliot amongst others, when she claims that “authorial context” raises audience expectations with regards to the adaptation. Over time, Davies’ particular tone and approach to these British television classic-novel adaptations have become so recognizable as to provide (for a majority of the audience) more of a marker and a marketing focus than knowledge of the source texts or their authors. However, Perfect Skin is one of a number of Earls’ novels that are known to a significant number of readers as well as to audiences whose encounter with his works is through the various earlier stage adaptations. Earls has a popular following. His Generation X central characters are readily identifiable, socially inept metro-sexual males whose witty and ironic observations on the messes they make of their lives provide an amused and amusing commentary on postmodern manners. They are serial monologists with a penchant for self-deprecation, ridicule and riffing on 1980s music and hairstyles, dating and movies. Earls’ readers and audiences are familiar with the progress of the characters through the novels 48 Shades of Brown, After January, and Zigzag Street, and the stage adaptations by playwright, Phillip Dean.

Perfect Skin proved to be the last adaptation in the La Boite Theatre Company/Earls “franchise”. In each case, the authorial context on which the marketing of the stage adaptation was based was on Nick Earls as the best-selling writer of the source text. In this way, the novel was only one part of the text the audience was invited to engage with; the other was the personality and celebrity of Earls as a marquee writer. The audience was encouraged to read or re-read Earls rather than to re-program their reception of the story which had been re-interpreted and was being presented in a new way in a new situation, to paraphrase Casetti above. Paradoxically, the process of adaptation became a secondary consideration to the commercial success of the Earls “franchise” even as each theatrical success raised audience expectations of each new
adaptation product. With the success of the venture increasingly attributed to Earls, the commissioning brief for *Perfect Skin* insisted on fidelity to the source text without due regard for the increasing narrative gaps in successive novels. In film the audience is rarely if ever subject to constant reminders of a source text and the celebrity of the author; the *Harry Potter* franchise being a notable recent exception. It is however, common practice in the marketing of stage adaptations of popular novels. With long running successful franchises in film or in the theatre, the producing body’s question often becomes: “How much longer can we get away with this?” The lesson may be to keep in mind what might have been the appropriate question for the first venture: “How do we adapt this novel so that the audience is prepared to re-program their reception of the story or popular character in the new medium of the theatre?”

### 7.1.3 Theatrical Context (Medium-Specificity)

Cardwell’s third practice-relevant context (see p. 41 above) is to do with medium specificity, with performance identified as a defining characteristic. Her case study example is television whilst for my purposes it is theatre. With the adaptation one’s attention is immediately drawn to the difference in narrative focus. In Casetti’s “paper world” of the novel and the discourse that surrounds it and Nick Earls as a popular and successful author, the reader’s engagement with the page is one of privilege, of being taken into the author’s confidence. Through this, the reader is invited to enter Jon’s world on his terms, to accept his version of events and to empathise with his struggle. By contrast, in the real-time material-space world of the theatrical adaptation, the viewer is confronted with a hierarchy of discourses demanding simultaneous attention. Instead of a single controlling voice focusing our attention selectively on a few details at a time, everything is on show at once. In the theatre, one is expected to engage with Jon as an embodied character in relationship to technical elements of set, lighting, three-dimensional space and also to other characters, some of whom need to be manipulated by the actors. Instead of having a privileged relationship with a single author, the audience has to be convinced to accept the fundamental principle that the adaptation has to work in its own terms, as theatre requires the combined collaborative contributions of another writer and actors, of set and lighting designers, of the director and stage management, as well as the publicity department and front of house.
Performance as the defining characteristic

The medium-specificity of the stage adaptation is that of performance, the physical presence of actors, in real time, inhabiting space, embodying characters who have acquired quite distinctive appearances and who speak with distinctive voices. They may not look as one imagined them when reading the novel and even at this simple level, if the adaptation is to be accepted on its own terms, the audience’s reception must be re-programmed. Furthermore the characters have manifested as autonomous beings not bound by the page or the space. When they go off stage they do not cease to exist. In the novel Jon speculates on the motivations and behaviour of other characters. Whilst it theoretically would be possible for him to do so in a stage adaptation, his power of control is contested by the apparent autonomy of the other characters, speaking, moving, gesturing, entering and exiting at will, disconcertingly announcing themselves rather than being announced by Jon.

There is not time or space here to examine the La Boite production and performances in detail. What is significant is that the mingling of comedic genres and puppetry referred to above were determining factors in the aesthetic choices of the adaptation in the theatrical context. This key point alerts us to an aspect of the adaptation process which is overlooked by most if not all theorists, but which is a critical element of the medium-specificity of theatre: the processes of adaptation for performance are not completed with the writing of a draft script. The adaptation continues to be shaped and changed through the whole rehearsal process and may be refined further after opening night. For example, in writing the adaptation I imagined a high level of use of the puppets; however different choices were made in the script development workshops. The director made the decision that there would be minimal manipulation of the puppets, partly due to acting resources being too thinly stretched and partly due to the design aesthetic negotiated with the set designer. Different choices were suggested or made in the workshops and rehearsals with regard to narrative events, character and dialogue, and successive drafts were written to satisfy the evolving brief of the needs of the production.

At this level of analysis and experimentation in the rehearsal process, the adaptation raises its own questions unrelated to the source novel because they arise from
specific requirements of the medium and from aesthetic decisions made individually and collectively by the collaborating practitioners. Close analysis, interpretation and evaluation of the script and the performance within their theatrical context require no comparisons to the source text. Indeed, they demand to work effectively in their own medium. In turn, the theatre audience demands a satisfying experience. The theatre audience that has no prior knowledge of the source text evaluates the performance as medium-specific and based on whether it is a good play or not. For the pre-conditioned audience whose reception of the play is primarily coloured by the source text, their evaluation is often based on how closely the play came to meeting their expectations of a replay of what is in their heads, that is, how faithful it is to the novel. However, as Bluestone observed fifty years ago:

> Whenever a film [play] becomes a financial or even a critical success the question of “faithfulness” is given hardly any thought. If the film [play] succeeds on its own merits, it ceases to be problematic (Bluestone, 1957, p. 114)

Leaving open the question of how the success of a play or film is determined, implicit in the different levels of audience reception of the adaptation are medium-specific challenges for the practitioner, and it is to these that I now return.

7.1.4 Narrative Gaps

A precedent for absent characters

An opportunity for commentary exists at the heart of the narrative of *Perfect Skin* in the absence of Mel, who was Jon’s wife and Lily’s mother and who we eventually learn died in mysterious and traumatic circumstances. Despite the almost constant presence of baby Lily, her mother, Mel, is “absent” for much of the novel and consequently for much of the play. Throughout theatre history, absent characters have driven onstage action, from the famously absent fathers in Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, to the endless waiting for the non-appearance of Godot in Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* and Lefty in Odet’s *Waiting for Lefty*, to the absence of sons, either an elaborate fantasy as in Albee’s *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? or real but dead in Miller’s *All My Sons*. A more recent example is from Mamet’s 1984 play *Glengarry Glen Ross* in which the owners of the real estate agency never appear but the sales contest they contrive with its threat of unemployment propels the four salesmen into cut-throat competition with each other. Common to all of these dramas is that the absent characters’ names are invoked at the beginnings and ends of these plays, and
their absence receives explicit and frequent attention from other characters, reinforcing not only their absence in the minds of the audience but the existence of a causal link between their absence and the events unfolding on stage. By means of constant reminiscences, reminders, exhortations and blaming, a character’s absence becomes a pervasive and dramatically influential presence.

**Absence at the centre of Perfect Skin**

In Earls’ novel, Jon’s monologue controls our access to and perceptions of Mel. Apart from a couple of hints we do not learn of Mel’s death in childbirth until a third of the way into the novel in Chapter 8. Earls then devotes the eleventh chapter out of twenty-two to Mel’s back-story and in particular to Jon’s difficult relationship with her. Confessional in tone and shared in confidence with the reader, this passage enables Jon to rationalize his passivity and his unwillingness to discuss Mel’s death and its effect on him. Whilst it is possible to pause the forward progress of a novel in order to reveal to the reader what had happened before, such a slab of exposition almost halfway through a play would most likely alienate the audience. Jon “tells” us at length that the other characters have learned not to mention Mel due to his “prickliness”. In the theatre the audience expects to be “shown” this trait manifested in dialogue and action involving other characters. Such situations do not exist in the novel as Jon usually clams up or walks out of challenging situations. In the production the performers tried to accentuate the few moments of overt conflict between Jon and other characters. To pursue them to the suggested “prickly” ends would have meant contriving situations that would have altered the narrative and our attitude to Jon.

Stylistically in the novel, Jon’s conversations with other “living characters” are rendered as dialogue in “real time”, whilst we are only given his version of Mel as reportage of their life together. Unlike the play examples above, Mel’s absence is barely mentioned or referred to in the first third of the story, nor is her name invoked frequently thereafter; none of the other characters dares to mention her, and Jon only does so in monologue as he puzzles over his increasing infatuation with a younger woman, Ash. However, the dramatic climax of the narrative and Jon’s emotional breakthrough, which together lead to “closure”, require Mel’s “presence”. As Jon makes a mercy dash to hospital with the stricken Ash in the back of an ambulance, his mind flashes back to the night of Mel’s death, coincidentally also in the back of an
ambulance. As outlined in the plays above, to be dramatically effective a character’s absence is usually explicit and continually drives or influences the action. By comparison, it is only in retrospect or on reflection that Earls’ novel expects us to connect Mel’s absence with Jon’s unexpressed guilt at her death as the cause of Jon’s erratic behaviour which initiates a comic chain of events.

Inherent problems in dramatizing absent characters

A significant challenge of the adaptation was to decide how to give Mel’s absence the pervasive dramatic presence usually required by the theatre medium and explicated above. To dramatize Mel as a physical presence would have been problematic. The audience may long to see Mel on her own terms, acting autonomously like the other characters, particularly as Jon admits to her challenging him and his view of the world. However, given that we eventually learn that Mel and Jon did not get on, to contrive scenes between them and with other characters would have been to create quite a different narrative and a much more overt commentary on the novel and Jon’s failings as the central character. The question raised, not just by the limits of the commissioning brief but also by the ever-present existence of narrative gaps, is: “How does the writer negotiate the territory between disregarding the gap, which may cause more problems in one medium than in the other, and addressing it without creating a new narrative?”

My initial instinct in the stage adaptation was to let the audience know as early as possible that Mel had died in order to provoke the question in their minds as to the circumstances, particularly as no one was willing to talk about her or her death. Armed with this knowledge the audience would be in a position to consider Jon’s relationships with his friends in the context of Mel’s absence, providing a level of commentary on their complicity in not mentioning or talking about her particularly in the presence of a newcomer to the group in Ash. In the dramaturgical process of script development I was persuaded to delay explicit information about Mel’s death so that the audience’s experience of Jon and his friends was as though through Ash’s eyes. A few clues were planted in the play text and in awkward moments in actor behaviour. The rationale was that if Mel’s absence could remain a mystery for as long as possible it would add to the relatively slight dramatic tension that existed between Jon and his friends and particularly between Jon and Ash. It was argued that it was better for the audience to be
intrigued and puzzled by Jon’s behaviour as there was a concern that if the audience was informed it would sit back in judgement of Jon and his friends. Consequently news of Mel’s death was delayed until Jon tells Ash, without preparing her in any way, just before the interval break. In hindsight this was a mistake and nothing was gained from the delay, particularly as a significant proportion of the audience was familiar with the novel, and it even may have undermined the production. It is difficult enough for actors to create tension around an announced absence; but in the production of Perfect Skin the actors’ attempts to sustain an air of mystery about “the missing mother” produced the effect of the audience being left in either ignorance or confusion for too long, and of Jon seeming negligent or callous. I have canvassed other possible medium-specific options for dealing with Mel’s absence in Section 7.3.1 below on “order”.

7.1.5 Adaptation Proper
On McFarlane’s “need for commentary”

As McFarlane (2000) argues in his paper in Literature/Film Quarterly published in Welsh and Lev in 2007, the ideal adaptation is “on the one hand, bold and intelligent and on the other, determined to make something both connected to its precursor and new in itself” (2007, p. 9). In his assertion that “not to make major changes is impossible as the narrative moves from one medium to another: changes will inevitably be dictated by the strategies and techniques peculiar to each” (McFarlane, 2003, p. 113), McFarlane agrees with Cardwell that medium-specific demands have serious implications for the approach to the adaptation. While Cardwell argues that consideration of generic, authorial and medium-specific contexts promote new readings or re-program both the practitioner’s and the audience’s reception, McFarlane goes on to claim that if the adaptation practitioner “has nothing new to say about a novel, it may be best to leave it alone” (McFarlane, 2003, p. 113). As evinced by the examples cited from McFarlane above in the Contextual Review (p. 44), even apparently “faithful” film adaptations of Howard’s End and Daisy Miller can offer “a kind of commentary on its great antecedent” (McFarlane, 2007, p. 8).

In retrospect one could conclude that in the case of Perfect Skin the adaptation may have benefited by the commentary being made more overtly than merely employing genre devices such as puppetry. However, with the producing company invoking the aura of the marquee writer to market the theatre production, the
commissioning brief did not allow these. This raises for the adapting writer the common ethical dilemma of how to negotiate amongst a number of different stakeholders: the original author who expects to be lauded rather than critiqued; his or her dedicated fans who expect the replication of a favourite novel; the producing company that wants to sell as many tickets as possible; and the collaborating artists who want to create something new. The adaptation must also satisfy that part of the audience that has no knowledge of the existing text. In the examples above McFarlane has the luxury of limiting his analysis to classic novels whose authors are literally dead. In referring to adapting more contemporary novels, plays, and even other films McFarlane evokes “cinema’s passion for narrative shape” as an argument for the “liberties of selection and compression” that flow on from the changes wrought by transfer from one medium to another (McFarlane, 2003, p. 119). However, he omits mentioning that while the creator of an existing contemporary work maintains moral rights in the work the often exorbitant sums of money that purchase the film rights almost exclusively bestow droit de seigneur rights of usage on the producer to alter it as he or she sees fit. A play adaptation that is a commentary on a recognizably great antecedent novel might provoke academic argument but any unauthorised commentary on a contemporary work is more likely to attract a lawsuit from a living author exercising his or her legal rights. These legal rights, constraints and expectations are usually made explicit in Licensing Agreements and Commissioning Briefs (dealt with below in Section 7.2.1) and are an important aspect of adaptation practice ignored by most theorists.

7.2 The Practice of Adapting Perfect Skin

Theatre making in general and adaptation in particular involve hundreds if not thousands of choices through the writing of a number of drafts, to choice of director and designers, casting performers, aspects of character determined in rehearsal along with line readings, spatial relationships on stage, entrances and exits, the use of props and so on. On the page, words in a novel and also in a script have a virtual, symbolic meaning. The specific choices of a theatrical production of an adaptation actualize the virtual, textually constructed world of the novel through the materiality of set objects located in space and the presence of embodied performers. We not only hear words spoken in dialogue but also are able to discern accents and changes of inflection. Simultaneously we are aware of facial expressions, looks, physical gestures and movement in space, all of which combine to alter the apparent meaning of the words. Furthermore, each and
every one of these performance elements is the product of a deliberate choice and a change in any one of them is capable of modifying the meaning. The question for the practitioner is: “What principles determine the making of appropriate or relevant choices when adapting a source text?” In the final section of his Introduction to *Theory and Practice of Adaptation*, Stam (2005) “gestures towards an analytical/practical model for addressing actual adaptations” (p. 32) that serves as a convenient template for the practitioner. It is to a systematic consideration of his model that I now turn with specific reference to the adaptation of *Perfect Skin*.

### 7.2.1 The Commissioning Brief

The first principle that guides the processes of adaptation, which is overlooked by adaptation theorists but is of essential importance to the practitioner, is the commissioning brief. The limitations imposed by La Boite have been discussed in detail in Section 5.1.1 above (p. 60). In general these limitations are arrived at by considerations of the context for the adaptation’s reception and the understanding that the producing company has with the author of the source text. In the theatre, many adaptations are of bestselling novels and producers are seeking to take advantage of the commercial success and the accompanying cachet of the marquee author. Often these selections are also studied at high school ensuring a readymade audience. When these circumstances determine the choice of source text, the producers feel compelled to be “faithful” to the novel and to the interests of this captive audience rather than the discourse/spirit of the source text. They usually have a contractual agreement or memorandum of understanding with the author of the novel which may also limit the approach to the source text as few bestselling authors are going to sign up for a public deconstruction of a specific work and/or their brand. In film, authors assign this right to the producer usually in exchange for considerable monetary reward. In the theatre, however, the author of the source text often maintains control and shares box office royalties with the adapting writer. The author has legal, moral and copy rights vested in the source text and it is usually in his or her interest to control and protect them. It is not the purpose of this study to examine the effectiveness of these rights or their standing at law but to accept them as a given circumstance and the usual first point of negotiation for the adapting writer.
As outlined in Section 5.1.1 (p. 60) above, La Boite had established a successful Nick Earls franchise and sought to re-invigorate it by engaging a different writer for the adaptation of *Perfect Skin* rather than changing their approach. La Boite Theatre Company’s agreement with Nick Earls was that the adaptation should follow the plot and story of the novel; that an informed audience attending a performance of the play could reasonably expect to recognize a close transposition (to invoke Wagner’s terminology) of the source text. To continue with Wagner’s (1975) classification system, the agreement excluded the possibility of the adaptation being a critique of or commentary on the source text or of using it as an analogy, the starting point only of a new work. The commissioning brief was founded on these agreed upon constraints and limitations: that as the story of the novel would not be changed Nick Earls did not expect to be consulted or to oversee or influence the adaptation, nor would he take any active interest in the production until he came to see a dress rehearsal performance. As the commissioning brief was offered as a “take it or leave it” proposition, it could be seen to be disempowering the adapting writer. By accepting these conditions, the adapting writer has an ethical and contractual (hence legal) responsibility to the author, the source, the producer and the interested audience to deliver on this undertaking. This imposes restrictions on another guiding principle, “order” of scenes, discussed below.

McFarlane’s assertion that all adaptations must be commentaries to succeed in their own terms raises the question: “How overt can the commentary be without doing extreme violence to the source or the interested audience?” The play script adaptation of *Perfect Skin* is substantially a close transposition of the novel. However, in the workshops and increasingly in rehearsals, the actors felt constrained by the adaptation and expressed their frustration at not being able to provide a commentary on what they perceived to be an underlying ideology of Earls’ successful novels. They argued that Jon was typical of Earls’ central male characters who parade their emotional ineptitude, passivity and existential suffering by way of a series of comic turns and end up getting the girl almost by default without having to assume responsibility or actually having to do or feel anything. A sense of “outrage” so pervaded rehearsals, that at the instigation of the artistic director who commissioned the adaptation, a scene was changed just before the climax of the play. Katie, who inadvertently became the butt of cruel jokes triggered by Jon’s emotional paralysis, was given added lines of dialogue. She tells Jon in front of his friends that he is a coward and that she feels betrayed and hurt by him.
This was not done simply to satisfy the urge for some overt commentary, but also to satisfy the demands of the narrative arc in the theatre. Before Jon experiences the emotional growth that he undergoes in the turmoil of the climax of the play, it was felt that he needed to be revealed to himself by another character, Katie, the only character in the novel and play who takes an emotional risk. Earls was not consulted about this minor addition before he attended a performance and he made no comment about it being in the production.

**Negotiating for flexibility of approach to adaptation**

With the benefit of hindsight gained in practice, the answer to the questions raised by McFarlane above is that there is no fixed rule. In principle, each adaptation is a case for negotiation between the adapting writer, the producer and the author of the source text. The important point for consideration is to allow for flexibility of approach so that the adaptation is able to satisfy the demands of the theatrical medium. If adaptation is not to be perceived as an impoverished mode of theatre making, and if it is to attract new audiences willing to accept the adaptation on its own terms, some latitude needs to be granted to the adapting writer. What degree of latitude is a matter for negotiation, requiring the cooperation of the author of the source text and his or her acceptance that there is often a need for the adaptation to argue with the source text rather than simply to replicate it, if the discourse of the original text is to survive in the new medium.

If a more nuanced negotiation had been possible at the commissioning stage of the adaptation of *Perfect Skin*, it may have allowed for a level of commentary that addressed the issues perceived as surrounding Earls’ central male characters and Mel’s absence without extreme violence to the source or creating a different narrative. By maintaining the integrity of the source text as well as enabling the adaptation to announce itself on its own terms, La Boite might have avoided the stricture that their “faithful” adaptations had become, and possibly have achieved their aim of re-invigorating its Earls franchise by attracting the new audience it sought. *Perfect Skin* was successful in terms of box office takings but unlike earlier adaptations in the franchise, the season was not extended and there was no interest in the production touring.
7.3 The Mechanics of Narrative

Many of the contemporary adaptation theorists including Hutcheon and Stam advocate taking a narratological approach to analysis of how the story is modified in practice by extrapolating three of Genette’s principal categories for dealing with time in the novel: order, duration and frequency. Two other major considerations in any analysis of the mechanics of narrative for the practitioner of adaptation are how to account for a novel’s “narrator” in the theatre, and the associated concept of “point of view”.

7.3.1 Order

As defined briefly in the Contextual Review (p. 42) “order” refers to the sequence of events, or the plot, which make up a story. The plot may arrange the events chronologically in a linear fashion from beginning to end, or it may jump back and forth in time, adopting a non-linear structure. In the plot of Perfect Skin Earls uses all the devices and strategies identified by the Russian Formalists to delay and interrupt Jon’s narration of events such as extended descriptions, reflections, word games, digressions, even poetry and recipes. In the theatre it is usually Aristotle’s three-act structure that determines the plotting of the action of a story so that it has a dramatic trajectory. Because a story told through drama unfolds in a real time space, the need for it to progress does not usually allow for discursive literary devices, which often have the effect of pausing the action. [I discuss this further in the following section on “duration”.] This does not mean that the plot of a play needs to be chronological or linear to fit the paradigmatic constraints of Aristotelian dramatic structure.

Back-story

The starting point of a plot usually casts us into the middle of a story. Important events that occurred prior to those chosen as the basis of the plot are introduced strategically at various stages of the narration. Most commonly writers in all media use “flashbacks” in one form or another. These usually manifest as retrospective narration of earlier events or the re-enactment of past events in a “seeming present”, in order to provide a context for events in the present as well as serving to disrupt the ongoing linear narrative. This is also referred to as the “back-story” and provides a subtext for the dramatic action of a play or film. Only occasionally does a writer use what might be
called “flashforwards” though it has become a characteristic “teaser” in the films of Tony Gilroy who wrote and directed *Michael Clayton* (2007).

The adaptation practitioner has the source text of the novel to regard as *fabula*, the raw materials to be ordered according to the specific requirements of the new medium and the dictates of the Commissioning Brief. The brief for *Perfect Skin* specified that the order of events in the adaptation would mirror the order of events in the novel. It is important to acknowledge that it is not possible to repeat every event of the novel in the play adaptation, and that the choices made to create the new order constitute a form of violence on the source text as well as provide a level of commentary. However, the significant challenge was how to deal with Mel’s absence and reveal her back-story. For ten chapters of the novel Mel barely rates a mention and it is as though her absence can no longer be constrained and she bursts forth into the narrative. Chapter 11 is Mel’s back-story reluctantly remembered by Jon as he charts his equivocal and difficult relationship with her. It is delivered in summary rather than as scenes in real time with dialogue, the prevailing form of much of the novel. As argued above in the section on “Narrative Gaps”, stopping the play to fill the audience in on the Mel/Jon back-story was not an option and other solutions had to be found. Like the readers of the novel, once the audience of the adaptation learned of Mel’s death they were able to glean further knowledge about her in the context of Jon’s speculations on when he would pluck up the courage to tell Ash about Mel. In the adaptation these speculations were the basis of links between scenes, narrated by the actor playing Jon in direct address to the audience.

**Summary**

If it had been possible to negotiate making Mel’s absence more present and pervasive it would have been important to consider how the events of her life and relationship with Jon might affect the plot of the adaptation. In Chapter 11 of the novel the forward progression of the narrative is paused while Jon catches the reader up with his and Mel’s back-story. It is as though Earls realised the mystery of Mel’s absence could not be sustained any longer and he needed to let his readers know about her before the story was able to progress. As articulated earlier, such a large amount of expository detail delivered in a monologue not only holds up the real-time action, it often has a frustrating and alienating effect on the audience. Medium-specific strategies
could be to intersperse episodes of the Jon/Mel relationship throughout the adaptation, either in the form of Jon’s direct address to the audience, or by creating flashback scenes between Jon and Mel. Either approach may have allowed for an increase in dramatic tension as Jon’s and Mel’s relationship was based on conflict, and introducing episodes at various stages in the plot would have provided a different context for the events of the main Jon/Ash love story. Dramatic stakes would be raised if Jon had a real antagonist in scenes with Mel, as well as the reflection on personal dilemmas that currently drive the narrative but keep Jon in stasis: whether Ash is too young for him, when will he tell her about Mel, and what will he do about Katie? Furthermore, it would enable the audience to judge whether Jon’s behaviour with Ash, Katie and his friends is as a consequence of Mel’s death or it is his *modus operandi*. Whilst employing such strategies may constitute a violation of the novel (which does not ask the reader to reflect on its central character in this manner) perhaps it would have allowed the adaptation of the story to work more effectively in the new theatrical medium.

7.3.2 Duration

“Duration” is defined briefly in the Contextual Review (p. 43) as the pace of the narration, the time it takes to tell the story in different media (discourse time) relative to the time it would take to “really” happen. The story time of *Perfect Skin* is about three and half weeks, while the discourse time of the novel is approximately ten hours and of the play, two hours. For example, the sequence when Jon pisses on Katie’s cat takes Earls three pages of the novel to describe in hilarious detail. By comparison, the play script contains six lines of monologue and a brief description of the event, which the actors turned into a physical comedy routine involving a chase in a toilet sized space and lasting for a little more than a minute. Stage time within scenes is usually significantly faster and closer to real time than in the novel in terms of density of incident and the pace of the action. Importantly, there is little point in trying to sustain action for longer than it takes to establish the next link in the story as audience interest will begin to wane.

**Dialogue as dramatic action – not conversation**

Another example of different paces of the narrative in different media is in the bantering exchanges between Jon and George that define how they relate to each other. Film, music, the value of exercise and dating etiquette are just a few of the topics of
conversation they engage in to avoid direct discussion of any personal issues, such as Mel’s death, how Jon is coping, or Katie’s interest in starting a relationship. In the novel their verbal jousting goes on for pages at a time and the action slows, almost on pause for their verbal comedy routine. Whilst the reader may indulge Jon’s and George’s banter about “middle aged dating” for eight pages, on stage this exchange does not sustain for more than two or three minutes. Regardless of the fun and cleverness of the exchanges, the audience wants to get to the point of the jokes, to the underlying personal issue that will prompt Jon’s next dramatic action. In the adaptation the duration of these exchanges had to be edited down to speed up the storytelling.

In the theatre the sense of pace of the narrative depends on exposition and new information being conveyed efficiently through physical action and dialogue that expresses the motivated needs of the characters. If there is insufficient dramatic action or conflict a play may still seem too slow despite progressing faster than the novel. One of the first lessons playwrights learn is that dialogue is dramatic action not conversation; dialogue is a strategy a character uses to get what they want. In a novel a character’s feelings may run deep and their thoughts range far; yet in the theatre telling us so does not suffice. We can empathise with Jon’s grief and guilt about Mel and his confused feelings for Ash but we want him to do something about these feelings, not just reflect on them and allow events to run their course.

**Relative speed of narration to action**

Stam cites Genette’s contention that most narratives establish a relatively constant speed or norm against which other passages might be deemed fast or slow. Maximum speed is achieved by skipping over events. In the novel for example, Jon is driving the streets with a sleepless, teething Lily when he happens upon fire-trucks at Ash’s burning house. Jon has to convince the firemen someone actually lives there and makes several futile attempts to break down the door himself before she is rescued. In the play adaptation, no sooner does he mention going for a drive than he is at the scene of the fire calling Ash’s name and she is being wheeled out on an ambulance trolley. Minimum speed is observed when a story is suspended or paused for extended descriptive passages, for moments or minutes of reflection, or as in the conversational examples referred to above. What may seem momentous in a novel and given weight by extended examination can seem fleeting and less significant on stage. Examples of this
are the two or three times when Jon and Ash almost kiss but don’t and the opportunity passes. Each time in the novel Jon deconstructs the moment at length afterwards, marveling at the unexpected possibility or castigating himself for his ineptitude. On stage each moment was held briefly, remarked upon briefly by Jon in his direct address to the audience, and the play moved on.

7.3.3 Frequency

“Frequency” is briefly defined above in the Contextual Review (p. 43) as referring to the number of times an event occurs in a story compared to how many times it is mentioned or revisited in the textual discourse. Stam (2005) cites Genette as discriminating amongst three variants: “‘singulative narration’ (a single event is told a single time); ‘repetitive narration’ (an event is recounted many times); ‘iterative narration’ (an event which occurs many times is told once)” (p. 33). An event occurring once and being narrated once is the most common form of narration across all media. Stam (2005) extrapolates from Genette’s variants to “homologous narration” where an event occurring many times is narrated many times; and “cumulative narration” (p. 33), a combination of singulative and repetitive narration. An example of the latter occurs when a single event such as Mel’s death is revisited a number of times in the course of the narrative and gradually fleshed out in detail, whereupon its impact on the characters and on us is fully understood.

Earls deploys most of these narrative strategies in his writing, extracting the comedy from an event such as Jon pissing on the cat through revisiting it several times, first with Katie’s sister Wendy, a few times as passing jibes from George, and later with Ash. Earls also makes strategic use of what might be called the comic writer’s variation of Stam’s homologous narration in “the rule of three”: that is, set up, complication and pay off. For example, Jon has three dates with Katie, each one more disastrous than the previous; and three episodes with Flag, her cat. First he pisses on it, then almost kills it and finally the cat gets revenge by hooking a claw in Jon’s penis at a party. Furthermore, Earls uses the cumulative effect of gradual revelation of the circumstances surrounding Mel’s death to achieve closure in the narrative. In the ambulance with Ash, Jon is pushed to a point of crisis in remembering Mel’s death, and in the hospital his admission of the part he played in it brings Jon and Ash together at the novel’s resolution.
An analysis of repetitions and patterns of events in the source text allows the writer of the adaptation to consider how they might be deployed strategically to provide structure to the overall narrative of the adaptation. For example, as articulated earlier in Section 5.1.2 (p. 66) on Finding the Conflict, the Jon/Katie/Flag subplot has a much more clearly defined and developed dramatic conflict than the Jon/Ash main plot with a clear beginning, middle and end. Following Linda Seger’s (1989) advice in *Making a Good Script Great*, the adaptation uses the inherently dramatic scenes of the Jon/Katie dating disasters to provide nodal points and the under-pinning architecture for the much less dramatic Jon/Ash love story.

### 7.3.4 Adapting the Narrator

It is not the purpose of this study to traverse the extensive critical discourse that exists on the wide range of narrators and story-telling strategies that have developed in the novel through history. Nor is it useful to consider the grammar-based terminology of first person or third person (commonly used in theatre discourse) and varying degrees of omniscience and participation. Stam (2005) asserts that what is more important is “authorial control of intimacy and distance” and “the calibration of access to characters’ knowledge and consciousness” (p. 35). To re-iterate a point made earlier in citing Stam and Hutcheon in the Contextual Review (p. 43) adapting literary narration to drama-based media such as film and theatre employs a combination of “telling” and “showing” forms of narration. In theatre the telling most commonly uses dialogue between characters but may include voice-over or direct address to the audience. The time-space materiality of the stage and setting show us the characters situated within their fictional world. Theatre both tells and stages or enacts stories.

Citing Gaudreault, Stam (2005) asserts that a complication, whether there is an actual character who is the narrator of the story or not, is that at one level the film itself [or the play] in its realization and reception can be “read” as a de facto narrator controlling what the audience can see or know by showing “the world and its appearances apart from voice-over and character narration” (p. 35). This level of narration has implications for the narrator voice in the novel when it is adapted to a different medium, particularly for the “auto-diegetic narrator”, to use Genette’s terminology. Jon in *Perfect Skin* is an auto-diegetic narrator, the initiator and teller of
his own story within which he is the protagonist. In the novel Earls wants us to empathise with Jon and his point of view of the world; and even whilst acknowledging that the narrational voice in his head becomes the reading voice in our heads we are still able to determine for ourselves whether to like or dislike him, to find him funny, smart, foolish, brave, fair, reliable or not.

The challenge in adapting the narrator as a character in the theatre is that he becomes “severely relativised” (Stam, 2005, p. 38). Moved from the novel to the time-space materiality of the stage it is as though Jon has been cast into a “hostile environment where … [he can] exercise less power and agency over the narration” (Stam, 2005, p. 35). Because the actor playing Jon addresses the audience directly we are invited to presume that the scenes that follow are a visual manifestation of his speech as they are filled with the physical presence of other characters and voices, lights and set items, all of which vie for our attention by moving about on the stage. In the novel Jon speculates on the motivations and behaviour of other characters. Whilst it would be possible theoretically for him to do so in a stage adaptation, his power of control is contested by the apparent autonomy of other characters, speaking, moving, gesturing, entering and exiting at will. Jon is still undoubtedly the main protagonist and the expectation is that we will empathise with his story from his point of view; furthermore, that it is his point of view that has determined the selection and order of events that shape his story. However, now we are able to see him contextualized in a time-space environment that is not directly under his control as is the page-space of the novel.

7.3.5 **Point of View**

As cited earlier in the Contextual Review (p. 44) Stam argues that the commonly used term “point of view” is ambiguous and problematic as every contributing element from the writers to actors to sound-scape designers can assume a narrational point of view. The director’s task is to focus these elements in a manner that best serves the storytelling. Stam’s solution is to adopt Genette’s concept of “focalization” to discriminate between the narrator and how much he or she sees and knows:

“Zero focalization” occurs with omniscient narrators, those who know much more than any of the characters. “Internal focalization” refers to the filtering of events through a character …That concept is usually further subdivided into “fixed” (when limited to a single character) or “variable” when passed from character to character…. “External focalization”, finally, occurs when the
reader is denied access to point of view and motivations, and restricted instead to merely observing external behavior. (Stam, 2005, pp. 40 – 41)

Challenging the narrator’s authority

Applying Stam’s schema to the novel *Perfect Skin* Jon’s narration is “fixed internal focalization”. Essentially this approach was translated to the play adaptation. Jon talks directly to the audience, commenting on scenes or other characters, revealing his state of mind and telling them parts of the story that will not be shown such as his relationship with Mel. Jon’s narration was used as transitional links between scenes. In the novel the reader is taken into Jon’s confidence and experiences events as he experiences them, what he sees, feels, and hears. Even though there are scenes of dialogue in the novel the overall effect is of what Derrida termed “logocentricism” and Bakhtin referred to as monologic authority, of there being only one truth, Jon’s (or the author’s), and of the other voices being strictly subordinated to the author’s (or Jon’s) controlling purpose. In the theatre the audience has the similar privilege of hearing Jon’s narrated thought processes and feelings. However, it also has a real time-space context in which to witness Jon’s involvement in events and his relationship to other characters. To apply Foucault’s notion that power is gained through discourse, Jon’s power is relative to the power he has over the respective discourses: he has more power in the novel and less power and is more compromised in the theatre.

Bakhtin was amongst the first literary theorists to assert that context determines the meaning of utterances, that even if only one person is speaking, social interaction or dialogue is always implied and a “multiplicity of voices and their individual expressions” come into play (as cited by Seldon and Widdowson, 1993, p. 39). A single voice, such as Jon’s in the novel, “may give the impression of unity and closure” (Seldon and Widdowson, 1993, p. 39) but his utterance, particularly his references to events and other characters is “constantly producing a plenitude of meanings which stem from social interaction (dialogue)” (Seldon and Widdowson, 1993, p. 39). In the theatre, the audience is invited to assume that it is Jon’s narration that initially generates and then liberates alternative voices that become uncontrollable, and monologue becomes impossible.
Confronted with the one-person play in the form of the extended monologue, context of the utterance is a primary consideration for the writer, the performer and the audience. “Who am I talking to and why?” “Where am I and if I am talking to the audience, who are they meant to be?” Or to invoke Derrida, the actor might ask: “Why am I present speaking my soul?” This is no less problematic for the narrator character such as Jon who is sharing his story with the audience. By turns, he talks directly to the audience, taking them into his confidence and then he appears in scenes with other “liberated” characters who disrupt his apparent authority, which then allows the audience to draw their own conclusions as to his culpability in events. As discussed earlier, if Jon’s deeds do not fit his words, he may appear to the theatre audience to be unreliable or untrustworthy.

The casting dilemma

A critical element in this matter is the actor playing the role of the narrator. The inherent challenge in the stage production of the adaptation is in casting the actors, and in particular in casting the actor who, as the narrator, is the conduit or mediator between the audience and the performance. Much of the loss that audiences familiar with the source text feel can be attributed to the fact that the actors cast in the play often do not resemble the characters imagined on reading the novel. However, of primary importance in the novel is that the tone of voice be established in the writing. On stage it is determined by the presence of the actor and his or her ability to create the right tone in the utterance of their speech and their general demeanour. In the novel Jon is charming and funny and smart, qualities that draw the reader in, despite his ineptness, confusion and passivity. Finally he allows himself to be vulnerable, for the protective carapace he has built around himself to crack open and he admits love and to loving. However, if the actor playing Jon lacked charm or charisma, seemed awkward in the role and struggled to establish contact with the audience, and found it difficult to be vulnerable, the effect is likely to be of alienation. Rather than invoking empathy it would allow the audience to sit back in judgement of the character and of the adaptation itself.

External focalization

To return briefly to Genette’s “external focalization” as defined by Stam above, it is interesting to speculate on the effectiveness of this approach to an adaptation of
Perfect Skin. This would entail eliminating entirely Jon’s first-person reflexive narration in the linking monologues and restricting the audience to merely observing his behaviour. This is the most common approach taken in film adaptations of first-person novels as narrators are generally considered to be ineffective, an actual hindrance or bad story-telling practice in the screen medium. Theatre allows more for the verbal expression of interiority and with appropriate casting narrators can facilitate the audience’s engagement with the performance. However, had the approach been taken to have no narration and no monologues, the adaptation at all levels would have been forced more seriously to consider and deploy other medium-specific strategies to re-interpret and re-tell the story. It most likely would have been essential to create and interpolate scenes of the Jon/Mel relationship into the existing narrative if the audience was to have a context within which to observe and understand Jon’s seemingly erratic behaviour.

Summary

This analysis of both my practice and of the production of the adaptation of Perfect Skin provides some “obvious” theoretical strategies for what is a complex transformational process, and a practical suite of tools for approaching the adaptation of Red Cap and other adaptations in general.

Consideration of the specific requirements of the theatrical medium best provides an overarching set of guidelines for the practice of adaptation. As articulated above, the first guiding principle is the negotiation with the producer and the author of the source text of a commissioning brief that provides for a flexibility of approach. Accepting that “the creation and reception of adaptations are inevitably … intertwined” (Hutcheon, 2006, p. 114), meeting audience expectations that the same narrative is relayed in a different medium need not delimit medium-specific demands also being satisfied. A more nuanced agreement would allow for consideration of the implications for performance of the genre shift; narrative gaps could be identified and addressed by deployment of some medium-specific remedy; and it may encourage the producing body to take a more balanced approach to marketing the adaptation in its own context rather than in the shadow of the marquee author of the source.
Practical choices about what events and characters to alter, eliminate, condense or expand can be informed by a theoretical understanding of the interplay and interdependence of order, duration and frequency, and by evaluating the effect of different approaches to dealing with the narrator voice and point of view in different media. Useful questions might include: Is this event essential to the story and is it narrated in the appropriate place in the order of scenes? What is the most efficient and dramatically effective way to tell or show what happens? How long can this action be sustained? How many times does the audience need to get this information, in how many different ways? From whose point of view is the story primarily being told and is the presence of a narrator essential? These are the (medium-specific) questions one might generally ask in the practice of playwrighting. To adapt Kranz’s dictum to the theatre: “a play adaptation is both a play per se and the legacy of a literary source, among other influences” (Kranz, 2007, p. 85).

This solution - to first write a good play - is conceptually so simple and obvious that it is surprising that it is so often overlooked by practitioners and ignored by producing bodies in the misplaced objective that adaptation is primarily an act of obeisance to fidelity to the source text. However, as for all good playwrighting it demands intellectual rigor and flexibility in approach, and a willingness to interrogate and reinvigorate one’s practice – often by not ignoring the obvious and by making conscious once again processes that have become habitual.

7.4 Second Take

It is useful in conclusion to reflect on what I would do differently if I had the opportunity to adapt *Perfect Skin* again, and apply what I learned in the process of the adaptation. In the first instance I would try to negotiate a commissioning brief that allowed for a more flexible approach so that medium-specific solutions could be applied to any inherent (and unforeseen) problems that might arise in the process of the adaptation. I would let the audience know as early in the play as possible that Mel is dead so that the underlying context for Jon’s behaviour is revealed. Mel’s death is hinted at in Scene Two at the office meeting and could easily be made explicit once Jon has gone; and Jon could make earlier reference to her in his direct address to the audience.
Having personally found Jon’s narrated links between scenes to be unsatisfactory, not only in their execution because of casting difficulties but also in the writing, I would want to experiment with no narration, requiring the audience to observe what was shown rather than being told. This would have implications for how to treat Mel’s absence. My initial instinctive response was and remains that some Mel/Jon scenes would need to be interpolated into the existing narrative structure of the play adaptation. This presupposes approval being granted by Nick Earls and La Boite Theatre Company. It would require either employing another actor or eliminating Oscar as a character and charting the consequences for the adaptation in consideration of order, duration and frequency. It would necessitate a slightly different selection of events and Oscar’s extravagant poetry slam sequence would be lost. However, the gains would be that the actor playing Mel would at times be the puppeteer of Mel’s baby, a relationship that could be enhanced in production; and while there was a “knowing” comic connection in having the same actor playing sisters Katie and Wendy, there may be an extra frisson in the actor playing Mel doubling as the amorous Katie, and Ash’s rival for Jon’s affections. The actor playing George would then have to be the puppeteer of the cat putting him in the middle of the action between Jon and Katie which could have added comic benefits.

What is evident from these speculations is how a relatively simple change in approach can have major implications for the writing and production of the adaptation. If Earls’ novel *Perfect Skin* had been adapted in the manner outlined above there is no doubt that the audience’s reception of it would be quite different from the existing play adaptation. Significantly, though the narrative itself remains essentially the same, the reception of the story, its themes and characters would be re-programmed according to the choices made to facilitate the move from one medium to another. This is true for the adaptation of fiction for the theatre and as we shall discover it also applies to the adaptation of factual or historical materials for stage production.
8. PREPARATIONS FOR PROJECT 2: Red Cap

By way of introduction to the script of the adaptation of Red Cap I briefly outline the writing process using Smiley’s eight-step model for playwrighting, discussed above in Section 3.6 (p. 52). I also make reference to the adaptation practice framework developed in the writing, production and analysis of the adaptation of Perfect Skin. Smiley’s model provides a structured and practical methodology as well as giving a context for the creation of the work. Points of difference between writing the adaptations of Perfect Skin and Red Cap are identified here; but a more complete analysis of my practice, the processes used and the efficacy of the analytical and practical framework for adaptation developed before, during and after Project 1 follows the script of the adaptation of Red Cap in Chapter 10.

8.1 Methodology of Practice

As articulated in “Introduction to the Adaptation of Perfect Skin” in Section 5.1 (p. 63) the methodology of practice in writing an original work and in writing an adaptation can involve using largely identical processes and practical tools. Whereas using a novel as the source materials led to adapting Smiley’s model for Project 1 (see p. 64 above), the disparate factual and anecdotal materials used as the source for Red Cap meant that Smiley’s suggested model could be followed through the following eight stages:

(1) Creative Compulsion
(2) Germinal Idea
(3) Collecting Materials
(4) Thinking Through
(5) Rough Scenario
(6) Final Scenario
(7) Drafting
(8) Revision

8.1.1 Creative Compulsion

Smiley (2000) discriminates between “a feeling, a need … to create” (p. 21) and merely an interesting idea by defining the compulsion as involving a significant moment of change in a character or situation. Smiley asserts it is awareness of a particular moment of change that provides the necessary stimulus or provocation for the playwright. In my own case, I first became aware of Pat Mackie (the eponymous Red
Cap) and the industrial dispute at Mount Isa Mines (MIM) while still at school in 1964. I was intrigued by what Mackie had done to be so vilified in the newspapers and on television for months on end. I wondered what events were occurring in a remote mining town that were also impacting on the rest of Australia. In 1989 when Pat Mackie published his account of the dispute I added the cutting of the newspaper article about his book to my file of “future projects”. On being offered a commission for the Queensland Music Festival of 2007 to be presented in Mt Isa, I pitched Mackie’s story as the subject matter. It was only then that the “compulsion” manifested to write a music theatre work.

A significant point of difference (from the Perfect Skin project) even at this embryonic stage is that the “creative compulsion” for Red Cap came from my adolescent interest in a news story; whereas the compulsion to explore the characters and issues in the novel Perfect Skin came from Nick Earls; and the compulsion to adapt the novel for stage production came from La Boite Theatre Company.

8.1.2 Germinal Idea

Smiley’s metaphor is of “an acorn … that holds the complicated possibilities for life [and] contains the potential for dramatic action … of change” (Smiley, 2000, pp. 24-25). Although the original commission was proffered in October 2005 it was not finally negotiated until September 2006. The “commissioning brief” developed and changed over this time as circumstances surrounding the project changed. A more detailed description of this negotiation is discussed below in the analysis of Red Cap that follows the script.

The composer Iain Grandage was assigned to the project in 2006 and initial discussions of the work were of it being in the form of popular, folk-opera or of an oratorio with 3 or 4 principal singer/actors supported by community choirs. Even at this germinal stage the range of formal possibilities and medium-specific requirements of theatre informed discussions of this work rather than the need to replicate historical events in documentary form. In Casetti’s terms, the move from one medium to another entails reprogramming the reception of the story of the dispute and of the character of Pat Mackie. Choices were made to signal clearly to the audience that the change of medium both needed and allowed for a different approach to the material; that the move
from historical fact to drama involved a significant change in generic context and made available a wide range of performance devices from which to choose. Analyses of generic context and of the implications of these choices as influenced by the demands of medium-specificity are discussed in much greater detail in the analysis that follows the script.

In reading about the dispute and Pat Mackie, it soon became apparent and intriguing that although Mackie was absolutely central to the dispute he remained an ephemeral character with a dubious reputation and many aliases. He is largely absent from his own account of the dispute, a day by day historical account of events written in conjunction with Elizabeth Vassilieff. Elsewhere he emerges as enigmatic, difficult to grasp, slippery, if not quite a villain then at best an anti-hero, all of which are fitting descriptions of a man who had a successful career as a professional wrestler before going to Mt Isa.

The germinal idea for the project that emerged from this initial reading was that no one really knew Mackie, who he was or why he did what he did. Though the workers lost the dispute and Mackie left town, they eventually won the majority of the concessions and conditions they had been fighting for. Mackie was both the galvanising force for the workers and the lightning rod for the vitriol and contempt of politicians, union representatives and right-wing commentators, but he was not a hero. Unlike Jon’s role as the auto-diegetic narrator in Perfect Skin it seemed more appropriate that there should not be one character called Pat Mackie played by one actor but many versions of Mackie who would be played by each of the actors at some time. It would be as though Pat Mackie could only be created from what people remembered about him long after he had gone; that the story of the dispute could only be told by those who remained after the event, told by those who had benefited from the changes they had collectively wrought and by those who had been wounded, destroyed or still felt betrayed by Mackie after forty years. Even at this early stage consideration was being given to medium-specific possibilities for dealing with the “narrator voice” and “point of view”.

8.1.3 Collecting Materials

Wary of divisions that still existed in the Mt Isa community, the Mt Isa City Council delayed making a commitment to the project until August 2006. The production
was scheduled to premiere in Mt Isa on the 12th July 2007. Little time now remained to complete the research and write the play particularly as the music could not be composed until the script had been written. To facilitate this process the co-producers La Boite Theatre Company and the Queensland Music Festival agreed to hire the services of a professional researcher. Karin Mayer undertook locating all available original documents in union and State Library archives, and copies of photographs and newspaper articles. Karin also conducted and recorded interviews with a number of ex-union officials who had participated in the dispute.

While the research documents were being gathered I continued collecting my own materials, reading historical and fictional accounts of the dispute. I travelled to Sydney to interview Pat Mackie and his partner Elizabeth Vassilieff. Unable to recall the dispute in any detail they referred me to the book they had co-written that I had already read. I also visited Mt Isa and noted conversations with people who had been there at the time of the dispute, either actively involved or as observers. This activity stimulated ideas, thoughts, character observation, and sketches for songs, a process continued with reading the research materials that Karin Mayer had been able to gather. The research material was also used in a powerful and moving art gallery installation that accompanied the production in Brisbane.

A relevant observation at this juncture is that the source material for the adaptation of *Perfect Skin* is a single pre-existing text that has a single owner, Nick Earls. By contrast, gathering the source materials for the adaptation of *Red Cap* identified a number of different parties who might claim ownership, either of their part of the story or of particular documented accounts from published books and newspapers to newsletters, flyers, summaries and meeting notes in union archives. Authorial context and specifically how to negotiate with a range of owners and “authors” and the obligation that one has to historical accounts is discussed later. The methods used in gathering materials appear to have some correlation to those used in the creation of Verbatim Theatre (defined and discussed more fully in Section 10.2.1 below), but the expression of the work in musical form through imaginary characters does not conform to the accepted theoretical definitions.
Worth noting is that the only archival records to which access was denied were the Board papers of Mt Isa Mines and any documentation held by the Australian Workers Union. Though ostensibly antagonistic to each other, both bodies were jointly antagonistic to the workers’ claims and their stop work action. As will become evident upon reading the script of the adaptation of Red Cap an attitude or interpretation of events sympathetic to the workers began to coalesce with the gathering of more and more materials. This raises issues of a level of commentary on events that McFarlane calls “adaptation proper” which will also be discussed in later analysis.

### 8.1.4 Thinking Through

This is a form of brainstorming of story elements, characters and the order of events. It is simple scenario making in the form of a speculative scene list that allows for exploration and experimentation with the “bones” of the story. In this instance particular consideration was given to songs, to where they should be placed, what they should say and who should sing them. In terms of “the mechanics of narrative” the obviously useful tool at this stage was consideration of “order”, and “frequency” as reprises of songs became an important element of the storytelling.

This process was repeated many times and overlapped with the gathering of materials. New discoveries often spark new ideas and enable new and different connections to be made. An example of this in Red Cap is the “lock-out sequence” suggested by the discovery of seventeen signed affidavits in which workers described the circumstances of their sacking when they refused to sign punitive contracts. Determined that these authentic “voices” from the past be heard in the play all the affidavits were included in the script, to be read by the actors and choir members. These are real statements by real workers whose names are read out, which borrows a Verbatim Theatre technique but the emphases in production is in the “musical scoring” of an overlapping crescendo of clamouring and chanting voices, which were silenced by the slamming of the mine gates.

### 8.1.5 Rough Scenario

Smiley (2000) describes this stage as matching the story from the previous stage with other “qualitative parts of the drama” (p. 36) to establish more firmly the overall structure of the play. In screenwriting terms and now more commonly in playwrighting this is called a “treatment”.

The first treatment, completed in October 2006, included a prologue and epilogue and consisted of ten sequences of action focused on a nodal event in the dispute. The assumption was that each sequence would contain at least one song. Apart from identifying nodal events the main purpose of the treatment was to chart the placement or “order” of songs and speculate on their content and contribution to the storytelling. The first treatment contained suggestions for fifteen songs including reprises. There were sketches of a few lines of song lyrics but mostly it hinted at possible titles and raised questions about what the songs might say:

I was undecided about the musical component of this sequence … to turn the letter into a SONG that then rolled into the men giving their notice … Or a SONG: WHO IS THE MAN IN THE RED CAP? or MACKIE IS THE MAN WHO … that introduces us to the man in the Red Cap and how he got to be elected chairman … because he knew how to run a meeting and how to plan for a strike; and how he harnessed all the men including the migrant workers. (Balodis, 2006, p. 2)

In subsequent drafts “The Letter” was written as a patter song that ended “Sequence 1: Lighting the Fuse”. “Who is the Man in the Red Cap” is the song that runs throughout “Sequence 2” which bears the same name.

Sean Mee, Director, Iain Grandage and I discussed the treatment in depth and the placement, content and form of the songs in particular. Given the contracted timeframe it was essential to write some of the songs first so that the music could be composed if choirs in Mt Isa and Brisbane were to begin learning it in February. However, a significant part of our discussion was about medium-specific issues of genre and style of performance. Smiley (2000) urges the writing of many versions of the scenario to refine what characters do before worrying about what they say. It became incumbent upon us to develop many versions of the treatment to perfect what the songs did and said, and who might perform them in what style. This necessitated continual revision and refining of the detail in the scenes that provided the context for the songs.

8.1.6 Final Scenario

Five drafts of the treatment were written between the end of October 2006 and the end of March 2007. Eight of the songs had been substantially written and detailed notes supplied about the placement and content of the three remaining songs. In a few of the sequences the detail of the action had been refined to the point where most of the
actual dialogue between characters was included. At each stage the treatments were de-
constructed, discussed, challenged and re-assembled by the creative team. The primary
focus was on the songs: their placement in the order of the piece and how effectively
they contributed to the storytelling. A secondary focus was on clarifying and
simplifying the history of the dispute which was extremely complex and legalistic. The
third concern was to establish the character of Mackie and what motivated his journey
through the play.

A consequence of this intense period of revision of scenarios was that only one
song that had been written was discarded. On reflection, perhaps a verse could have
been used to introduce Commissioner Harvey (who arbitrated the dispute) and to
alleviate the density of spoken text in “Sequence 3: Legal Fandangoes”.

8.1.7 Drafting

Because of the work already done at the treatment stage and because so much of
the storytelling is carried by the songs, the drafting process of the linking dialogue was
relatively short. As much of the battle was waged in courts and arbitration hearings, the
challenge was to keep the spoken text simple, personal and concise. Two distinct
“languages” emerged in the work. The songs chart the emotional journey of the
community while the spoken text largely reflects the often impersonal official language
of union and business management and of the law.

8.1.8 Revision

The writing process of this piece was one of intense and constant revision
because of the compressed timeframe. There was little time for reflection or to wait for
creative inspiration. This is not an optimal method of working as one can overlook or
eliminate “creative accidents” that may provide fresh or unexpected insights into modes
of storytelling or performance. However, it means that suggestions and solutions to
problems are immediately incorporated and tested, accepted or discarded without delay
or procrastination.

The first draft was read and discussed by the actors on the 11th April 2007. It
was complete except for Sequence 8 and the Epilogue which were still in treatment
form. In response to feedback and more considered dramaturgy further drafts were
written which also underwent processes of workshopping and dramaturgy. The fourth
draft of the script was delivered to the actors at the end of May 2009. Rehearsals began on 6th June 2007.

The text was constantly revised, edited and simplified throughout rehearsal and previews. This was done in response to the prescribed limits of the commissioning brief mediated by an emergent sense of obligation to the “owners” of the stories. It was further shaped by medium-specific demands and influenced directly by the available resources, the abilities of the performers and of the director and designers. The sixth draft of the script was completed for publishing on 19th June 2006.
9. PLAYSCRIPT: ADAPTATION OF RED CAP

Prologue

*The show opens with a deep rumble as though from an underground detonation. Lone voices begin singing FAIRNESS AND WISDOM, building into the first chorus.*

*It’s as though we begin underground in the noisome dark, one voice, one light, then another and another, using the light of mining lamps, first one then eventually massed as the light spreads.*

**Fairness and Wisdom**  
© Janis Balodis Jan 2007

**(MINERS)**  
Miners toil unseen forgotten  
Far below the haunts of men  
Courting danger in the darkness  
Cut through rocks ‘n’ mountains  
Bring what’s hidden into light  
Give thanks in prayers at night  
For all God’s riches that are found  
By miners working underground.

**CHORUS**  
Shine a light into the darkness  
Light can pierce the heart of stone  
Stones surrender up their riches  
Rich men claim them for their own  
‘Cos greed allows no place for fairness  
And wisdom can be overthrown.

**SLIDE:**  
Tuesday 4th August 1964 –  
The Industrial Commission refused to grant Mt Isa miners a wage increase of four pounds a week.

**Mount Isa Will Surprize Ya**  
© Dec 2006 Janis Balodis

God is we know always perverse  
When He scatters His riches  
In far distant corners of the earth.  
Such precious ores seldom are found  
In less congenial niches  
Than right here where we built this town.

Far at the end of a long train line  
Great dreams began
And up sprang the town from the mine.
Merely at first somewhere to work
Nowhere women could call home
The loneliest place with red dirt.

Red and white smoke stack
Rises from the plain
Can’t get more outback
But like monsoonal rains
That sneak up and surprize ya
Is this town called the Isa
As you get older and wiser, Mount Isa
Mount Isa will always surprise ya.

We’re not saying it’s paradise
Though winter is quite cheering
All those who live here must pay the price,
We live so far away from the coast
With summer’s heat so searing
And ten million flies – almost.

Lotsa peoples from forty lands
And lotsa diff’t lingos
She’ll be right mate we understand.
We all work hard make lotsa dough
While underground or in those
Dark Satanic Mills over town.

Red and white smoke stack
Rises from the plain
Can’t get more outback
But like monsoonal rains
That sneak up and surprize ya
Is this town called the Isa.
As you get older and wiser, Mount Isa
Mount Isa will always surprise ya.
If you just let it
Mount Isa will always surprise ya.

Sequence 1

Lighting the Fuse

We have come as men believing
That the Company can pay
Without begging without pleading
Willing to do what it takes
If you sit on a volcano
Prayers won’t help you if she blows.
Monday 24th August 1965 –
Mr. Foots, the General Manager of Mount Isa Mines meets a
deputation of miners, (including Pat Mackie) and Fred Sargent, the
AWU Organiser.

FOOTS: Mr. Sargent.

SARGENT: Mr. Foots.

FOOTS: (To SARGENT) Are the AWU Executive in Brisbane aware of this
meeting?

TOBY: The rank and file members here in Mt Isa elected us as a negotiating
committee. Fred’s here as the official AWU Organiser and Pat’s the Mt
Isa Section Chairman.

SARGENT: As you can expect, Mr. Foots, the men are up in arms about the
Industrial Commission rejecting their claim for a wage increase.

FOOTS: The Industrial Commission rejected the AWU claim, Mr. Sargent, on the
grounds it would be merely a camouflaged bonus payment.

RED CAP: Five years ago the same Industrial Court refused an increase in bonus on
the grounds it was a disguised wage increase.

SARGENT: (To FOOTs) The AWU went to a great deal of trouble and expense to
present a case for a four pounds per week increase. It was you who
suggested we go to arbitration and then you argued vehemently against
it. The men have been patient. They’ve waited three months for that
decision.

TOBY: It’s longer than that. At least twelve months, the atmosphere’s been bad.
I don’t know how long we can keep the lid on the pressure cooker.

DOSS: What do you mean you’re on the negotiating committee?

TOBY: Someone put my name forward.

DOSS: You could have said no.

TOBY: I didn’t think so, Dorothy.

DOSS: “Oh no, Dorothy.” It doesn’t pay to stick your head up just to have it
knocked off.
TOBY: Come on, Doss. Give it a chance. We’re all reasonable men.

DOSS: Tell them how much the prices have gone up in the last six months. Your wages haven’t gone up in five years. If we want to buy anything big like a fridge or furniture we have to buy it on hire-purchase.

TOBY: Yeah, yeah.

DOSS: Men never know the cost of anything. Just make sure you tell them.

FOOTS turns his back on the men and doodles on his pad while they put their case.

TOBY: What she said. It’s only because we work on contract and we’re paid by the ton of ore produced that we manage to make ends meet.

RED CAP: Mr. Foots, this deputation is not just about asking for a wage increase. Labour – management relations are pretty crook at the moment. You’ve got two and half thousand AWU employees, right here. And we’ve got a Union Executive fifteen hundred miles away, in Brisbane.

SARGENT: The men think if the Company was prepared to meet them across the table once a month, it could go a long ways towards ironing out a lot of problems to our mutual advantage.

FOOTS: Am I to assume that the AWU wants to get away from Arbitration and turn instead to Collective Bargaining?

SARGENT: I personally think if we can come to some agreement through direct talks that’s better.

FOOTS: Collective Bargaining is quite contrary to the opinion held by the Queensland AWU Secretary, Mr. Williams.

SARGENT: I would have to refer any decisions we made to the Branch Executive in Brisbane.

RED CAP: (Aside) Sargent only answers to ‘Squizzy’ Williams when he should be answering to us.

FOOTS: We made our case before the Commission, that the Mount Isa Mines Company was losing money and wasn’t able to stand any wage increases.

RED CAP: (Aside) He proved his case by deducting the total cost of new plant, some seventeen million pounds from the operating profit.

FOOT’S: Compared with other workers in Queensland the miners are pretty well off.
1(d)

DOSS: Did you show him?

TOBY: I showed him, Doss. He isn’t interested. His mind is already made up.

DOSS: There’s no point you being on that committee then, is there?

1(e)

Meeting continues:

FOOTS: If we were to meet your demands, the Company would be forced out of business, the town would be closed, and what a tragedy for all of Mt Isa.

RED CAP: Would it be correct to say that the Company will not consider our request for a wage increase?

FOOTS: That is correct. It would be improper for the Company to prejudice in any way the claims still before the Commission.

RED CAP: In that case, this deputation has been instructed to serve this notice on Mount Isa Mines Limited.

TOBY: And you’ll find it’s entirely without prejudice to our claims still before the Commission.

SLIDE: Under their Award, miners could opt EITHER to work for wages OR on individual contracts. Most choose to work on contract as they could earn more through greater effort and often by taking risks.

The Letter
© Janis Balodis Jan 2007

CHORUS:

Late afternoon Monday
August twenty-four
The letter is handed
To Mr. Foots
General Manager
Mount Isa Mines.
The letter could possibly
Set light to the fuse
That ignites a dispute.

A special meeting of
A. W. U.
Carried the motion
That notice be given
To Mount Isa Mines
All contract workers
Will revert to wages
Until we meet next
On September six.

RED CAP: All those in favour?

MINERS: Aye.

And this decision is taken
In protest of the
Commissioner’s findings
And his refusal
Of our recent Wage Claim
Of only one, two, three, four pounds a week
Increase for every
Employee under
The M.I.M. award.

The letter takes effect
Tuesday twenty-fifth
Four in the afternoon.
The letter is signed
E. for Eugene Markey
Also known as
Red Cap Pat Mackie
The Section Chairman
Of A. W. U.

But Mr. Foots
Was not persuaded
“The letter is”, he said
“Most unfortunate
For all concerned.”
The letter made hist’ry
Proving incend’ry
Set light to the fuse
Igniting this dispute.

Sequence 2
Who is the Man in the Red Cap?

2(a)

FOOTS: So tell me, Pat, who’s this Eugene Markie? Aren’t you Pat Mackie?

RED CAP: Depends on how far back you want to go.
**Who is the Man in the Red Cap?**
© Janis Balodis March 2007

RED CAP: I was born in New Zealand Maurice Patrick
To Matthew Michael, known as Mick,
Surname Murphy.
Maurice Patrick Murphy
When I stowed away and went to sea.
Maurice Patrick Murphy
On my seaman’s ticket

AWU: Maurice Patrick Murphy?
Then who is Eugene Markey?

MIM: Yes who is Eugene Markey?

RED CAP: That’s another story.
Maurice Patrick Murphy
Wasn’t bound for glory
Jumped ship when the war be – gan.
Goodbye Maurice Patrick Murphy
Why, Hi there, Eugene Markey, Canadian ex-seaman
Born in Port Arthur, Ontario. *(tar as in car?)*
Got himself a seaman’s ticket and a Soc. Sec. number.
Doesn’t like to boast, ‘cos every trick he knows
He learned from old hands much wiser
While workin’ on the docks’n’ships as a union organizer
On both the west’n’estern coasts
Of Canada
And the United States of America.

CHORUS: Who is the man in the red cap?
Who is the man underneath?
Who is this Eugene Markey or Murphy or Mackie
Who went to sea?

RED CAP: I was shipped back to New Zealand
and fetched up in Mt Isa for the mines,
just like all of you, to make my fortune,
in the Christmas of 1949.
I signed on with MIM as Eugene Markey – Gene for short.
“Oh cripes,” says the foreman, “that’s a bloody girl’s name, sport.”
I can fix that, my other name’s Pat.
Or call me John, or Tom, Bill, Jack, Harry.
I don’t care what or how,
Just don’t call me late for chow.
“Boys, this is Pat Markey.”
When the first pay day came, my cheque said Mackey.
And I told them again and again that the name
On my official papers was Eugene Markey,
But my cheque always said Mackey and I was called Pat
From then on I was stuck with the name, Pat Mackey

CHORUS: Who is the man in the red cap?
Is he a man to believe?
Who is this Tom-Bill or John-Dick or Pat—Jack or Harry?
Looks can deceive.

AWU hands out a pink pamphlet with a list of names on it, and the Mackie handprint?

AWU: Then who was Wesley Bredemus?
RED CAP: What’s that you’ve got there?
AWU: It’s a list of names for Bat Whackie
Alias Wesley Bredemus.
Sounds to me like an alias.

RED CAP: A name that I took from a book,
Some Yankee pulp-fiction Dick—

AWU: Detective Wesley Bredemus?
RED CAP: When I stowed away on a Kiwi ship.
AWU: Alias Courteeze, also Maurice?
RED CAP: My first wrestling name was Giorgio Cortez—Champion of Brazil.
They called me Wildcat in England,
And in Canada I was known
As Gentleman Gene from Eugene in Oregon
No one thought I was a gal in the wrestling ring.

WOMAN: Elmer J. Steffenweyit? (To rhyme with “buy it”)
RED CAP: Me a Steffenweyit?
No one would buy it, not even in Panama.
AWU: Not even in Panama.
RED CAP: Just a drunken sailor I once met in a bar.

CHORUS: Alias Maurice Patrick Murphy
RED CAP: Ain’t no alias
CHORUS: Alias Morris Murphy
RED CAP: Ditto—more or less
CHORUS: Alias Maurice Murphy
RED CAP: Also no alias
CHORUS: Alias Patrick Murphy
RED CAP: Okay, okay, You got me more or less.
CHORUS: Tell us more, tell us more
You could hardly tell us less.

Who is the Man in the Red Cap?

Who is the man in the Red Cap?
What’s with the names that he borrows?
If he was Eugene and Markey and Mackie
Who will he be tomorrow?
2(b)

**RED CAP:** Having a lot of names has prepared me for Aussie politics where being called a lot of names passes for debate.

**VINCE:** What difference name make? You get re-christen here. You name Guglielmo they call Elmo, not William even. You Verriko, call you Vic, Arvid you now Harry. Here forty-seven language, many accent, plenty secret, thousand story. Is any one of you got no secret? Is any one break no law? All saints stand over there. I tell you who is man in red cap. He talk to us, wogs, tell us come to special meeting, talk of trouble. One Finn bloke tells how foreman, little Hitler does wrong measurement and cheats him. His English not so good, Aussie stands up and says, “Oh sit down ya wog bastard and shut up.” Finn is proud man. “Ve fokken wogs fokken union men like you. Ve fokken pay union dues like you, ve talk our fokken trouble like you.” This Red Cap sees problem and straight away fix. He ask volunteers translate so every man can understand. First time Union talk to us not just, “You must pay Union dues.” If we fighting these bastards I want man in red cap smart fighter in my corner. Don’t tell my missus that I swear.

**SLIDE:** Average take home pay on wages was 26 pounds a week
Average earnings on contract was 50 pounds a week.

2(c)

*The BOSS speculates on: Who is the Man in the Red Cap?*

**FOOTS:**
Who is the man in the Red Cap?
Why is this man in our way?
Who is this smartarse interferer cum working class hero?
Sack him today.

**FOOTS:** Tell our lawyers to lodge an application in the Industrial Commission for an order restraining the AWU from taking part in an unauthorized strike.

**EXEC 1:** The AWU Executive won’t like that. They don’t want this fight anymore than we do.

**EXEC 2:** Let them do something about it then. It’s their members out of control. All because of one shit-stirrer.

**FOOTS:** And he is still an AWU member.

**EXEC 1:** I’ve talked to the men. Not all of them are up for this. The four hundred who left town in the last five weeks wanted no part of this or Mackie.

**EXEC 2:** Mostly single blokes chasing an easy quid. They didn’t stay and speak against him at the meetings, did they?
FOOTS: As the miners are so keen to work for wages, shift the troublemakers up to work in the smelters. Let the word out that’s where they’ll be staying when this is over. See how they like that.

EXEC 1: Too bad Mackie’s not a miner.

FOOTS: Too bad Mackie still works here.

WOMEN’S CHORUS:
Who is the man in the Red Cap?
Are his promises hollow?
Who is the man in the Red Cap?

2(d)

SLIDE: Sunday 11th October 1964 – AWU troubleshooter and Northern District Secretary, Kevin Costello traveled to Mt Isa to address a Special Meeting of 1000 miners at the Star Theatre.

RED CAP: I declare this meeting open. I’d like you to welcome our special guest, Kevin Costello who wants to say a few words.

COSTELLO takes the microphone and you can hear a pin drop.

COSTELLO: Most of you fellows know me. I’m up here from Townsville quite often on Union business, your Union, the great Australian Workers’ Union that has been involved in many battles over the years, battles we have won, through Arbitration. You were right to be disappointed, even to be disgusted by the Industrial Commission’s decision on the wage claim. The Union believes the Commission was wrong. You may have already heard that the Union Executive has sought leave to appeal against the rejection of the wage claim. You may also have heard that Justice Hanger has, in his wisdom, refused to grant the application or to hear the appeal until October 14, in three days time, on account of the slowing up of work that’s taking place here. Now the Union Executive needs this application to be heard on Wednesday if we are to proceed in your interests. If we are to win, we need you to pull with us on this. That is why I have come here, to recommend to you a return to work contract.

RED CAP: Hold it right there. You know where you can shove that proposal.

The meeting erupts. Shouting, jeering, whistles, stamping of feet. No no, we won’t go! Boo! Boo! Go back to Brisbane. Whose side are you on?

COSTELLO: Now hang on… hear me out… Let me tell you… The court will no hear the appeal… You are allowing yourselves to be duped… your own Section Committee has moved to return to contract…
RED CAP tries to be heard, to take control so that COSTELLO gets a fair go. He reaches for the microphone and there is a brief tussle with COSTELLO who refuses to let it go. COSTELLO tries to continue but is forced to relinquish the microphone and to leave the meeting through the shouting mass. 
RED CAP takes the microphone and the meeting settles.

RED CAP: I take it this meeting is not interested in ratifying any AWU Executive motion to return to contract.

CHORUS: No!

RED CAP: Can we safely assume that the original motion to continue to work for wages still stands?

CHORUS: Yes!

2(e)

WILLIAMS: We have to stop that commie bastard chairing meetings.

COSTELLO: The mongrel is meeting mad. Fred Sargent told me Mackie has chaired ten meetings since July and taken four days off work on Union business.

WILLIAMS: Why doesn’t Sargent chair the meetings?

COSTELLO: Mackie has the rank and file in Mt Isa under his jackboot. Sargent is forced to do their bidding.

WILLIAMS: What’s to stop the AWU changing the regulations? What’s to stop us saying who can chair Union meetings?

2(f)

SLIDE: Thursday 22nd October 1964 – Pat Mackie was dismissed by Mt Isa Mines

The words “Mackie’s been sacked.” starts to ripple through the CHORUS.

MINER: Mackie’s been sacked.

VINCE: Bullshit. You kidding me.

MINER: No bullshit. I just heard. For taking the day off yesterday, on Union business.

VINCE: He was with Sargent. What does he say?

MINER: Hey, Sargent, Mackie’s been sacked.
SARGENT: I know. I went with Pat and took the matter up with the Company. But they’re holding firm to their decision. It’s wrongful dismissal. Pat will have to file a complaint against the Company. That’s the process.

VINCE: Is that all what the fokken Union is going to do? He was on fokken Union business.

SARGENT: I know.

MARGARET: Maybe not. Have you seen these? Hot off the press. By-Laws of the Queensland Branch of the AWU. There’s a couple of new rules. Mackie’s not Section Chairman any more and he’s no longer eligible to chair monthly meetings.

VINCE: When was these change?

MARGARET: About a week ago. After Costello left here and went to Brisbane.

SARGENT: It’s all new to me too, all right.

MINER: So Pat wasn’t a Union official yesterday when he took time off so the company can sack him today.

MARGARET: How did MIM know about the new Union rules before we did?

RED CAP: The AWU Executive have summoned me to appear on December 7th to show cause why I shouldn’t be expelled from the Union for misconduct.

Sargent retreats.

VINCE: (shouts after him) Bloody bastards. They in bed together.

MINER: We don’t have to take this, Pat. We’ll go on strike. Everyone will go out.

RED CAP: Stay on the job. Don’t walk into the Company’s trap. We won round one. The Industrial Commission has refused to rule that we’re on strike. That’s why the Company wants to provoke you into walking out, to precipitate an illegal stoppage. Then they’ll use the courts to invoke penal clauses just like in ’61. Go back to work, do a fair days work, and keep on punchin’. This proves they’re hurting.

Who is the Man in the Red Cap?

CHORUS:
Who is the man in the Red Cap
Is he the right man to follow?
If Mackie left town this dispute could end
If not today then tomorrow.
MINER: What about you, Pat?

RED CAP: I’ll fight the bastards.

MARGARET: It’s still not right.

MINER: What if you lose?

RED CAP: I’d have my excuse to leave town. I might have to anyway if I can’t get a job.

VINCE: We not make it so easy just to get rid.

MINER: We can all pay a bit keep you here.

RED CAP: No. You’ve all taken a big cut in take home pay, working for wages instead of on contract. I’ve got holiday pay and stuff to last me a while. You could end this today. That’s up to you. But you can win this. You stick together and keep on punchin’. The last one punchin’ is the one who wins.

CHORUS:
Cometh the hour, cometh the man
Madcap or Red Cap, let’s make our stand
Now is the time, if not now when
It’s time that we counted as men.

8 TOWNSPEOPLE step forward and contribute 3 pounds a week each to pay him a wage to stay to fight on. “I’ll put in three pounds a week.” “Count me in for three pounds a week.” “Me too. Three pounds a week.” “I’m good for three quid.” Etc.

We want the man in the Red Cap
They will have won if he has to go
Cometh the hour, cometh the plan
Mackie’s the man we will follow.

Sequence 3
Legal Fandangos/Union meeting

3(a)

SLIDE: Sunday 25th October 1964 –
Kevin Costello returned to Mt Isa to chair a Special Meeting of 1000 miners.

COSTELLO: It is my intention as an Executive Officer of the Union to chair today’s meeting.

Jeering, hooting, booing.
CHORUS: We want Mackie! We want Mackie! We want –
Go on Pat. Get up there where you belong.

*RED CAP is pushed forward to rounds of applause and cheering. He gestures for silence.*

COSTELLO: I declare this meeting closed.

*More cheers as COSTELLO stalks off, but not before saying something to RED CAP.*

RED CAP: I have been informed that any Union meeting conducted without Costello as Chairman will be unconstitutional. What is the will of the Mt Isa Section membership?

CHORUS: Carry on. Carry on!

MINER: I move that we carry on the meeting.

VINCE: I move that we continue to work for wages.

MARGARET: I move that the Mt Isa rank and file have no confidence in Northern District Secretary Costello and State Secretary Edgar Williams and affirm that Pat Mackie is our duly elected representative.

CHORUS: Second that. Second that. Second that.

RED CAP Show of hands. Unanimous.

3(b)

MARGARET: It’s gratifying to see so many women here. If this goes on for any length of time, the Women’s Auxiliary Committee will need as many volunteers as possible.

DOSS: Excuse me Margaret, is it true eight people are putting in three pounds a week each for Mackie?

MARGARET: Some of the local business people. One of the doctors, a couple of taxi drivers, a newsagent...

DOSS: That should keep them in the good books with the miners when this is over.

MARGARET: It’s OK for MIM to crack down on wage increases so that the shareholders can enjoy bigger profits, but if a local backs the workers to protect his business it’s a crime.
DOSS: No, but if Mackie left town the strike would be over.

MARGARET: Is your husband still at work?

DOSS: Yes.

MARGARET: Then he’s not on strike. It’s a dispute. Maybe the townspeople think the miners are in the right. Maybe they don’t like bullies. Or maybe Mackie hypnotized them like he’s hypnotized more than a thousand men and their families.

DOSS: I didn’t say that.

MARGARET: Why else would every man, woman, child and dog be following a convicted thief, drug runner, gangster and communist secret agent?

DOSS: Some of that stuff might be true.

MARGARET: It’s in all the papers so it must be true. We’re part of a communist plot to weaken the national economy and lay Australia open to the threat from Red China, Indonesia, North Korea. You’re right to be worried.

DOSS: I’m more worried how I’m going to keep up the payments on my new fridge…

MARGARET: The women’s committee has been round to talk to the shopkeepers. They understand about things like that because one day this will be over.

DOSS: We didn’t buy it locally.

MARGARET: I see. Look, Mackie’s been here for fifteen years. He’s always had a red cap and no one ever said he was a commie before. He once committed the crime of having a faulty light on his pushbike. The only time he’s had anything to do with the Union, he helped pour the concrete slab for the Union hall, and he organized some wrestling bouts for the kids. None of my kids got brainwashed or criminalized. What does your husband think?

DOSS: He thinks Mackie can do no wrong.

MARGARET: You better back him up. It could get a lot worse before it gets better and it’s best if you’re both on the same side. The Company will come to their senses. It lasted eight weeks in 1961 and we ended up worse off. Doesn’t mean we were wrong. Last time we all made the mistake of going on strike and the lawyers belted us. This time we’re still going to work. It’s a legal right under the award to choose to work for wages. There’s nothing the Company can do about it. Pat’s got it sorted.
SLIDE: Thursday 29th October 1964 –
MIM and the AWU appeared before Commissioner Harvey in the
Industrial Commission in Brisbane.

RED CAP on the sidelines looking on and commenting on proceedings.

SLIDE: MIM was now applying for an order restraining AWU members
from continuing the contract work ban.

MIM: Mt Isa Mines draws the Court’s attention to Section 98 of the Act, “that
no person shall take part in...anything in the nature of a strike...unless
or until a strike has been authorized...by the members of the industrial
union of employees...in the calling concerned.” We would contend that
the decision to work for wages is in the nature of a strike (directed at
AWU) and as it was not authorized, is illegal.

HARVEY: The Industrial Court ruled more than a month ago that the men’s action
in reverting to wages did not represent a strike.

RED CAP: That’s right, we won the first round.

HARVEY: Furthermore, you have presented no factual evidence of a continuance of
a strike or a deliberate go-slow since then.

MIM: The Company is doing it’s best to do nothing to provoke the men.

HARVEY: You may assure me of your good intentions but the dismissal of Mackie
was obviously regarded as provocative to the people of Mt Isa.

RED CAP: Who is that guy?

ALL: Commissioner Harvey.

RED CAP: I’m starting to like this guy.

AWU: The AWU submits that there is no evidence of unrest in Mt Isa, or of a
go-slow. We tender the Company’s own works newspaper, Minews.
Production figures show no marked reduction, and productivity figures
actually show an increase. We are asking for the Commission to reject
the application.

HARVEY: The Company has cast too big an onus on the Commission. It’s up to you
to get whatever evidence of a ‘go-slow’ is available so that if an order is
granted or refused the decision is based on the evidence at this time. I
suggest it would be less complicated if the Company withdrew the
application - and started afresh.

MIM: I ask the Commission’s leave to withdraw the application.
HARVEY: Granted.

RED CAP: (To AWU) Isn’t it just a bit peculiar the Commission invited the Company to re-open their case when they already made their case? (To HARVEY) They should have lost again.

HARVEY: We don’t want this hanging over our heads. We are not going to contribute to a strike at Mt Isa. The way things look at the moment, it is going to be a cold Christmas up there. Adjourned till November 9.

RED CAP: (To MINERS) Between now and the next hearing, the shift bosses are going to be your best mates. They’ll get you yarnin’, telling you to take it easy so they can prove you’re going slow. Don’t fall for it. (To MIM) And in the meantime we’ll be trying to get management across the table with us, to see if we can get this contract work ban lifted.

HARVEY & AWU are interested to see the MIM response.

MIM: We believe in the Arbitration system. We have to date negotiated directly with the executive of the AWU, and see no good reason to change. It is not our intention to meet with any unofficial deputation of Mt Isa miners.

3(d)

SLIDE: Monday 9th November 1964 – MIM’s application for a restraining order against AWU members resumed in the Industrial Commission.

RED CAP: Surprize, surprise! What does the Company present as evidence at the next hearing, but shift bosses and foremen who saw the men going slow.

HARVEY: The men are still working. What is the Company asking this Commission to do – is it to order the men to revert to contract working?

MIM: Yes. Everything depends on output, not the method of work. If the men stayed on wages and produced as much ore as they did on contract, then the Company would have no complaint.

RED CAP: Because their profits would be even bigger. (To AWU) Are you going to let them get away with that? (To MIM) Your workforce is down by 800 men. If you lose one third of your workers you’re going to drop one third of your production.

HARVEY: The Bench is unable to find evidence of reduced output or reduced productivity to justify granting the Order. But it is my personal view that the Union must be held accountable for the actions of its members.
AWU: The AWU Executive has been doing all it can to get the men to return to contract work. Beating us up in court is not going to help.

MIM: At this stage, the Company feels it cannot properly ask for an injunction against the Union Executive.

RED CAP: Cosy. Our Union hierarchy has taken the first legal steps to distance itself from our actions. (To MINERS) If there was any doubt before, from now on it’s us against the Company and our own Union.

HARVEY: The court will make its decision in eleven days time.

3(e)

SLIDE: Friday 13th November 1964 – MIM unexpectedly shut down the copper smelter.

MIM: The Company has decided it cannot wait. We’ll have to shut down the copper smelter tomorrow.

RED CAP: Hang on a moment. Why are you doing that?

MIM: Despite our best efforts, copper production is not high enough to enable the smelter to operate economically.

RED CAP: That might fool the press but everyone in this town knows there are hundreds of thousands of tons of ore stockpiled. Even if we stopped work completely, you could maintain production in the smelter for at least six months.

MIM: It’ll give us an opportunity to overhaul and maintain the plant while we await the Industrial Court’s decision.

RED CAP: Bullshit. It’s just to cook up further evidence against us.

SLIDE: Monday 16th November 1964 – Jack McEwan, Federal Minister for Trade banned all exports of copper.

McEWAN: Because of the ongoing industrial disorder in Mount Isa, The Federal Government has no choice but to hold all copper supplies within Australia and stop all exports. The reduced output of copper in Mt Isa is the result of unconscionable actions of a lawless few men of dubious character and motive, transforming law abiding miners into a rabble of dangerous insurgents wreaking havoc upon the economy. A world shortage of copper has sent prices surging upwards.

RED CAP: You can bet it isn’t the miners who are going to profit from that. At least when the stack stops smoking the sulphur stink will be gone. We’re
going to have to put up with a plague of flies and journalists. I leave it to you to decide which is worse.

3(f)

SLIDE: Monday 23rd November 1964 –
The Industrial Commission handed down their decision.
Two Commissioners in favour of the miners, Commissioner Harvey dissenting.

HARVEY: It is by a majority of two to one against that the Industrial Commission has found that: production figures have not shown the existence of a go-slow strike.

RED CAP: Strike one for the rank and file.

HARVEY: It would be impossible to order the Union not to do something it had no intention of doing.

RED CAP: Strike two.

HARVEY: The issuing of an Order against the members would be quite ineffective, an empty gesture, contributing nothing towards settlement, and therefore the Order should not be granted.

RED CAP: Strike three and you’re out.

Iron in the Soul
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RED CAP:
Though we’ve won the battles three to none
It doesn’t mean it’s over and all done.

HARVEY: However, I, Commissioner Harvey, in a minority of one, firmly believe the contract ban was a go-slow strike because it was designed to achieve certain purposes.

RED CAP:
They will break our bones to keep the gold
And lock their hearts to leave us in the cold.

HARVEY: It is impossible to order the men into Contract with the Company, but sooner or later the Order will have to be issued, not only in the interests of the Company but in the interests of the employees who have already lost this strike.

RED CAP:
It’s right to fight for what you believe in
The last one punchin’ is the one who wins
But no one man can triumph on his own

MIM: Mt Isa Mines Limited seeks leave to appeal.

RED CAP: It’s unity puts iron in the soul.

SLIDE: Wednesday 2nd December 1964 –
Justice Hanger rebuked the Commissioners’ for failing to take into
account the lawlessness of the situation and the fact the action
constituted a strike.

HARVEY: Justice Hanger has overturned the majority decision and I have been
vindicated. I have a high regard for the people of Mt Isa and it is
completely unendurable to me that the town should be allowed to rot, or
should be murdered, or allowed to commit suicide.

HARVEY: Finally it’s turned out I was right
My judgment said this was a go-slow-strike.
I was once a worker just like you
I shoveled coal and paid my union dues.
Arbitration’s now what I believe in
I’m patient and persistent till I win
’Cos one just man can solve this all alone
It’s certainty puts iron in the soul.

Iron in the soul is justice
Iron in the soul is law
With iron in the soul I’ll prosecute
Law’n'order to restore.

SLIDE: Thursday 3rd December 1964 –
The Industrial Commission ordered the AWU and its members to
stop taking part in an unauthorized strike and being concerned in
any ban, stoppage, limitation or restriction in the performance of
contract work.
Sunday 6th December 1964 –
The miners voted to disregard the restraining order and to continue
the ban on contract work.

MIM: Though we lost court cases three to one
We just appealed till they were overcome.
We don’t need to talk to any one
Stockholders own and run this mine.
Yes might is right it’s what we believe in
We don’t quit till we get ‘the’ decision
But if we should lose control
A State of Emergency puts iron in the soul.
Iron in the soul is profit
Iron in the soul’s blue chip
With iron in the soul we’ll keep control
A velvet glove on iron fist.

SLIDE: Monday 7th December 1964 –
Pat Mackie was expelled from the AWU for misconduct.

HARVEY: I’ve been gazzumped. The State Government of Queensland has declared a State of Emergency.

SLIDE: Thursday 10th December 1964 –
The Queensland Cabinet declared a State of Emergency.
Miners were ordered to return to work on Monday 14th December and not to refuse contract or piece work. Penalties of 100 pounds or six months in gaol.

MIM: It ended the strike in 1961.

RED CAP: Every miner employed by Mt Isa Mines Limited is directed, by law, to report for work on Monday December 14, 1964. And if you refuse contract or piece work, they’re offerin’ to fine you one hundred pounds each or give you six months in jail. Up till now, turning up for work, and working for wages, you have not broken any law. The Government has brought a big stick and wants to slug you. That is why the law has been changed. It’s up to you now, how far you’re willing to go, for your rights, for fair pay, and to be heard. You can give up on this now, and nothing will change. That’s what they’re expecting you to do. What’s your decision?

MINERS: They c’n shove their fine and drag us off to jail
We’ve got no money so it means we won’t make bail
They can take the wife and children too
And prove to them the worst that you can do
Our fight’s a fight for fairness for wisdom
We’ll keep on punchin’, punch until we’ve won

RED CAP:
But no one man can triumph on his own

MINERS
Together we will triumph we won’t fold
’Cos unity puts iron in the soul.

Iron in the soul is courage
Iron in the soul gives strength
With iron in the soul we’ll punch on through
United to the end.
SLIDE: Sunday 13th December 1964 –
1500 AWU members and families, townspeople televisions crews, journalists, policemen met at the Star Theatre and the street outside. AWU Executive declared the meeting unconstitutional. Mackie opened the meetings from then on to all comers. The meeting reaffirmed conditions for the men’s return to work contract:

1. Reinstatement of Pat Mackie
2. 4 Pounds a week wage increase
3. 6 Pounds a week bonus increase
4. 1 Pound shift allowance

3(g)
Lockout Sequence

Musically underscored reading of the Statutory Declarations by MINERS. It starts with one voice then another and another until it builds and builds to a crescendo.

SLIDE: Monday 14th December 1964 –
The Queensland Cabinet gave MIM the power to suspend or dismiss any miners who refused to work on contract.

I, William McDonald of 16 Wewak Street, Soldiers Hill, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that P. Noope foreman at Mt Isa Mines asked me if I was prepared to go underground and work on contract. When I replied no – he said then I must give you your Pinkie.

I, Robert Allan Koctka of Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland do solemnly and sincerely declare that on 14th December at approx 8.15 am I was called into the conference room of the foreman’s office along with other men from my job underground. The foreman (Kit Clifford) asked if I would accept contract. I told him I would accept contract but I wanted to see the contract sheet first. He refused and told me to answer yes or no. He then called in Fred Staples (senior foreman) and I said the same to him. I got the same answer from him and he told the foreman to dismiss me. He wrote on the Pinkie refused contract.

I, Geoffrey Renwick, of 32 Opal Street, Happy Valley, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that I asked for a contract sheet and was refused the foreman saying that I would have to go back the same way and they would bring a contract sheet down for me to sign at a later date.

I, Antonio M. Stridi of Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland do solemnly and sincerely declare that my foreman asked if I refuse to sign a contract. I asked him what contract? to which he replied you’re going back to work contract, so I said you show me such a contract and I will answer yes or no. My foreman then said Mr. Martin will fix your contract price.
I replied before I say yes or no I prefer to see my contract so he handed me my Pinkie.

I, Thomas James Payne, of 23 Bunce Street, Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that I did not refuse a contract from MIM. But did ask to see the contract. But was told by Bob Floyd that they would take about a fortnight to draw up. And was told my services were no longer required and was given Pinkie by Floyd.

I, John Thomas Watson of Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on the 15/12/64 I was called into the foreman’s office and asked to work contract without seeing a contract. I could not agree to these terms so was paid off.

I, Mikko Nurkka, of 22 Eleventh Avenue, Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that I reported for work as required on midnight shift on 15th December. I was asked if I would accept contract work on 10/2. Mr. Cowan a foreman of Mt Isa Mines Limited asked me yes or no will I accept contract. I requested a contract sheet for inspection. I was refused. I then said that I could not accept contract without the contract conditions. I was discharged by the foreman. Reason given Services No Longer Required.

I, Andy A Gargat of 64 Marian Street, Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on Tuesday 15th of December 1964 was reported for work on 11 level in the five hundred load. I was told to see the foreman and was asked if I would sign a contract. I told him I would sign if I could see the contract but he told me that I was not allowed to see it. Then he wrote me my Pinkie.

I, Kenneth Peter Hastings of 15 Verry Street Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that I reported of work on the 14th December was called into the foremans office and told if I did not sign a contract I would be dismissed on the spot. They could not show us a contract. So I was dismissed.

I, Alfred Charles Newey, of 168 West Street Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on the 15th day of December I was asked would I sign a contract by Mike Conners 11/2 Foreman. I asked to see the contract and he said if I wanted to see it I would have to see Mr. Martin. Then he said again are you going to sign a contract, “Yes or No.” I said if I can’t read the contract I can’t sign one, so he said you will have to receive your Pinkie.

I, Les Harold Grove of 17 Deighton Street Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on the date of 15 December 64 when was reporting for night shift as first MM on Micaf 11/2 was told by the Foreman that if we refused to accept contract work I would be dismissed. I asked may I see contract sheet so as to see the contents but was refused. With this I was dismissed.
I, Robert Stewart of 27 Kokoda Road Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on the 15th day of December 1964 I presented myself at the underground section of Mt Isa Mines for work. I was taken by my shift Supervisor E. Irwin, to the level Foreman J. McCarthy who advised me that under the ruling of the State of Emergency, he was offering contract work and would I accept same! I said I would have to see the contract sheet and peruse the terms of same, before I would agree. He said he did not have one and that if I refused I would be discharged. I then said I would have to have instruction on the matter, and he brought in the Union organiser Mr. F. Sargent, where the offer was again made. We were then taken to the office of Mr. R. J. Floyd who again offered us contract. When he was asked for a copy of the contract, he said it was not necessary to have one; that we had to accept Contract, fo to work on contract, and sign the contract at a later date! As this was not satisfactory to me, I would not agree to his terms! I was then taken to McCarthy, who wrote out my discharge, (clearance certificate) and he endorsed it, “Did not accept contract.”

I, Jack H. Allan of Box 426 of Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that I was a gaes worker for over nine years for Mt Isa Mines and never worked on any contract or bonus job. On Tuesday 15/12 1964 before starting day shift I have been asked to work contract. Asking what contract, I was told any contract. Since I never worked in such a position I had to refuse. I was then taken to the office and I was discharged.

I, Esko Nestor of 58 Marion Street, Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on the 15th December 1964 I reported to Mt Isa Mines Ltd for work at midnight as required. When the starting whistle blew, I was told along with fellow workers to report to the Foreman’s office. I was asked by Mr. Cowan, a foreman of the staff of Mt Isa Mines Ltd would I work on contract on the job which I worked previous shift. I replied will you give me a contract sheet so that I can examine the terms and clauses. He again asked me would I work contract “Yes or No”. I again requested to see the contract sheet and I was again refused. I then replied that if I can’t see a sheet I must refuse contract. He then discharged me from the company. Reason given that “Services no longer required.”

I, Charles R. Lacey of 190 Miles Street Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on the 15 -12 -1964 I was called into the foreman’s office of Mt Isa Mines and given resignation for refusing to work contract work. When asked would I work contract by my ofreman, or refuse it I said I would like to have a look at the conditions of the contract. The reply was “That’s not the point do you refuse contract.” I was then handed my resignation slip for refusing contract work.

I, Raymond Seib of 15 Very Street Mt Isa Queensland, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that I reported for work
on the 14th December and told if I did not sign a contract right away I would be dismissed. They could or would not show me a contract when I asked them. So I said that I could not sign something I could not see. So I was dismissed on the spot.

I, Roy Charles Newman of Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that non the 15 – 12- 64 I asked the shift boss for a look at the contract in case I wished to sign it and I was told I must say that: I wish to sign a contract before I could see same.

I, Ronald Griffiths of B.S.D. Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on Tuesday 15th December, 1964 at approximately 9 AM before the Engineer in charge of MICAF I was asked to work contract. On asking to see the contract I was refused.

I, Allan Kane of 1 Carbonate Street Mt Isa, in the State of Queensland, do solemnly and sincerely declare that on the 15th December 1964 I was approached by W Schultz and asked to work contract. I said I would work contract if I could see the contract sheet, he could not produce one so I said I won’t work for contract unless I know the conditions. Consequently I was sacked.

This sequence ends with SFX of gates being slammed shut and locked.

Sequence 4
The Hungry Christmas

4(a)

Away in a Manger

CHORUS
Away in a manger, no crib for a bed
The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head
The stars in the bright sky looked down where he lay
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay.

SLIDE: Tuesday 15th December 1964 –
By 5.00 pm MIM had ceased all operations and its whole productive workforce had been sacked.
MIM also closed its Townsville copper works and its coal operation in Bowen.

SLIDE: Thursday 17th December 1964 –
MIM’s annual Christmas Tree went ahead as usual.
4,300 children under 11 lined up for icecreams, lollies and presents.
8,000 staff, workers and their families attended.

BRAD: Yeah, ho ho bloody ho.
VINCE: Merry bloody Christmas.

MARGARET: Who are they kidding?

CHORUS:
Pat Mackie’s a Commo the papers all said
You miner’s are stupid to follow that Red
It will end in tears when the curtain comes down
On a cold hungry Christmas in Mt Isa town.

4(b)

ANNOUNCER: (An Irish accent) Aah… Hello…are you sure this is…they can’t hear me…Yeah rightio, rightio keep your hair shirt on. Welcome everybody to the Mt Isa Mines Christmas Tree. In spite of the troubles. I di’n’t say that. There’s no trouble here tonight. Every kiddie gets a prize as long as he’s under eleven. And there’s plenty of ice-creams and lollies and soft stuff. And plenty of harder stuff for the oldies. God knows we need it now. I di’n’t say that. Anyway I’m about to have one or even twenty - three. Especially as the Company is payin’. I did say that.

4(c)

MARGARET: I didn’t want to come here. You know I didn’t want to come here.

BRAD: Margaret most of the people here are workers, our friends.

MARGARET: There are way too many management bastards for my liking. Are we supposed to pretend they haven’t just sacked you and locked you out? Yes I’m talking about you.

BRAD: Try and be nice. Christmas is for kids.

MARGARET: Then why are we here? Or if we’re here, why are they bloody here?

4(d)

M.I.M.’s Christmas Tree
(To the tune of O TANNENBAUM)

CHORUS:
We’re not on strike it’s a dispute
We are locked out from working
Poms, Yugoslavs and Frenchies too
We’re all in this together
Germans and Poles, Maltese and Finns
Italians, Hungarians
We’re all of us Australians
We’re one united nation.
ANNOUNCER: Hey you kids, keep your eyes open for Santa. Is it a plane, is it a bird? No he’s in a ute. I di’n’t say that. Santa should be arriving sometime soon. Yes, Samantha there really is a Santa, he just doesn’t work at Mt Isa Mines. No one does. I di’n’t say that.

Ding Dong Barricade The Door
(To the tune of DING DONG MERRILY ON HIGH)

CHORUS:
Ding Dong! Barricade the door
It is not Avon calling
Ding Dong! Don’t unlock the door
The Repo man is coming
To - ooh-oooh-ooh-ooh etc
Take mum’s refrigerator. [Oh-oh-oh-oh etc Took mum’s refrigerator]

BRAD: Could be a bumper Christmas this year.
MINER: Yeah how do you work that out?
BRAD: For once nobody’s working. Everyone can party at the same happy time.
TOBY: If you can afford the grog.
MINER: We bought ours months ago, from Adelaide.
TOBY: My problem’s going to be how to keep it cold. We might not have a fridge.
MINER: Good thing they invented ice and eskies, hey?
BRAD: They should hang repo men up by their toes and urinate in their nostrils.
TOBY: We should get stuck in while the beer’s free.

DOSS: So what does it mean that Judge Hanger has ordered the Commission to rehear the wage claim?
MARGARET: Nothing. The Company will still fight it.
DOSS: If we get any kind of pay rise we should all go back.

MARGARET: Not without Mackie. That’s been decided. And it’s too late now. They won’t give us the four pounds anyway and the men are now asking for ten and rightly so.

4(i)

We Got Three Pounds
(To the tune of I SAW THREE SHIPS)

CHORUS:
We got three pounds sweet irony
On Christmas Eve can you believe
In August if our claim they’d paid
On Christmas Eve we’d be working.
We got three pounds it came too late
On Christmas Eve they’ve locked the gate
It’s not enough there’s more at stake
On Christmas Day we’re still warring.

4(j)

ANNOUNCER: If you don’t think there’s a Santa, the Auditor General asked to see the Company’s books. Nooo I di’n’t say that. Later on we’ve got the big fireworks display all the way from the Brisbane Ecca courtesy of yes, your friendly management committee. We’ve got the gelignite fellahs. I di’n’t say that.

SLIDE: Tuesday 24th December 1964 –
The Full Bench of the Industrial Commission awarded all MIM employees 3 pounds per week increase – to be paid from Monday 4th January 1965.
It wasn’t a wage increase, it wasn’t a bonus, it was a “prosperity payment.”
If this had been awarded in August when the 4 pounds claim was rejected – this dispute would NEVER have happened.

Maybe someone in a Santa costume throwing lollies into the audience.

4(k)

In the Five Months of Dispute
(To the tune of the Twelve Days of Christmas)
MINERS & M.I.M.:
In the fifth month of dispute
We say to M.I.M.
You’ll never win
Not working now, see you in court,
Mackie is no mug
And a pay rise is well overdue.
MARGARET: It’s a wonder you bastards have the gall to show yourselves.

**Good Women of Mt Isa**
*(To the tune of GOOD KING WENCESLAS)*

**WOMEN’S CHORUS:**
We all have to stand in line  
For the union hand-outs  
The good women make us sign  
To keep good accounts.  
Fruit and veggies, groceries  
Supermarket vouchers  
And even a cash stipend  
For those little extras.

**4(l)**

DOSS: So, Mr. Mackie what do you think about being called a communist all the time?

TOBY: For Christ’ sake, Doss.

DOSS: I’ve got a right to ask.

RED CAP: They wouldn’t know. Just because I wear a red cap. I put it down to a lack of imagination.

**4(m)**

**Ding Dong Barricade The Door**

**CHORUS:**
Ding Dong! Kick us when we’re down  
Can’t you see we’re bleeding  
E-nough! Run him out of town  
The Repo man is leaving  
Wi-iith, ca-aars, fri-idges, fuuur-uur-niiii-ture etc  
By the bloody tra-in load.

**4(n)**

TOBY: What you have to go an’ make me look like I’m a bloody idiot?

DOSS: You can do that without my help every time you get on the drink.

TOBY: And don’t tell me how much I can an’ can’t drink.
DOSS: There’s one good thing about this dispute, you can’t piss every spare penny against the wall.

TOBY: I’m warnin’ you to keep your fat gob shut.

DOSS: What are you going to do? Hit me in front of everyone?

TOBY: What, you think I bloody won’t?

BRAD: Give it over, mate.

TOBY: You stay out of it.

MARGARET: You, ya bloody galloot, pick on someone your own size.

MARGARET and BRAD now wrestling with TOBY.

BRAD: You’ll be sorry in the morning.

TOBY: You going to make me? Come on then…

DOSS: I’m getting the kids and going home.

BRAD: Steady on. I’m not going to fight you.

TOBY: Bugger ya. I need a drink. Bugger the lot of ya.

4(o)

ANNOUNCER Time for the fireworks everybody. Take up your positions for the great tank battle. Place your bets. The green tank is MIM and the red tank is guess who, our favourite pinko ratbag. I di’n’t say that. Yes I did. No bugger orf…what?

4(p)

M.I.M.’s Christmas Tree
(To the tune of O TANNENBAUM)

The green tank called Mt Isa Mines
The red tank called Pat Mackie
The green tank fired, back fired the red
But there was no one laughing.
And when both tanks went up in smoke
Then no one thought it was a joke
Tonight we’re trying to be friends
We’re foes the morning after.

MINER: Worst bloody fireworks yet.
VINCE: Bloody worst as last year.

$4(q)$

**Punchin’ Through**  
*(To the tune of SILENT NIGHT)*

TOBY: *(drunken singing)*
Punchin’ left, punchin’ right  
Punch all day, punch all night  
Punchin’ at A – W – U  
Punchin’ at the Company too  
Punch-in’ till we win through  
Punch on till we win through.

**Can You Hear the Silence**  
© Janis Balodis March 2007

Did you hear the silence  
In the padlocking of the mine gate  
Did you hear the silence proclaim  
In the laying of the blame  
Can you hear the silence  
On the children’s empty plates  
When a man can’t feed his family- what a shame  
Can you hear the silence  
Can you hear the sound of smug indifference.

Did you hear the silence  
In the whisperings of rich men’s law  
Did you hear the silence called  
To order by the judge’s gavel  
Can you hear the silence  
Yes but only if you’re poor  
Then a man can’t expect to be heard at all  
Can you hear the silence  
Can you hear the sound of money’s influence.

Did you hear the silence  
Of the stoic wife at night  
Did you hear the silence creep  
Can you hear the silence  
Waiting at the door  
So as not to wake her husband crying in his sleep

Can you hear the sound  
Of a family tearing apart  
Can you hear the silence roar  
Can you hear the silence  
Of so many breaking hearts
When a man says he’s not coming home no more  
Can you hear the silence  
Can you hear the sound of their resilience  

Can you remain silent  
As families leave a town in pain  
Can you remain silent  
As good people are ground down  
Losing everything bought on the hire purchase plan  
Thought we’d never have to go through this again  

We can not be silent  
We cannot be bought  
We will not be silenced any more  
You will hear no silence  
You will hear the sound of our defiance.

Sequence 5  
The Compulsory Conference

5(a)

SLIDE: 6th January to 15th January, 1965 –  
A compulsory conference was convened in Mt Isa at the Buffaloes’ Club.  
In attendance – Mr. Foots for MIM, Mr. “Squizzy” Williams for the AWU, (and QTLC representatives of 13 other unions).  
It was presided over by Commissioner Harry Harvey.

NOTE: This sequence carried just by the male principals and MALE CHORUS, though RED CAP may need to be played by one of the women though it might be better if FOOTS is.

The MINERS are rocking and banging on the car. HARVEY is there watching.  
MR FOOTS arrives and the MINERS fall silent watching him walk by and through them to HARVEY and shake his hand.

HARVEY: G’day Mr Foots.

FOOTS: Commissioner Harvey. Who’s in there?

HARVEY: Mr. Williams, I believe, of the AWU being greeted by his members.

WILLIAMS takes the opportunity to get out of the car. The MINERS start jeering him, derisive slow hand clap as he makes his way through them to HARVEY and FOOTS. One of the men (Italian accent) follows him chanting “Fascist. Fascist...”  
WILLIAMS makes his way past HARVEY and FOOTS with barely a nod.

WILLIAMS: What’s all the fuss about? You had Mussolini in Italy.
MINER:  
(Accent) Yeah, we hang the bastard.

WILLIAMS: That’s the kind of pseudo-Canadian-gangsterism, that I’d expect to be running rampant here in Mt Isa.

FOOTS: Could be an interesting ten days.

*The CHORUS softly singing* “Ten days, ten days, ten days…”

*RED CAP arrives at the meeting. (Cheers??)*

5(b)

WILLIAMS: Commissioner Harvey, I’m stating categorically, if Mackie and his mob are allowed to remain at this conference, the official AWU delegation will walk out.

FOOTS: I believe the Company has made its position very clear, that it has no intention of negotiating with any unofficial deputation of miners.

HARVEY: The conference cannot proceed while there are persons here who have no right to be present. I will have to ask those persons to leave.

RED CAP: Mr. Commissioner, we have been delegated to represent the AWU rank and file at this conference because only we have been elected to do so.

HARVEY: I cannot lose sight of the fact that you must represent somebody.

RED CAP: The men are angry that this fellow, Mr. Williams here, is claiming to represent them. He would not be able to if the matter were put to the membership vote, and he knows it.

HARVEY: Nevertheless, you are not accredited representatives of the Union.

RED CAP: I have a petition with hundreds of workers’ signatures requesting that the delegation be heard on their behalf.

HARVEY: I ask you to leave the hall.

*RED CAP leaves. Joins the MINERS who watch proceedings from a distance.*

**Ten Days**

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CHORUS

Ten days ev’ry morning
Ten days each afternoon
Ten days very boring
Ten days hot air balloons.
Ten days fro and toing
Ten days not much doing
Ten days ten days ten days
5(c)

HARVEY: I could not officially permit you to sit in on the conference, but I’m prepared to meet anyone and listen to anyone. At the very least that is being scrupulously fair to the rank and file.

RED CAP: You want to be scrupulously fair, convene a meeting of the rank and file so that you can see with your own eyes who they want to represent them at the conference.

HARVEY: We are making good progress with the written contract.

RED CAP: It’s taken you three days to come up with an agenda and it has 23 items on it. When will you get to the other 22 points?

HARVEY: I believe if the men were to return to work -

RED CAP: The men never left work; they were locked out by the Company.

HARVEY: That may be strictly true but it is hardly helpful at this point of time. If the men are persuaded to return on a written contract, I give you my word that the other points of contention will be negotiated through arbitration.

RED CAP: Harry, you’ve got me all wrong. I don’t persuade them to do anything. And I have no authority to negotiate anything. I’m just one bloke with one vote. The men vote on everything, at properly run meetings. We start with an agenda and we get through it.

CHORUS:
Ten days written contracts
Ten days yawn bloody yawn
Ten days you scratch my back
Ten days I’ll scratch yours

5(d)

HARVEY goes from group to group. RED CAP intercepts him.

WILLIAMS: The AWU is reasonably satisfied with the negotiations on the new written contracts. At last it ties down the Company to something definite as to rates and conditions and promises increased money for our members.

RED CAP: Promises? How much money? Was there any discussion of actual increases?

FOOTS: The Company will make no economic concessions of any kind until the financial results, ending June 1965 are available. Obviously if trading
results are poor, the Company will be forced to seek some relief from the prosperity or bonus payments.

RED CAP: Well there goes the three pounds a week prosperity bonus.

FOOTS: Mr Commissioner, these rumours are to be deplored. They indicate a regrettable lack of faith in the Commission’s judgment and integrity.

CHORUS:
Ten days telling whoppers
Ten days who needs proof
Ten days price of copper
Ten days through the roof

5(e)

HARVEY: Regrettably, agreeing to the terms of the written contract has taken far longer than expected. There are a couple of issues we should address; the recognition of the Mt Isa delegation as the only negotiating body –

WILLIAMS & FOOTS: No.

HARVEY: And the reinstatement of Mackie.

WILLIAMS & FOOTS: No.

HARVEY: The other points on the agenda –

FOOTS: As they are essentially dependant on the Company’s financial position, discussion of them now is useless.

WILLIAMS: As soon as the men return to work, with the new written contract, the AWU will expect to begin negotiations on them.

HARVEY: How soon can the Company expect them to return?

WILLIAMS: I have been asked to address a meeting of the men in the morning. They assured me I would get a fair hearing. I will be making a recommendation.

5(f)

SLIDE: Saturday 16th January 1965 –
Edgar “Squizzy” Williams arrived at the Star theatre to address an official meeting of AWU members.

The MINERS wait silently. RED CAP is sitting at the very back of the hall. WILLIAMS comes forward, a little unnerved by the dead quiet.
WILLIAMS: I declare this meeting open. This has been a big ten days in Mt Isa. We have made some important gains and there are more to come.

*HARVEY steps forward to join him. Slow handclaps, boos and jeers begin.*

**CHORUS:**
Ten days endless meeting
Ten days of endless words
Ten days f-explicative
Ten days it’s b- absurd
Ten days ten days ten days \ 

**CHORUS:** We want Mackie! *(chanting begins)*

WILLIAMS: I was promised a fair go… Commissioner Harvey is my guest…

*HARVEY reaches for the microphone and even more pandemonium ensues, all of the above and foot stamping and whistling. The noise is deafening and continuous as both HARVEY and WILLIAMS are howled down.*

**RED CAP** is urged forward by the mob. He is handed a chair and encouraged to go up to join WILLIAMS and HARVEY.

RED CAP walks down holding the chair aloft as in the famous photograph. The **MINERS** are now cheering him till he puts his chair down next to WILLIAMS and reaches for the microphone.

**WILLIAMS** refuses to surrender the microphone provoking another round of crowd howls and even abuse.

**HARVEY** makes for the exit.

WILLIAMS: I declare this meeting closed and unconstitutional.

*Even as WILLIAMS departs to further cheering and jeering. “Go on, piss off…”*

**RED CAP:** Who do you want to chair this meeting? Do you want “Squizzy” Williams?

**MINERS:** NO!

**RED CAP:** Do you want Harry Harvey the workers friend?

**MINERS:** NO! WE WANT MACKIE! WE WANT MACKIE! WE WANT MACKIE!

Reprise of: **Iron in the Soul**

**MALE CHORUS:**
Iron in the soul is courage
Iron in the soul gives strength
With iron in the soul we’ll punch on through
United to the end.
RED CAP: *(Speaks over the singing.*) The Arbitrations puppet show is over, and every man and woman here could see the strings. Neither Harvey nor the Government, is going to force the Company to negotiate. Recognition of our local Union movement is out. My reinstatement is never to be considered. There is only one line of action left to us, and that is to dig in for a very long fight. Things are going to get tough now but if we hang strong and keep on punchin’, we can win. But we need money and lots of it. We need to elect representatives, good talkers, fellows like John McMahon of the TLC, to go on a fund-raising tour to the southern capitals, to talk to our fellow workers in the Trade Union movement, and give them the low down on this dispute. Our brothers in Broken Hill have already pledged two thousand pounds a week and they have invited me to come down and speak to them. But we need to go to Adelaide, and Melbourne, and Sydney and Brisbane. The Company is against us, the AWU is against us, the State Government is against us, the press is against us. They can call us any names they like. That doesn’t make them right. This can happen again, and it can happen anywhere, at any time. This is not just our fight. We are fighting for all workers and it is your iron will that can win this. And when we win, we will win for all workers, the right to be heard in the workplace, and the right to a fair deal. Now is the time to keep on punchin’. Keep on punchin’.

CHORUS: KEEP ON PUNCHIN’. KEEP ON PUNCHIN’. KEEP ON PUNCHIN’.

Sequence 6
Police State

SLIDE: Wednesday 27th January 1965 – Queensland becomes a police state. Police were given the power to:
1. Stop any person entering or leaving Mt Isa;
2. Arrest any person without a warrant;
3. Enter and search any building in Qld without a warrant;
4. Seize any vehicle, banner, placard, or any machine used for producing written material or distributing it.
Fines of 100 pounds and six months imprisonment for defying a police order under the regulations.
Offenders were to be tried in Brisbane.

MARGARET: When we became a police state, it was like it had rained mullet. Stopped the town it did. The dogs in the street stood amazed. How were the four or five police we had going to do all that and why? They had to live here. United the whole town against the government. Nothing was different and then this. They sent twenty extra police; most of them in their idea of plain clothes. Grey trousers, white shirts, ties. Might as well have Special Branch stamped on their foreheads. I suppose the idea is to stop Mackie coming back. They’d arrest him for sure. Mackie has been gone since the meeting that “covered Mt Isa in a red stain”. “The end of democracy and free speech”. What a load of tripe. “He should have let Harvey speak.” He didn’t stop him. We did. We all did. I was there
yelling as hard as anyone. Maybe he could have stopped us. Then maybe this would be over. The men back at work with written contracts. We’d have an extra three pounds a week. Mackie wouldn’t be back at work though. Would that matter? He’s not here now and he should be. There’s already rumours going round he won’t be back. Maybe that’s for the best, for him and for us.

The Heart Knows
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ELIZABETH:
I met Mackie in Melbourne
He was wearing his famous red cap
There had been so much written about him
I went to see how much was made up.
He wasn’t a demon or tyrant
I tried to imagine him tough
Fire burned in his words, I saw in his eyes
A man who’d had his share of enough.

MARGARET: I had those Nazi bastards in my house. Barged in no beg your pardons. Terrified the kids and the cat. Would not take my word for anything. “Why aren’t you looking for Mackie in Melbourne? The news reporters can find him. He’s even been on the television.” Bloody galoots turning my house upside down. Searching through the kids toys. For what? Turns out they’re looking for the damned Gestetner machine for printing pamphlets. Why would I have the Gestetner? I’ve got kids. I’m not that stupid. We would’ve followed Mackie anywhere but why isn’t he here running this whole damn dispute? This whole police state thing is not right.

ELIZABETH:
He didn’t come to me for shelter
Or to keep him safely and warm
He refused to countenance danger
There’s no reason for fearing the storm.
He knew how to travel the oceans
And he crossed the desert to me
He could read the stars, I knew by his touch
We both shared the same sweet memory.

The world turns, the tide flows
The moon’s blood is the sea
Show no fear the heart already knows
Blood soon learns to believe
The heart knows how to be.
MARGARET: It turns out the police were ready to grab Mackie in Brisbane but he got a tip off and got off the plane in Sydney. And the next bit of police pantomime was that another Union leader, John McMahon was not allowed to return to Mt Isa from Brisbane. This is Queensland we’re talking about, not the Soviet Union. So he buys a ticket to Darwin and they let him on the plane even though it’s scheduled to stop at Mt Isa. They wouldn’t let you do that in the Soviet Union. In the air over Queensland, the pilot is ordered to put down in Longreach, where eventually John McMahon is off the plane. He wasn’t a criminal, he had done nothing wrong, he wasn’t charged with anything. This is not a young man, he had white hair, but he’s not allowed to go home, to his wife, where he’d lived for years, where his family had grown up, supposedly in a free country. A big crowd of us waited at the Mt Isa airport. With the police. The airport workers all had red caps on for a joke. Mackie was supposed to be on the same plane but no one knew where he was.

MARGARET: He told me later he’d been playing hide-and-seek with ASIO in Sydney. Some kid put on a red cap and every now and then walked in front of the windows at the wharfies’ Union Hall.

SLIDE:  Monday 1\textsuperscript{st} February –
The police regulations were lifted. Commissioner Harvey was ordered to return to Mt Isa to convene another compulsory conference between MIM and the Unions.

MARGARET: As soon as the Government ban was lifted Mackie popped up like a rabbit out of a hat at in the Bull Ring of the Isa Hotel. Beer flowed like water and the next day Mc Mahon returned home a hero. Mackie was soon off again. At least money was flowing in to the Women’s Auxiliary. It was while Mackie was away, the AWU executives called an official Sunday meeting. They were worse than the police, checking everyone’s union ticket at the door. Only AWU members allowed. No women, no townspeople. We had to wait in the street. Mackie wasn’t even there and the men still voted six to one against a return to work on contract. We’re not dummies. We can think for ourselves. You stand your ground and you fight to the end. When Mackie came back next time, he turned up with a woman from Melbourne on his arm. They reckon she bought him a red Mini Minor, with a cheque, before she left town. It’s all right for some.

\textit{WOMEN’S CHORUS sings a reprise refrain of The Heart Knows.}
\textit{They dance separately, donning red caps.}
\textit{ELIZABETH and MACKIE come together and dance as a couple.}

The world turns, the tide flows
The heart knows how to be.
Sequence 7
Picketing and Shit Lists

SLIDE: Wednesday 17\textsuperscript{th} February 1965 –
MIM re-opened the mine gates and announced they will remain
open until a complete workforce returns.

7(a)

FOOTS announcement is set to the same music as The Letter.

FOOTS:
The Board of Directors
Of Mount Isa Mines
Has made the decision
To re-open the gates
At 8.00 in the morning
On Feb seventeen.
We will give a job back
To any employee
Who was on our books
Last December fourteen.

It’s a positive gesture
By MIM to
Overcome the deadlock
And end this dispute.
Our gates are now open
If you aren’t on strike then
Your job is (now) waiting
So return to work.

RED CAP: As far as our AWU executive is concerned this dispute no longer exists
and relief payments will no longer be paid from February 24\textsuperscript{th}. By
opening the gates, the Company reckons you are no longer locked out.

MARGARET: What about you, Pat?

FOOTS: Mackie was dismissed before that date so he can’t be re-employed.
There’s no work for him! But there’s no other limit as to the time or
number of men we need to keep this mine open.

7(b)

DOSS: What are you doing?

TOBY: Our Union says we should go back to work.

DOSS: Will the other men go back?

TOBY: I can’t worry about them. We need the money.
DOSS: We’ve stuck it out this far. I can manage.

TOBY: We should all be going back.

DOSS: Wait and see first. Don’t stick your neck out.

7(c)

SLIDE: Wednesday 17th February 1965 –
409 Award employees returned to work
30 men underground (4 miners)
No police
35 pickets.

Counting Song
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CHORUS:
Counting the days
Mounting to weeks
Since we last got paid

Counting the men
Friends we once had
Now we call them scabs.

Counting and counting
More every week.
Counting the cost,
Did we overreach?
Can we ever win?
Have we already lost?

RED CAP: We need fifty pickets at the gates every morning, like clockwork, you can’t be late. There will be a roster and you’ll get a card. It’s a badge of honour, to be marked every morning you attend. And no violence. Don’t give the coppers or the press reasons to accuse us of intimidation. No violence and no threats.

FOOTS: Organise buses so the workers don’t have to run the Union gauntlet. And only publish the total number of men back at work. It looks better.

RED CAP: Look into the faces of those men going back. Their own consciences must tell them they are doing wrong. And just in case put their names up on a shit sheet. It’s a surefire way of arousing shame in any scab or freeloader.
7(d)

SLIDE: Wednesday 25th February 1965 –
441 Award employees returned to work
33 men underground (6 miners)
30 police
60 pickets.

CHORUS:
Counting the lies
Outright untruth
Naked terror runs wild

Counting the names
On the shit sheets
Men who have no shame

Counting and counting
More every week.
Counting the cost,
Did we overreach?
Can we ever win?
Have we already lost?

RED CAP: Justice Hanger of the Industrial Court in Brisbane, refuses to deal with my application for reinstatement so long as a substantial number of mine employees refuse to return to work. He refuses to decide whether he or the Commission should ever hear it. He says it’s “as if Mackie has appealed to the referee while his supporters stand on the sideline brandishing cudgels.” Sounds like he has a mighty low opinion of you fellows.

7(e)

LAZLO: What you doing here?

TOBY: Having a beer just like you.

LAZLO: You don’t see you name on the door, on shit sheet?

TOBY: No. Why don’t you go and see if it’s there?

LAZLO: You not welcome here.

TOBY: There’s no law against it. I reckon my money is as good as yours. And at least I earned it.

LAZLO: You a focken scab.
TOBY: The way I see it you blokes are the scabs. Our Union said this dispute is over. Go back to work. That’s all I’m doing.

LAZLO: I tell you what scab is. When God finish with snake and toad he have rubbish poison left to make the scab. Two-legs animal with corkscrew soul and glue backbone. When scab walk down the street, men turn his backs, all the angel weeps, and even the devil shut his gate to keep scab fockin out. Not one man have fockin right to scab if there is one rope long enough to hang himself like fockin Judas. This shadow of man who takes the bread and butter from the wife and little ones of other men, he take the name scab to the grave.

7(f)

SLIDE: Wednesday 3rd March 1965 –
488 Award employees returned to work
54 men underground (22 miners)
30 police
100 pickets.

MARGARET: Doss, hang on a minute. Hang on. What’s the rush?

DOSS: I didn’t think you’d want to talk to me.

MARGARET: I wanted to know how things are going.

DOSS: Now that my husband is a scab?

MARGARET: I didn’t say that.

DOSS: But you think it. And you yell it every morning down there at the gates.

MARGARET: They’ve stopped us picketing down there now. So it’ll get easier.

DOSS: I didn’t want him to go back. I told him to wait.

MARGARET: It’s not too late.

DOSS: For what?

MARGARET: For him to pull out. Stop going back.

DOSS: He’s not going to do that.

MARGARET: The men go back. I’ve seen it before. If it was left to the women we’d never go back.

DOSS: No.

POLICE: You two, move along.
MARGARET: Where do you get off? Can’t women talk about scones anymore?

POLICE: Not under the new regulations.

MARGARET: Can we talk about our operations and our scars?

POLICE: Move along.

DOSS: My husband’s on your side. He’s a scab.


DOSS: Yes sir. Three bags full sir.

MARGARET: Heil Hitler.

DOSS: Heil Hitler.

_The women do Nazi goose-step._

POLICE: Not together. Split up.

7(g)

**SCAB SONG** (reprise of *Can You Hear the Silence?*)

TOBY:
Did you hear the silence
Of the frightened men in the mine bus
Did you hear the pickets roar
As we lay hiding on the floor
Is a man a coward
If he knows he’s had enough
And can’t punish his own family any more
Can you hear the silence
Can you hear the sound of our compliance.

7(h)

**SLIDE:** Wednesday 10th March 1965 –
522 Award employees returned to work
83 men underground stockpiling ore
50 police
300 pickets

MIM: The Company has decided to invite applications for employment from all former employees. Our offer is no longer confined to employees who had been on the books on December 14.
MARGARET: Does that mean Pat Mackie can apply now?

MIM: We would rather close the mine permanently than re-employ that man.

RED CAP: Listen up. Time is on the Company’s side now. My reinstatement seems a hopeless case. It should be the last thing on the list, and if we can settle this dispute without it -

VINCE: I don’t talk alone when I say we will rather see the fockin mine close than go back without Mackie. Don’t tell my missus that I swear.

RED CAP: The AWU has practically asked the Government to introduce anti-picketing regulations. The AWU which claims to represent us, and claims to be acting on our behalf in our interests, has said to the Government, picketing will have to be outlawed before the dispute can end. Why? The picket lines are discouraging many men from returning to work. That’s what picket lines do.

7(i)

SLIDE: Wednesday 17th March 1965 –
550 Award employees returned to work
100 police (Extra police were flown in overnight)
250 pickets

CHORUS:
Counting police
Like a disease
Law unto themselves

Counting each yard
They push us back
Until we are barred

Counting the fines
That must be paid
For crossing the line

Counting who stays
Counting who goes
Lose more hope each day

Counting and counting
More every week.
Counting the cost,
Did we overreach?
Can we ever win?
Have we already lost?

Shine a light into the darkness
Light can pierce the heart of stone
Stones surrender up their riches
Rich men claim them for their own
Man always must fight for fairness
Till wisdom is the rule of law.

7(j)

SLIDE: Wednesday 17th March 1965 –
Police were given powers to:
1. Prevent picketing within half a mile of the mine gates.
2. Prevent anybody compelling any miner not to work or terrorizing any miner.
3. Disperse gatherings of two or more people in the street.
4. Arrest without warrant.
5. Enter and search any home without warrant.
6. Seize any suspect printed material and any printing device.

SLIDE: Wednesday 25th March 1965 –
660 Award employees returned to work
100 police
250 pickets

That sequence ends suddenly with SFX of a rifle shot.
Whispers at the picket line. “Someone has been shot.” “A boy has been shot.” “Did the police shoot someone?” Etc.

MARGARET: Where is that bastard, Mackie? Where is he?

She finds him

MARGARET: It’s all your fault. The death of that boy.

VINCE: Come on Margaret, was accident. Young blokes muckin around with loaded rifle.

MARGARET: Let me go. He caused this.

VINCE: You cannot blame Pat for this. Everyone is upset for the shooting.

RED CAP: Let her be. Let her have her say.

MARGARET: The rifle was loaded because of us. This is how far the trouble has gone. A boy. Killed. They were the best mates in the world. How will the other two… Can you even imagine what is happening in that family, the three families? You’ve never had children. And this is not the first killing. There have been men driven to suicide. Good men. Leaving their families with what? This is worse than anyone imagined. Do you have any idea when or how it’s going to end? Can you tell us? You don’t know, do you? Or care. You’re not the messiah. You’re just in this for
the glory. You don’t care what’s happening to us. How many have to die? How many will be enough? We’re eating each other.

Sequence 8

It’s over!

SLIDE: Friday 26th March 1965 –
The Federated Engine Drivers & Firemen’s Association were ordered to return to work by the Industrial Court and their State Management Committee in Brisbane. Ore that was stockpiled underground was now winched to the surface.

Everybody Pays
© Janis Balodis June 2007

COMPANY:
Every boy
Is a mother’s son
His death is far too high a price
When day is done.
Any man
Says he can’t go on
Deep in his soul knows he will pay
His whole life long.

Everybody pays
No one gets off free
At journey’s end
The ferryman collects his fee.

Pat Mackie addressed miners and their families in the Star Theatre

There are 5 RED CAPS, addressing the meeting in turn. As each one finishes talking s/he removes their red cap, OR they do it together as the last one finishes.

RED CAP: The business of today’s meeting, is to discuss the Union’s terms for a return to work. We are stuck with the Government’s anti-picketing regulations. Mobs of imported police have made it impossible for us to put up a fair fight.

RED CAP: We could stay out another year or eighteen months, but by that time the mine will have a complete workforce and you militant guys will not be there.

RED CAP: The best thing to do, the only thing, is to go back, get your jobs back, and fight on from inside the fence.
RED CAP: A guarantee of no victimization should be the only condition demanded. I advise you all to go back to work.

RED CAP: I am not going to ask for my own reinstatement. The final decision is yours.

COMPANY:
Every battle
Be it lost or won
Someone stands up for what’s right
Against what’s wrong.
Any one (who)
Takes life easily
Their day still comes
When they must cross the darkening sea.

Everybody pays
No one gets off free
At journey’s end
The ferryman collects his fee.

It’s you and me
I’m fighting for
And we will say how much we’ll give
Before we take no more.
Everybody pays
No one gets off free
At journey’s end
We all must cross the darkening sea.
(At journey’s end
The ferryman collects his fee.)

Epilogue

SLIDE: Monday 29th March 1965 –
746 Award employees returned to work.

SLIDE: Thursday 1st April 1965 – in Brisbane
Commissioner Harvey presided over negotiated terms of settlement between MIM and the Unions.
MIM agreed to take all the Craft Unionists back but reserved the right to consider each AWU member’s application individually.
Mr Williams for the AWU Executive agreed to MIM’s terms.

SLIDE: Wednesday 7th April 1965 –
All the Unions agreed to return to work the next day.

BRAD: You might say we lost the battle but won the war. Within six months we got 90% of what we fought for. Every two years we sat down with the
bosses to collectively bargain for wage increases and conditions. And there wasn’t a major work stoppage at Mt Isa Mines for about 30 years.

SLIDE: Pat Mackie drove out of Mt Isa in the first week of April 1965 never to return. He lost his case for re-instatement. There were 44 other miners who were never to be re-employed, no reason given.

DOSS: No one can tell me Mackie didn’t do a lot of good for Mt Isa. It was hard for some people but it was good for others. Because families had to collect vouchers for food some kids got properly fed. There wasn’t the money for drinking.

TOBY: Once a scab always a scab. But there were hundreds of us. It split the town for years. Some blokes couldn’t take it. After a few years they had to leave town to find a friend, that’s what was said. We left when we’d made our dough. That was always the plan.

MARGARET: We followed Mackie like a god and he betrayed us. Some of us lost everything. Lots of lives were ruined by it. I’ll never forgive him.

LAZLO: There was 44 men never to be employ again. No reason was give. These 44 on blacklist. 44 ordinary blokes, who maybe at meetings, stand up and say what they think. AWU goes to court but no-one wants these men. Not Union, not Company. We never get back in that gate. But I stay. I still do okay. Mt Isa grow up at that time.

SLIDE: Late 1972
Pat Mackie was awarded $30,000 damages for libel against the Sydney Daily Telegraph.
He still lives in Sydney with the woman he met during the dispute.

(Fairness and Wisdom)

COMPANY:
Shine a light into the darkness
Light can pierce the heart of stone
Stones surrender up their riches
Wisdom’s price is more than gold
Man always must fight for fairness
Lest wisdom should be overthrown.

End of Play
10. **ANALYSIS OF RED CAP**

This analysis of the adaptation of *Red Cap* is an investigation into genres, tone, performance and the medium-specific demands and potentials of theatrical production of a newly created work from multiple source texts. The framework for this analysis was derived from the analysis of the adaptation of *Perfect Skin* from a single source novel by a single owner. As this analysis shows, the framework itself needs to be adapted to allow for the different sorts of negotiations and considerations required to accommodate the demands of multiple sources and multiple owners. The section on the Commissioning Brief examines the particular legal restrictions, ethical concerns and obligations imposed upon the adapting author because of prior ownership rights of multiple owners, as well as considering the practical limitations that are determined by available and affordable resources. The interpretive possibilities offered by adapting multiple source texts as opposed to a single source text are investigated in the sections on Generic Context, Authorial Context and Theatrical Context with its emphasis on the medium-specificity of performance. As discussed in the analysis of the adaptation of *Perfect Skin*, the move from one medium to another involves implementation of the Mechanics of Narrative. However, as becomes evident in the analysis below, adapting multiple source texts requires a more subtle and supple calibration of “order,” “duration” and “frequency”. The sections on Adapting the Narrator Voice and Point of View identify the differences of approach and the increased sensitivity required to negotiate the conflicting demands of a number of narrating voices and multiple points of view. The analysis also examines how multiple perspectives offer a range of performance possibilities and allow for the use of a variety of performance languages and conventions. That these elements compete for our attention in a limited time/space continuum has implications for McFarlane’s (2007) concept of “adaptation proper” and raises the question whether merely satisfying medium-specific demands in re-working multiple source texts in itself provides an appropriate level of commentary that will allow the adaptation to emerge on its own terms.

The suite of tools derived from the analysis of the adaptation of *Perfect Skin* has been developed in response to the question: “What principles influence and determine the making of appropriate or relevant choices when adapting a source text?” The analysis of the adaptation of *Red Cap* from multiple source texts identifies and
examines the similarities and differences encountered in the processes and practice of writing the two play adaptations. Conclusions can then be drawn about the efficacy of the framework as providing a methodology for adapting other texts, single or multiple, and whether they are from fictional or factual sources.

10.1 The Commissioning Brief

Background

The principal commissioning body was the Queensland Music Festival which is a State Government funded biennial festival. Its charter is to run music events in regional centres throughout the state. The location and spread of festival events is determined by how successfully the Queensland Music Festival engages with Local Government Councils who are each expected to make a significant contribution. Mt Isa City Council had participated in the previous two festivals by facilitating large outdoor spectacles staged in a dry riverbed with the mine complex glowering in the background. Involving the choreography of mining and earthmoving machinery, these free events had been extremely successful and well attended. For Red Cap, Queensland Music Festival engaged La Boite Theatre as a partner so that the production could have a Brisbane season at the Roundhouse Theatre after opening in Mt Isa where it would be staged at City Hall.

At the outset there was no consideration of legal, ethical or prior ownership concerns as neither the Queensland Music Festival nor La Boite specifically commissioned an adaptation of any existing copyright texts. The Queensland Music Festival’s brief was for a music-theatre work based on the mining dispute of 1964 that could be performed in Mt Isa by and for that community; that this quintessentially Mt Isa story be told in such a way that it should also have resonance and appeal for a Brisbane audience; and that as well as a short season in Mt Isa it would play an extended season in Brisbane during the Festival as part of La Boite Theatre’s annual program. This co-production relationship between the Queensland Music Festival and La Boite Theatre was essentially to commission an original work based on an historical event. Queensland Music Festival would negotiate the participation and a financial contribution from Mt Isa City Council while La Boite Theatre undertook the delivery of the production in both locations.
As the senior partner in the relationship Queensland Music Festival reserved rights to comment and offer advice; however, decisions about specific content and form were to be determined by La Boite Theatre in consultation with the core creative team of Janis Balodis as writer, Iain Grandage as composer and the Artistic Director of La Boite Sean Mee, as director. At no point did Queensland Music Festival or La Boite Theatre formally refer to or consider *Red Cap* to be an adaptation of existing source texts in the terms of the definitions or discussion previously outlined in this document. It might be considered to more closely correlates to Sanders’ (2006) definition of “appropriation” in that “the appropriated text or texts are not always as clearly signalled or acknowledged as in the adaptive process. They may occur in a far less straightforward context …” (p. 26). That it can be considered an adaptation, employing the processes and practices of adaptation, is as a consequence of a decision I undertook for the purposes of this research. This decision to formally “adapt” the source materials uncovered in the research phase was further influenced by an emergent sense of obligation to the owners of the stories of the dispute, in particular to the workers and their families.

### 10.1.1 Constraints and Limitations

**Physical Resources**

As briefly outlined in Section 8.1.2 “Germinal Idea” above, the work was originally conceived as being in the form of popular, folk-opera or of an oratorio. The intention was that the text would be through-sung with featured solos and large “workers’” chorus numbers and making use of a number of choir formations such as a Women’s Choir, a Children’s Choir and a Men’s Choir. Initial discussions between Iain Grandage, Sean Mee and me were about giving voice to the women and children in the dispute, voices that are often not heard, especially as the women in Mt Isa had provided much of the logistical support in distributing food and welfare. Pat Mackie and Elizabeth Vassilieff (1989) devote a brief chapter in acknowledgement of “The Women of Mt Isa” in their diarised account, *Mount Isa – The Story of a Dispute:*

> During the Mount Isa dispute, a major part of the organization was done by the women … The women maintained morale by providing refreshments – sandwiches and cakes – and … by keeping the records with marvellous efficiency … long hours of tedious, unspectacular work, which was not noticed by the media. Yet these activities provided a backbone to the whole dispute (p. 248).
John Reynolds (1988) also mentions the success of the Women’s Auxiliary in his Honours dissertation; in particular “their support for the men’s struggle … was vital if rank and file militancy was to be sustained” (p. 103). And in Keith De Lacy’s (2002) novel Blood Stains the Wattle, one of the secondary characters is involved in the Women’s Auxiliary. Without the cooperation and support of the women and families the dispute could not have lasted as long as it did. The earlier notion of having a children’s choir seemed appropriate when research revealed that the Mines Christmas Party portrayed in Sequence 4 of manuscript of Red Cap above (Balodis, 2007, pp. 192-199), went ahead as planned after the men had been locked out; and that later in the dispute, school friends had sung at the funeral of a teenage boy killed in a shooting accident, an incident that was reported in the final draft as if by Greek Chorus in Sequence 7 (J) (Balodis, 2007, p. 215).

In determining what resources were available in both Mt Isa and Brisbane it soon became apparent that having a children’s choir would be impractical as the legal requirement is that there be two children’s choirs attending alternate performances. Rather than trying to coordinate separate male and female choirs in Mt Isa and Brisbane it was deemed more appropriate and manageable to procure the services of a large established community choir with the musical ability to learn new work quickly and large enough for there to be a rolling roster of singers available for the performances. The choir chosen for the Brisbane season was Canto Coro and its choir director Mark Dunbar became an intrinsic part of the production team. Besides training and conducting Canto Coro, Dunbar was the liaison and advisor to the choir assembled in Mt Isa.

Budget constraints

As exemplified in the adaptation of Perfect Skin, the costs of production play a major part in determining some of the limitations of the commissioning brief. Whilst its partners Queensland Music Festival and Mt Isa City Council would make significant contributions to the Red Cap production budget, La Boite Theatre was still constrained by the increased costs of having to produce a work that could be performed in two locations more than a thousand kilometres apart. In consultation with the creative team the decision was made that the core company would consist of five actor/singers and a band of five musicians including composer Iain Grandage as both player and the
Musical Director. Consideration of distance between venues and transport costs influenced the decision to build identical sets in each location despite Mt Isa City Hall being a proscenium arch stage and the Roundhouse Theatre being configured as a thrust stage. Though the set elements are simple - a utility car body and some bleachers to accommodate the choir - the different configuration of the theatre spaces in each venue had implications for the performances of the actors, discussed further below.

**Time delays**

Mt Isa City Council took ten months to make a firm commitment to the project as the dispute is still a contentious issue in parts of the community. Consequently, instead of having eighteen months to research, write and develop the project there remained barely nine months until the commencement of rehearsals. Sean Mee and La Boite Theatre thought that if the project were to proceed in the available time the commissioning brief would have to be re-negotiated. It was decided that the work be changed from the more complicated demands of sung-through music-theatre to a simpler form in which two-thirds would be songs linked by scenes of dialogue. This became necessary, as there would not be enough time to compose a longer music score after the researching and writing of the whole libretto. Songs on the other hand could be treated as discrete units of storytelling within an overarching structure, and if one third of the text was spoken not as much music needed to be written. A timeline was developed for the delivery of a series of treatments that identified the content and placement of songs. As discussed earlier in Section 8.1.5 Rough Scenario above, this approach facilitated the writing of some of the songs as the scenario was refined so that the choirs could begin learning the choral score as early as possible.

Whilst the need for re-negotiation of the commissioning brief was as a consequence of a timing issue and necessary in order to complete the project in the available time, it was achieved through the flexibility and willing participation of both the commissioning bodies and the creative team. Time is often itself a limited resource that requires careful management in creative enterprise. Significantly more time was available for the writing and development of the adaptation of *Perfect Skin*. Though there were early questions about the adaptation’s adherence to Jon’s point of view as handled in the progression of events in the novel (which the adaptation mirrored), legal restrictions of the commissioning brief did not allow for re-negotiation, regardless of
whether a change in the form of storytelling would have better satisfied the demands of medium-specificity and better addressed gaps in the narrative. In the adaptation of Red Cap, the form of the work was able to be altered substantially despite significant impacts on the performance outcome. However, the original creative compulsion and germinal idea were maintained and the same story told. From its inception, Red Cap was and remains a play for voices. It is about giving voice to the community and telling a part of our history that is all but forgotten.

10.1.2 Legal restrictions, ethical concerns and obligations to sources

Once an agreement is entered into the writer and other members of the creative team are not only bound by the laws of copyright and moral rights of the author of the source text, but also by the ethical considerations of actually undertaking what they agreed to do. Essentially this is not substantially to change the work or to misrepresent the work or its author or owner. By default, negotiation with a single owner such as Nick Earls of a single source text, whether it be a novel, a history or a memoir, ought to be simpler than having to negotiate with multiple owners of disparate materials.

In the case of Perfect Skin La Boite Theatre had a long-standing relationship with Nick Earls that the adaptation would closely transpose his novel to the stage. At one level this is the simplest, most straightforward undertaking with clear legal boundaries and obligations. It assumes that the popular success of the novel will translate to success at the box office for the adaptation. Whilst re-negotiation may be possible, the success of the novel and of previous adaptations often militates against it.

Management’s case

In contrast to Perfect Skin, the materials for Red Cap came from many sources. Gordon Sheldon was a local journalist employed as a publicist by Mt Isa Mines. His account Industrial Siege - the Mount Isa Dispute was published six months after the dispute ended in 1965. Though Sheldon is biased towards defending the actions of the management of Mt Isa Mines, he was an eye-witness to events. Despite never acknowledging his employment by Mt Isa Mines, Sheldon identifies instances when the dispute might have been resolved quickly by the exercise of good will on both sides, questioning rhetorically how events were so blindly allowed to spiral out of control:
Was the Mount Isa dispute inevitable? Why did it happen? Why did it become so complicated and difficult to resolve? Could it have been avoided? To the first of these questions the quick answer is ‘no’ … There is a final question: could the dispute have been halted during the headlong rush through eight months of disaster? The answer must be ‘yes’. (Sheldon, 1965, pp. 194 – 199)

Though Sheldon only asks these questions directly in his concluding summary, his book is a detailed examination of the issues that caused and exacerbated the dispute and the lost opportunities to resolve it.

**Mackie’s case**

Pat Mackie with Elizabeth Vassilieff (1989) published a diarised “history” twenty-five years after the event. Presented as a day by day factual description of events as they unfolded, it is nevertheless biased against the Company, the Queensland Government and the media in favour of the workers; whilst also seeking to present Mackie in the best light. The entry for “Thursday 10 December: Panic in Queensland Cabinet” responds to Premier Nicklin’s announcement of the State of Emergency:

The blame for this state of affairs he [Premier Nicklin] placed not with the Company, the Industrial Commission, the Union, not even the miners themselves, but with ‘one irresponsible individual acting independently of his Union, instigating miners to refuse to revert to contract work and misleading them into foolish action’ … Nicklin could not have been further out of touch with reality. The relationship between the ‘one individual’ and the miners was the exact opposite of what he described (Mackie with Vassilieff, 1989, pp. 78 – 79).

An uneven mix of bland reportage of facts, political editorial and rhetorical argument, the book attempts to tell the story of the dispute from the inside, from Mackie’s and the miners’ points of view.

**Workers’ case**

John Reynolds’ (1988) Honours dissertation is titled *An Examination of the Rank and File Militancy in Mount Isa in 1964/65*. He asserts that the books, pamphlets and papers written by journalists, unionists and academics within a few years of the dispute ending are either too narrowly concerned with what happened or with why it happened and that “the real story of the dispute has yet to be told” (Reynolds, 1988, p. 4). Reynolds’ (1988) concern is that the Mt Isa workers are taken for granted:

This paper is not directly concerned with either the events or the causes of the dispute … It seeks to explain why the Mount Isa workers were initially
prepared to take industrial action and why for 32 weeks they defied numerous attempts to end their struggle (p. 7).

Reynolds (1988) argues that the assertion of many commentators of the time, including Sheldon, that the dispute continued for so long only because of communist influence and the agitation of the charismatic Mackie, is simplistic. Moreover it “portrays the miners as not having minds of their own” (Reynolds, 1988, p. 55). Reynolds (1988) acknowledges that Mackie was influential in radicalizing the workers who had genuine grievances. However, in citing an interview he conducted with Bevan Foot (who was Secretary of the Mt Isa Trades and Labor Council at the time), Reynolds (1988) asserts the illogicality of one man holding sway over more than a thousand workers and their families in the full glare of the Australian media for eight months.

Triangulation of the data

It is evident that Sheldon, Reynolds and Mackie had access to and cited newspapers of the time, union newsletters, flyers, union meeting notes and minutes, photographs, posters, radio and television news reports. Reynolds also appears to have had a number of conversations and conducted interviews with union officials of the time. Keith De Lacy’s novel also bears the “intertextual” marks of his having had access to all of these primary and secondary sources. As an ex-AWU member and former Queensland Labor Minister, De Lacy would have had ready access to the Union officials who had been involved in the dispute. Pat Mackie and Elizabeth Vassilieff mentioned that Mackie had been interviewed by De Lacy and was later invited to the book launch. To invoke Casetti, at an intertextual level, all these texts confront each other, each “trying to maintain its peculiarity on the one hand and trying to connect to the rest of the network, on the other hand” (Casetti, 2004, p. 89).

The chronological data is not in contention and can be triangulated by reference to the multiple sources. For example, in an eight-page document that provides a background to the dispute and a “Chronological Survey” prepared for or by Sir John Egerton, the then President of the Queensland Trades and Labour Council (his name and office are written by hand on the front page), Mackie’s sacking is described thus:

Sheldon (1965) takes the opportunity to cast aspersions on Mackie’s honesty and character but not that Mt Isa Mines deliberately made a scapegoat of him:

Mackie referred to a conversation the day before with Mr. K Finlay, underground superintendent … had allegedly given Mackie a couple of days off … but subsequently Mackie admitted that the foreman had not in fact given permission… What ever was said, Mackie took the day off and the next day, October 23, he was dismissed … Thus Pat Mackie was ‘victimised’ and became the ‘issue’ – in the end the only issue standing in the way of settlement of the strike (p. 48).

Mackie (1989) differs in detail from Sheldon in claiming that he was merely exercising his rights as a Union representative to take time off to attend to Union business under the Industrial Conciliation and Arbitration Act. His account of his sacking recounts the sequence of events, the locations and conversations in colourful detail:

Just the same, I thought, going to shower and dress, the sack seemed a bit screwy … every Tom, Dick and Harry took a day off whenever he liked. Guys would either be on the grog, or sick from the day before, and nothing was ever said to them for blowing a shift, much less, ‘You’re fired!’ (p. 47)

Reynolds is not so much interested in why or how Mackie was fired as in the fact that eight local businessmen each contributed three pounds per week to provide him with a wage while the dispute continued. Like Sheldon he acknowledges that Mackie “became an important issue and … the major obstacle preventing a return to work” (p. 98). In De Lacy’s (2002) novel it is only revealed in retrospect in a Mt Isa hotel when the central character, Peter Mooney, explains the connection between Mackie’s expulsion from the Union in early November and its links to his sacking on the 23rd of October, two weeks after Mackie had humiliated a Union official at a meeting (pp. 171 - 176).

It is worth noting that triangulation of data is important as a research tool to the creative practitioner interested in establishing the veracity and accuracy of the relevant historical facts.

10.1.3 Moral obligations

Most of this material is in the public domain and could be appropriated and used to create an “original” play based on the “facts” of the dispute without direct
acknowledgement of the source materials or of prior ownership. Many original novels, plays and films that declare themselves as “fictions” are created in just this manner, by adapting unattributed historical source documents. De Lacy’s novel is one such example and Sander’s (2006) study teems with thought provoking examples of adaptations and appropriations from the literary canon.

As articulated earlier, many of the processes and much of the creative practice are the same whether writing an original work or an adaptation. It is this deployment of intertextuality and referencing that allows Stam (2005) to make the extravagant claim that all films are at some level adaptations, and by extrapolation that all creation is adaptation. Whilst allowing that all art comes from other art, the major difference as both Hutcheon (2006) and Kranz (2007) identify is that the adaptation “declares itself” as being directly based on or as substantially using existing source materials. Hutcheon is almost alone amongst adaptation theorists in acknowledging the legal constraints of copyright. However, Hutcheon’s (2006) concern is: “What does the law protect when it comes to adaptations?” (p. 89). No mention is made of the concept of moral rights and no consideration given as to how one might negotiate these legal constraints and obligations in the practice of adaptation. Apart from any legal agreement that has been entered into, it could be argued that the act of declaration brings different levels of ethical responsibility into play.

Permissions and conditions

The new “original” work is the expression of the personal vision and biases of the writer unfettered by considerations of prior ownership, historical accuracy, facts, fair representation or any obligation to tell the truth. With adaptation one is usually bound by agreements that grant certain permissions and conditions about how the owners’ property can or will be used. The agreement may legally be binding as in the case of Perfect Skin and many novel adaptations; or it may be a signed ethical agreement of fair and accurate representation of any information willingly tendered in the course of an interview or conversation. In some instances this agreement is in the form of a verbal assurance or disclaimer. Direct quotation or replication of materials in the public domain may also require legal clearance or granted permissions lest it breach copyright.
In adaptation, and by entering into these agreements whether they be written and signed or verbally negotiated, one is acknowledging that the reportage, accounts, personal recollections and anecdotes are owned by others under copyright law or under moral rights. Moral rights allow an “author” to object to any modification or use of their work or materials that would be injurious to the author's reputation. The adapting writer has then an ethical responsibility to honour the agreement and the conditions under which it was made. If the writer decides to take a different approach to the material, he or she is ethically obliged to re-negotiate the agreement under the new conditions at which point permission may be refused or withdrawn. Though this can seem restrictive, it is nothing more than fair and honest dealing.

10.1.4 Emergent sense of obligation in Red Cap

Sheldon’s and Mackie’s published accounts of the dispute favour either management or the workers, while De Lacy’s novel is told from the point of view of a union sympathiser who questions Mackie’s motivations. However, the media at the time vilified Mackie and other Union leaders as malign, power-crazed communist flunkies bent on destroying the Australian economy; and the townspeople were denigrated and disparaged as mindless dupes. Ex-union official Fred Thompson, formerly the Northern Secretary of the Amalgamated Engineering Union, willingly reported to me his version of events and of his recollections of Pat Mackie. For example, Fred Thompson volunteered that when Elizabeth Vassilieff came to Mt Isa for a visit she bought Mackie a red Morris Mini Minor, paying with a cheque, referred to in “Sequence 6” of the manuscript above (Balodis, 2007, p. 204). Tony McGrady, a former Minister and Speaker of the Queensland Labor Government, offered his recollections of the dispute as a young man of twenty years, making the point of Mackie’s toughness in dealing with those not committed to the cause by publicly calling for all the “gutless bastards” to come and stand to one side of the meeting hall. Needless to say, none identified themselves as such. McGrady was later affiliated with the Australian Workers’ Union and became the Queensland Parliamentary Member for Mt Isa.

Seeking assurances

However, the people I talked to in Mt Isa were generally more circumspect. Having all known families that had suffered damage or been destroyed by the dragging
out of the dispute, they wanted assurance that their story would be dealt with sensitively and seriously. In his analysis of *Community Stories: Aftershocks and verbatim theatre*, Paul Makeham (1998) asserts:

This type of work entails a fundamental obligation on the parts of the research team [here, writing team] and performance company to the people who give their stories. It is imperative, both in ethical and practical terms, that storytellers are confident that their personal experiences will not be exploited, distorted or disparaged in the process of being theatricalised (p. 170)

There remain few actual participants in the dispute in Mt Isa. Those I was able to talk to included Ron McCulloch, the former Mayor of Mt Isa City Council who as a young man had been working for Mt Isa Mines before the dispute. He had left town after the Christmas lockout, returning later to become an underground miner. Ann had been living in the town at the time and since. Having had no direct involvement she felt she could only make general comments. Rene used to live a few doors up from Mackie in 13 Butler Avenue. In a telephone conversation on the 9th November, 2006 she made the following observations:

The dispute was hard for some people but good for others. Drinkers’ wives were better off as the men could not afford to drink, so their kids got fed … Pat did a damn good job … No one can tell me he didn’t do a lot of good for Mt Isa.

A version of these words is spoken at the end of the play by Doss whose husband we have seen is a drinker:

No one can tell me Mackie didn’t do a lot of good for Mt Isa. It was hard for some people but it was good for others. Because families had to collect vouchers for food some kids got properly fed. There wasn’t the money for drinking (Balodis, 2007, p. 216).

Alan had been one of the miners to leave town early in the dispute to find work elsewhere. His wife Betty and their children joined him after Christmas of 1964, leaving town in a convoy of cars heading south. Betty said she did not like lining up to receive Union handouts. They also mentioned hardships that broke up families and trainloads of re-possessed cars and white goods leaving town. Joe had been an engine driver and a Union delegate during the dispute. He talked of Mackie being a tough man and a fighter; and of the sorry treatment of the men who first went back to work “because their families couldn’t take it anymore” (Notes from conversation, 10th Nov 2006). Kath described herself as: “Seventy-eight years old and still out of gaol.” Having “followed Mackie like a god” she felt betrayed and could not forgive him for giving up and
leaving town. “Some of us lost everything” (Notes from telephone conversation, Nov. 2006). Despite fighting to the bitter end herself, Kath had friends who had been called “scabs” for returning to work early because they were frightened of being in debt. The words the character Margaret speaks in the play: “If it was left to the women we’d never go back” (Balodis, 2007, p. 210) are a version of a statement made by Kath in the telephone conversation conducted with her in November 2006.

Authentic voices

It is not possible to mention here the entire salient details, idiosyncratic phrases, images and observations volunteered in various conversations, or to capture the emotion and passion with which people still talked about the dispute. However, these examples, these authentic voices demonstrate the direct value of their contributions to the script of the adaptation. There were also many personal stories and telling details that could not be accommodated but which inform and influence the approach to the event and provide a context for the choices made. John had been the manager of the Irish Club and recounted anecdotes of hiding the Gestetner machine from the police. Rolf had married during the dispute and took the opportunity to work underground when the workers returned to work. Don’s father had been the Postmaster at a small Post Office and his mother had taken in a couple of children from a mining family to ease the burden on them during the dispute.

These examples confirm the data. Moreover, these personal observations and anecdotal evidence conflict markedly with the media reportage of the time. The point most commonly made in conversation with people in or from Mt Isa was that the workers were never on strike. They were in dispute with management in both the workplace and the courts, and in dispute with their own union, the Australian Workers’ Union; and they were subsequently locked out and made to re-apply for their jobs. Like a recurring echo there was constant reference to the injustice meted out to “the forty-five”, including Mackie, who were never to be re-employed.

Untold stories and misremembered history

With the gathering of research materials the creative team increasingly felt a sense of obligation to telling these untold stories of the workers and their families within the context of the historical and published versions of the dispute. By presenting
a diversity of viewpoints we hoped to invoke the tensions existing between the different parties and their conflicting agendas. This obligation was not legally or morally prescribed but grew out of an increasing awareness of the lack of justice in the treatment of the workers and citizens of Mt Isa, and at the dishonest vilification of Pat Mackie by politicians of all stamps and by the media at large.

A further obligation was born of the need to correct commonly held misconceptions and for this all but forgotten or misremembered history to be more widely known. After forty years, people were either unaware of the dispute and its implications for Australian industrial relations; or it was misremembered as a big strike won by the workers when it was not a strike and the workers actually lost. This confusion is understandable as the issues in contention are both legalistic and complex and there were many failed attempts to resolve the dispute through negotiated settlement or by force. Consequently, if an audience were to understand what was actually at stake for the workers and their families, for Mt Isa Mines, for the unions, and for Government and the economy, it would need a bedrock of factual information. We could not take for granted that the audience would have the crucial background knowledge. Therefore it was decided to present this information as simply as possible and in chronological order so that it provided a bridging architecture for the work which was already beginning to form as clusters of fragments around particular dates and events.

Casetti (2004) suggests a new theoretical approach to adaptation is necessary “to re-program the reception of the story … [and] a character” (p. 85) such as Pat Mackie. As with most theorists, Casetti’s analysis is retrospective; and though it is a useful analytical tool for arriving at fresh readings of adaptations compared to their source texts, it offers no guidelines for how the re-programming of reception is to be achieved in practice. Making the theoretical meaningful in a practical sense demands going beyond the abstract to negotiate the legal obligations of copyright, or as is the case with Red Cap, to consider the implications of one’s decision regarding moral rights on the artistic outcome of the adaptation.
10.1.5 **Emergent commissioning brief**

Being able to arrive at the decision to adapt the multiple sources and honour the moral rights of the multiple owners during the research phase was made possible by the inherent flexibility of the original commissioning brief. One might conclude that an "emergent" or evolving brief allows for the most appropriate decisions about the overarching principle of the purpose and form of adaptation to be made, whether it be single-sourced from a novel or multi-sourced from historically researched materials. It requires that there be sufficient time and space to permit the interpretive possibilities of the brief to emerge rather than being narrowly prescribed at the outset, and for mutual trust and cooperation to exist within the creative team. It is at this stage of negotiation that one arrives at an ethical position that defines the levels of responsibility to the existing text or texts and to the owners; that is, how recognizable the source text is in the re-versioning of the work. Sanders is one of the few theorists to acknowledge that:

> What is often inescapable is the fact that a political or ethical commitment shapes a writer’s, director’s, or performers decision to re-interpret a source text. In this respect, in any study of adaptation and appropriation the creative import of the author cannot be as easily dismissed as Roland Barthes’s or Michel Foucault’s influential theories of the ‘death of the author’ might suggest (Barthes 1988; Foucault 1979) (Sanders, 2006, pp. 2-3).

However, as mooted on pp. 14-15 above, “questions of ownership and the attendant legal discourses of copyright and property law” (Sanders, 2007, p.4) are now being proactively welcomed as areas of study in new journals, *Adaptation* and *The Journal of Adaptation in Film and Performance (JAFP)*, and also at international conferences focused on adaptation studies: International Association of Adaptation Studies, and the Translation, Adaptation, and Dramaturgy Working Group of the International Federation for Theatre Research.

Sanders (2006) accepts as a given that ‘adaptation is frequently involved in offering a commentary on a sourcetext’” (p. 18) while McFarlane (2007), in his advocacy of “adaptation proper” argues that if the adaptation is to be accepted as “something both connected to its precursor and new in itself” (p. 9), it also *must* provide a level of commentary on the source text, which is enunciated through the narrative choices made. The only practical guidance McFarlane offers to the adaptation practitioner to achieve a bold and imaginative reworking of a source text is the invocation that the adapter do only what needs to be done to make a good example of
the work in the specific medium. McFarlane is not alone in ignoring the influential role of the commissioning brief on the outcome of the adaptation. This omission is more marked when one considers that film is funded in stages and there are many opportunities to either renegotiate the brief to accommodate genre, author and medium-specific demands, or to hire a different author who will deliver within the limitations of a prescribed brief. McFarlane’s demand for commentary can readily be acceded to if the commissioning brief is allowed to emerge.

Re-programming reception by re-negotiating the commissioning brief

At an intertextual level the adaptation confronts itself with the multiple source texts, “trying to maintain its peculiarity on the one hand and trying to connect to the rest of the network, on the other hand” (Casetti, 2004, p. 89). However, in this retrospective analysis, Casetti makes no acknowledgement of the existence of a commissioning brief or allowance for its constraints; but it is precisely at this early juncture that the practitioner must effectively negotiate the parameters and limitations of the possible intertextual relationship between the source texts and the medium-specific demands of the adaptation. During the move from one medium to another is the most appropriate time to negotiate whether or not there is opportunity to say things differently but also to say different things; to address gaps in the narrative and absences, and to provide a level of commentary. Furthermore, Casetti’s (2004) theoretical notion of re-programming the reception of the adaptation cannot be a “negotiation” that occurs after the event when the adaptation confronts the audience. In practice, the first stage of consideration given to the mode of re-programming an audience’s reception of the adaptation needs to be established during negotiations of the commissioning brief and be based on an assessment of the audience’s expectations and their previous knowledge.

As articulated above, this negotiation may also be influenced by a sense of obligation to honour the moral rights of the owners of source materials. The narrowly prescribed conditions imposed by the commissioning brief of Perfect Skin meant that there was an ongoing and unresolved tension between the aesthetic (medium-specific) and ethical demands of the adaptation. One could argue that this tension or conflict between medium-specific demands of the adaptation and the perceived obligations to the precursor text (usually a classic literary novel by a long dead author), is what is problematised in much of the theoretical comparative analysis and fidelity criticism of
adaptations. Whether directly stated or implied in critical reviews, the tension is inherent in such comments as “the book was better.”

Casetti (2004) asserts that it is the tension between the intertextual and reception levels that “creates an interpretation” (p. 89); and it is to the analysis of medium-specific rules and principles deployed in the creation of the adaptation of Red Cap that the study now turns.

10.2 Generic, Authorial and Theatrical Contexts

Cardwell (2007) asserts that acceptance of the adaptation’s “own agenda, its artistic choices, its emphases and voice” (p. 55) requires investigations into genres (generic context), tone (authorial context), and performance and the specific demands and potential of a particular medium (theatrical context). Nevertheless, Cardwell’s approach – as useful as it is – remains a kind of post facto analysis, after the creative practice has produced the adaptation. It is in effect speculation or theorising on what forces and influences were brought to bear on the source text in order that it should be presented in that manner. In Cardwell’s (2007) analysis of “authorial context” she acknowledges that BBC television classic-novel adaptations are a genre within which Andrew Davies has developed an identifiable and marketable style in his adaptations of various classic novels. However, Cardwell does not acknowledge the existence of the overriding authority of the BBC’s commissioning brief: neither of the conditions and limitations it might have imposed on Davies with regards fidelity to the source, nor of the latitude he may have been able to negotiate to “experiment” in his approach to the adaptation.

As argued above (and in the analysis of Perfect Skin), either the commissioning brief must allow the practitioner to explore and identify points of contention, questions, multiple perspectives, and to pursue investigations into genre, calibration of tone, and to consider the medium-specific demands of theatrical performance; or it is the practitioner’s exploration and consideration of these contexts that allows an appropriate commissioning brief to emerge.
10.2.1 **Generic Context**

There is no one specific genre of theatre making with which the adaptation of *Red Cap* is compliant. Given the multiplicity of sources, both written and oral, and the number of different “languages” - from the impenetrable jargon of the law, to the colloquialisms of the street, to the lyrical interiority of song - it seems both aesthetically and ethically appropriate that *Red Cap* manifests as a creative assemblage of fragments. An appropriate form needed to be found that allowed for engagement with the multiple perspectives and narratives in the history without reducing it to simplicity while still honouring the contributions of the invisible and unheard participants and owners.

**Verbatim Theatre**

It would be a fertile potential area of study to analyse how ‘verbatim theatre” is a form of adaptation or appropriation. However, there is not space in this thesis to examine in detail how *Red Cap* does not comply with the accepted understanding of the term “verbatim theatre” in the extensive theoretical discourse that exists on this topic. Given that the methods of gathering materials and the sense of obligation to the community of workers involved in the dispute are common to Verbatim Theatre, it is appropriate to identify what distinguishes *Red Cap* from this particular genre. Makeham cites Derek Paget’s widely accepted definition as “a form of theatre firmly predicated on the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews with ‘ordinary’ people, done in the context of research into a particular region, subject area, issue, event, or combination of these things” (Paget, 1987, p. 333 as cited in Makeham, 1998, p.169).

With particular reference to the play *Aftershocks* about the Newcastle earthquake, he asserts that verbatim theatre “consists entirely of stories gathered in interviews from real people who were directly affected [and that] although mediated by a complex process of recording, transcription, editing and performance, the authenticity of these accounts remains relatively uncompromised” (Makeham, 1998, p. 168).

Even in the broadest and most generous terms, *Red Cap* does not fit these definitions. It is largely comprised of original songs inspired by the stories of the Mt Isa community, the written accounts and available union records, and anecdotes recounted in conversation. There are fictional domestic scenes written to illustrate the effects of the dispute on fictional characters. The dialogue references actual personal stories, borrows phrases and verbal imagery but it is not a edited from a verbatim record.
Similarly the legalistic and union exchanges are edited distillations of analytical accounts of proceedings, which were written after the event. There was not time or inclination to peruse the complete Industrial Court transcripts and even if all union minutes were made available they are records of decisions rather than a transcript of all that transpired. An attempt was made to turn this complex and complicated political and legal analysis into accessible dialogue in court proceedings, as another layer text with its own language.

**Political theatre**

In many ways the script of *Red Cap* is an intertextual play-ground of multiple source texts where a number of “political” and “popular” conventions from the theatre and television are freely employed or referenced. *Red Cap* borrows from the political and popular forms of theatre developed by Piscator, Brecht and Eisenstein amongst others, and from their more contemporary successors from the 1970s and 1980s, Ariane Mnouchkine with Théâtre du Soleil and English theatre groups such as 7:84 and Joint Stock. Richard Drain (1995) asserts: “This double emphasis, on the work as constructed artefact, and on the frame of mind it seeks to create in its audience, recurs repeatedly in discussion of political theatre” (p. 76). Drain (1995) argues that what Eisenstein called “montage” are constructions that “may involve all kinds of variety show devices” intended to shake up and move the audience “into a new frame of mind” (p. 76). That is, the construction or assemblage is designed in such a way that the new context reprograms the audience’s reception of familiar elements. Brecht and Piscator put this idea into practice in the theatre in their use of songs, projections, film, comedy sketches, speeches, newspaper reports and documentary material. In so doing they created an “epic theatre”, defined by Martin Esslin (1959) as ‘loosely constructed in the shape of a serious revue: a sequence of musical numbers, sketches, film, declamation, sometimes linked by several narrators” (p. 23).

Mnouchkine highlights the complexity of this approach to playwrighting in interview with Denis Bablet (1974). Mnouchkine expounds on the problems of constructing unstructured materials:

We live in a world that’s terribly fragmented, scattered. What you learn of events is everything that happened at the end, at the same time, fragments (Cited in Drain, 1995, p. 124).
Mnouchkine differentiates by example between a linear construction of a chronological sequence of events leading up to the death of a worker, and a “fragmentary” construction that presents a number of situations involving two different workers in similar circumstances, leading up to but not showing the death of the first worker. This attempt to give a “vision of [the] epoch” is to “make us understand … why someone else got killed, because he goes through the same thing” (Bablet as cited in Drain, 1995, p. 124). Mnouchkine’s interest is not in the polemics of “Oppression with a big O” (Bablet as cited in Drain, 1995, p. 124). Rather, she seeks to create in her audience the frame of mind to question how and why one man oppresses another: “how does that show itself, or how does it betray itself, and how do you fight against it?” (Bablet as cited in Drain, 1995, p. 124). In its use of fragments, *Red Cap* attempts to invoke in its audience a similar questioning or critical frame of mind that Mnouchkine and Brecht sought to create in their audiences.

**Working class theatre**

In his explication of the style of plays produced by English theatre group 7:84, John McGrath (1981) teases out the different expectations of what he terms “bourgeois and … working class audiences” (Cited in Drain, 1995, p. 209). McGrath (1981) argues that working class audiences prefer an unambiguous “directness” of approach in performance and speech; they expect robust “comedy” and jokes, tuneful “music”, “emotion”, “variety” in its generic sense; it must have “effect” or impact, “immediacy” or currency, and “localism” in terms of content and sense of location. McGrath (1981) is mindful of the dangers of uncritically deploying these elements as a template in creating theatre works. For example, “that directness can lead to simplification … music can be mindless … effects for effect sake can lead to trivialization … immediacy and localism can lead to chauvinism” (Cited in Drain, 1995, p. 212). However, in taking a critical attitude to these features, McGrath asserts:

> They contain within them the seeds of a revitalized, new kind of theatre, capable of expressing the richness and complexity of working class life today, and not only working class life … they are some of the first sounds in a new language of theatre … we can work to extend [them] … by making more and more demands of them, by attempting bolder projects with them (Cited in Drain, 1995, p. 212).

With its sympathies aligned with the workers, it could be argued that *Red Cap* has much in common with this genre of theatre, deploying many of the features
identified by McGrath above, though without the overt socialism of much of 7:84’s work. Sixty percent of Red Cap is original music, sung by the actors or by the community choir which occasionally functions as a Greek Chorus and becomes involved in the action. It is part local history lesson, part Brechtian cabaret; there is a variety of short scenes, naturalistic domestic scenes interspersed with short comic sketches and monologues directly addressed to the audience; there is a searing love ballad sung by a mystery woman, choreographed dance, and Christmas carols with “cracked” lyrics reminiscent of television music game shows. The challenge was in how the use of these elements might affect the frames of mind and satisfy two different audiences, a working class audience in Mt Isa and the more middle-class audience at La Boite in Brisbane. The expectation was that the Mt Isa audience would engage with the play through their prior knowledge of the content and its localism, and that their frame of mind in relation to the events would be affected by the modes of delivery. Conversely the expectation in Brisbane was that the audience would engage with the theatricality of the production and have their frame of mind shifted by gaining knowledge of the content.

Theatre of uncertainty

The genre conventions, the use of fragments, the variety of performance styles, the montage construction of seemingly disparate elements, are not in themselves unfamiliar, nor is the germinal idea of Pat Mackie being played by all the actors at different times. Drain argues that Piscator’s epic theatre developed from a view “that the new ‘hero’ is not an individual but the epoch itself ... where the epoch comes to dramatic life on stage … with all the technical means he can muster (or afford)” (Drain, 1995, p. 77). In combination, the elements create a form of theatre that freely adapts many of the popular theatre conventions from the time of the dispute in the 60s to the present day. As argued in the analysis above, Perfect Skin also uses popular and familiar theatre conventions such as puppetry and direct address, and borrows from television sitcom and 80s music and film. Nevertheless, it is substantially in the classic realist mode and the audience’s expectation is that it will achieve unity and closure. If Perfect Skin could be said to belong to a “theatre of certainty”, it could be argued that by comparison, Red Cap belongs to a “theatre of uncertainty”.
If “form is content”, then in *Red Cap* the uncertainty of the outcome of the dispute is appropriately reflected in the uncertainty in the form’s apparent lack of centre, apart from the event and “epoch [coming] to dramatic life” (Drain, 1995, p. 77). However, this approach placed key demands on its audience to make sense of its whirl of fragments, of the elusiveness of a character played by many actors, and of the story being told in a number of theatrical “languages”.

**Use of “languages”**

Initially, members of the Mt Isa community expressed their reservations about the predominant language being music with most of the work being sung, either by single voices or by massed choir. In their estimation music-theatre equated with the frivolity of musical comedy which they feared would trivialize their experience. However, the appropriateness of adapting such content musically has a long and established precedent, from the cabaret-theatre of Brecht in the 1920s and 1930s, to Theatre Workshop’s *Oh What a Lovely War* in the 1960s, to large scale spectaculars such as *Les Miserables* and Australian works such as John O’Donoghue’s *Essington Lewis: I Am Work* in the 1980s. To continue the language metaphor, whilst the “accent” in many of the songs is Brecht/Weill, others reference Welsh hymns, pop ballads, more recent musical theatre as well as the patter songs of Gilbert and Sullivan, (arguably the distant progenitors of “rap”). The language of the domestic scenes is naturalistic dialogue based on appropriations of personal recollections, anecdotes and images. However, the context for these fragments is anything but naturalistic as they often cut across scenes of political satire of men posturing in court or in meeting rooms, as in Sequence 1. Similarly, there are many domestic fragments of increasing acrimony interspersed through the Christmas party scene that proceeds by a series of carols with parodic lyrics and the intermittent drunken ranting of an Irish MC. Within the moment they may require naturalistic playing, though Brechtian “showing” would suffice as in the overall context the interplay of elements borders on the surreal.

**Modes of delivery**

Conceived as a play for voices about a community of many ethnic groups and accents, the expectation was that the audience would link the different modes of delivery of the narrative to this diversity. An intrinsic language of the dispute was the legalese deployed by both Mt Isa Mines management and the AWU in the eight months
of protracted courtroom battles and arbitration hearings in Brisbane. Both sides engaged in subtle manipulations of the niceties of the law to confound and confuse the workers and their families in remote Mt Isa. To translate this language, Mackie’s skill was in organizing the workers, their families and townspeople to attend regular public meetings so that they could collectively decide upon a suitable course of action. Direct use of this language may lack theatrical sophistication but the intention was to capture the cynicism, bullying tactics and posturing buffoonery of men on both sides of the negotiations. The banality, brutality and destructiveness represented by these men were the arraigned forces against which the workers and their families struggled; the language of the law charted the terrain and boundaries of their lives for eight months.

The multimedia “language” of the power point slide was used to relate important plot developments and to provide a historical context for what was happening on stage. Again this is a familiar Piscatorian or Brechtian genre convention appropriate to the form of the play and made easier to achieve by advances in projection technology. Perhaps this convention was not readily accepted by some audiences because of the ubiquity of power point as a means of delivery of information and its associated “invitation” to tune out. For others it may have been that there was too much information provided, and for some the challenge may have been in reading and assimilating information whilst at the same time engaging with the live text and subtleties of performance. However, to enhance the audience’s capacity to meet the demands of the form and to grasp the complexity of the issues, it was deemed essential to present the facts accurately using all the technological means available. As most reviewers make no mention of this convention at all it seems generally to have been accepted, particularly as it was left to the audience’s discretion to access this information if and when they needed to. In a conversation after the production in Mt Isa, Betty and Alan, not regular theatregoers, specifically mentioned that the captions made the story easy to follow.

**Fragments**

In separate reviews of theatre shows at the 1998 Adelaide Festival, Keith Gallasch and Brad Haseman make acute observations about works that are composed of fragments. In “RealTime, Volume 2” Gallasch (1998) laments: “I see shows that fragment (but fall together)” (p. 6) implying that the fragments of Parellello/Doppio
Teatro’s *Tracking Time* do not cohere and provoking Haseman (1998) to speculate in “*RealTime*, Volume 4” on “why it is that some shows ‘fall together’ while others ‘fall apart’” (p. 5). Haseman (1998) asserts that “it is the imagination that struggles to understand that these disparate fragments are not random” (p. 6), but are glimpses of a larger fictional world; and that “the imagination seeks coherence” (p. 6). However, Haseman (1998) goes on to argue that imagination on its own is not enough and that if the fragments are to fall together, there is the expectation of “some order to the form … connective patterns, including repetition and recurrence, to secure the overall structure of the work” (p. 6).

In *Red Cap* the fragments are clustered around an event that was a milestone in the dispute. The clusters are called “Sequences” in the play script and within the sequences one could derive the existence of a pattern of repetition and recurrence of the theatrical conventions, performance modes and languages discussed above. Moreover, by the end of the second sequence all the genre conventions are introduced and a pattern of recurring features is established including the fragmented storytelling and every actor playing Mackie.

**Challenges posed by fragments**

Both Haseman and Gallasch imply that works with fragmented structures place greater imaginative and conceptual demands on their audiences than do linear narrative-based forms of theatre. The questions raised in relation to *Red Cap* are whether it was too fragmented, and whether this may have been ameliorated by having only one actor play Mackie, or perhaps a couple rather than five on rotation. On being asked whether having all the actors playing Mackie was confusing, Betty Regeling admitted: “At first, but you soon realized what was happening” (From notes of a conversation, 2007).

A subsequent production by acting students at Newcastle TAFE (2008) took the approach of allocating a single character to each actor and of having one actor play Mackie. Though it simplifies the audience’s reception of the story, it sets up Mackie as the “hero”, something the original creative team sought to avoid. Consequently, the audience has an unmet expectation that the play is an exploration of Mackie’s character and motives. While this expectation may have been the overwhelming desire of some
audience members who had prior knowledge of the dispute, the writing does not set out to achieve it.

How the fragments work in relation to each other is dealt with in more depth in the section below on “The Mechanics of Narrative”. Haseman ((1998) asserts “fragments do not have causal power” (p. 6). However it is clear from the outset that the play is not framed as a conventional classic realist drama set to music. Conceived as the interplay of voices and opposing forces the play was not intended to be a psychological drama of personal motivations, “representing a world of consistent subjects” (Belsey, 1991, p. 67) where meaning, knowledge and action are determined by a chain of “cause and effect” until a satisfying closure is achieved. There is no “bang” of heroic action that leads to a satisfying closure in Red Cap and it would have been inappropriate to create one. However the chronology of real events was adapted to provide a more satisfying dramatic structure. For example, the gunshot (and accidental death by shooting) was moved closer to the end of the story at the structural point of “crisis”, the dramatic turning point in the action leading to the resolution and conclusion. At this point of the play it becomes apparent that the workers will lose as more and more men return to work despite the picketing; and Mackie urges them to go back to work to save their jobs. Never to be re-employed, Mackie left town as the dispute ended “with a whimper”. This does not mean that the psychological analysis of personal motivations is not possible or desirable in a more fragmented approach to the writing and performance, but if that were the aim at the outset, the content of the play would be different and it would manifest in a different form more appropriate to achieving that aim; possibly longer and less fragmented.

**Summary**

In Red Cap, do the fragments fall together or fall apart? Implicit in that question is what I would do differently if the play were to be prepared for another production. Rather than reducing the number or variety of fragments I would edit and simplify the text of the meetings and court proceedings in Sequences 3 and 5. Increasing the opportunities for the familiar voices of the “townspeople” such as Vince, Toby, Doss and Margaret to interact and comment instead would better maintain the pattern of their presence and help the work cohere. At one level, coherence was found in rehearsals
with the actors and the director creating an appropriate performance style which involved a “playful showing” to the audience of the situations rather than deep psychological involvement in the moment. Similarly the composer Iain Grandage took care to create a consistent musical language for the piece. One might expect that the audiences in Mt Isa would struggle most with the form of the work. On the contrary, their overwhelming comments were not about the fragmentary structure of the work at all, but about the accuracy and amount of content that had been captured and presented; and about the details and images that triggered memories of hardship, mateship and meetings that were the making of the town. In acknowledging that some audience members and reviewers were challenged by the fragmentary approach to the adaptation, for the performers and the majority of the audience who were able to re-program their reception of the story - the fragments fell together.

10.2.2 Authorial Context

No particular consideration was given to Cardwell’s notion of authorial context whereby an identifiable Balodis style or approach to writing the adaptation might provide the audience with a familiar point of access at the point of reception that would allow them to circumvent the need to interpret the script of the adaptation and the performance in their own terms. The germinal idea, its development and execution as song lyrics and a script are born substantially of my practice. On the other hand, as there are many disparate sources of materials, and the assemblage of the fragments has been influenced by extensive dramaturgy on the drafts of the treatments, at one level Red Cap could be considered a creative team concept. As argued in the “Analysis of Perfect Skin” earlier, the process of adaptation continues in rehearsals with the actors to meet medium-specific demands of performance. In many respects, from its genesis to its manifest form in performance, Red Cap is not dissimilar to the group-devised political theatre of the 1970s mentioned above. Group-devised play making usually engages the processes and practices of adaptation.

The few audience members familiar with my previous works as a lyricist and a playwright may recognize idiosyncrasies of style in the choice and use of words, in the sparseness of dialogue, and in the willingness to experiment with form and theatrical conventions. Iain Grandage’s music is not well known in Brisbane or Mt Isa. Otherwise the stature of the composer provides a musical work with its identifiable authorial
context. For example, the names of Andrew Lloyd-Weber and Stephen Sondheim provide the branding of their musicals and audiences have quite different expectations of their respective works without recourse to considering the contribution of the lyricists or who wrote the script or book. As Grandage’s and my work have not been regularly performed in Brisbane, the company of familiar actors, the presence of the Canto Coro Choir and the La Boite brand would have played a more significant part in providing an authorial context for the audience.

10.2.3 Theatrical Context (Medium-Specificity)

The defining characteristic of theatre is performance and the physical presence of the actor, in real time, inhabiting space, embodying different characters with distinctive appearances and distinctive voices. Red Cap was cast before it was written. The casting decisions were made on the quality and range of the actors’ singing voices, on their flexibility in being able to play a number of roles and their adaptability in working with a new script. As a consideration of the emergent commissioning brief, the creative team decided on the work needing five actor/singers, the gender breakdown of two women and three men, younger and older, and that they all are able to cover a range of archetypal characters regardless of gender. The first songs were written for the choirs and it was some months before any dialogue was written for specific characters although “voices” emerged from the research and were incorporated into the various treatments as they developed.

In the treatments and early drafts, principal players such as Mackie, Foots and Commissioner Harvey were identified by name whereas other characters were defined more generically as Miner, Miner’s Wife, Migrant Miner and Younger Woman. In the writing phase no consideration was given to which actors might play particular characters. The fragments were determined and assembled according to the needs of the narrative. At the workshop readings of the various drafts, roles were schematically distributed according to archetypes and availability of actors from scene to scene and were only allocated when rehearsals started.

Brecht-ish acting

The fragmentary form of the play, deploying a number of theatrical conventions and different languages to convey layers of narrative and information, presents a
significant challenge to the actors and director. The workshops and early rehearsals were concerned with experimenting to find an appropriate “playing” style. Though *Red Cap* deals with serious issues the intention is that they should be presented in a “playful” manner. Without here going into a detailed explication of the differences between dramatic and epic forms in their construction and modes of presentation, or of Brecht’s “alienation effect”, the *Red Cap* company of actors labelled the style of performance they developed, “Brecht-ish”. It demanded of the actors that they forgo their habituated dependence on naturalism, of wholly entering into a role to evoke empathetic engagement with the audience. The brevity of some of the fragments simply does not allow for this “immersive” style of acting before the actor has to switch to another role in an opposite gender and speaking a different language or breaking into song.

Consistent with the way that some of the Balodis/Grandage songs in *Red Cap* adapt the songs of Brecht/Weill, and the PowerPoint slides adapt Brecht’s and Piscator’s use of blackboards, the presentational acting style developed by the director and performers of *Red Cap* in rehearsal is an adaptation of epic acting. Eschewing an intentional deployment of Brecht’s “alienation effect”, the *Red Cap* cast’s Brecht-ish acting nevertheless adapts some of its strategies: in particular acknowledging the presence of the audience, and establishing a form of interaction whereby they are critical observers aware of the ironies of the situations they are both presented with and presenting rather than empathizing with the plight of the characters.

**Collaborating with the audience**

Bert O. States (1995) asserts that the Brecht actor “works primarily in the collaborative mode” (p. 31) which he defines as assuming that “the audience is complicitous … or, to put it another way, the actor plays a character who lives in a world that includes the audience” (p. 29). The actors in *Red Cap* sought to establish “an open and immediate rapport and collaboration with the audience” (Zarrilli, 1995, p. 224) by speaking directly to them in monologues, comic asides and by addressing them inclusively as members of the town meetings. This effect was easier to achieve at the Roundhouse with the audience surrounding the actors on three sides rather than at Mt Isa which has a proscenium stage. The actors are further able to exploit this collaborative rapport and acknowledgement of the audience’s presence by changing
characters and switching from one scene to another in full view of the audience. For example, Sequence 2 of *Red Cap* subtitled “Who is the Man in the Red Cap?” artfully plays with this convention as the role of Mackie is handed on from actor to actor as the song cycles through different phases of his life and various aliases. There is no attempt “to become completely transformed … to the character he is portraying … he shows [the character]” (Brecht, 1964, p. 137 as cited by Krause, 1995, p. 265). To dispel the common misunderstanding “that epic theatre acting does not allow for the portrayal of real people on stage but only caricatures” Krause (1995) again cites Brecht on “the actor’s duty to portray living people” (Brecht, 1964, p. 234 in Krause, 1995, p. 272).

To re-capitulate, the *Red Cap* actors were required to adapt a presentational style of acting to portray living people in real life situations without caricaturing them. Krause (1995) argues that “‘demonstrate’ is a much more apt synonym for ‘portray’ than ‘become’” (p. 272). Krause (1995) delineates between epic acting’s “demonstration” and naturalism’s “becoming” the character in the making of “choices concerning how a character is to be presented to an audience” (p. 273). Krause asserts that in the latter:

… the actor masks those choices, disguises them and makes them appear to the audience as inevitable. In an epic approach the actor attempts to reveal those choices as choices so that other alternatives are more easily recognized by the spectator (Krause, 1995, p. 273).

Furthermore, though curbing their tendency to empathise “naturalistically” with a character, the *Red Cap* actors still had to capture the emotion of a situation. Far from eschewing passionate acting, Brecht is adamant that epic theatre:

… by no means renounces emotion, least of all the sense of justice, the urge to freedom, and righteous anger, it is so far from renouncing these that it does not even assume their presence, but tries to arouse or reinforce them … in its audience … (Brecht, 1964, p. 227 as cited by Krause, 1995, p. 272).

**Summary**

Considerable mental agility and physical flexibility were demanded of the actors in *Red Cap* in adapting their approach to Brecht-ish acting. In rehearsal some of the *Red Cap* cast struggled to find the emotional pitch of the text given the density of information and the rapid changes in focus. For example, in Sequence 1 and 7 the actors need the facility to switch from a presentational style of political satire which acknowledges the audience through direct address, into a domestic scene of apparent
naturalism before bursting into song, all without time for elaborate preparation (to become a character) and without costume or scene changes; and while doing so to evoke appropriate critical and emotional responses in the audience.

In terms of the demands it places on its performers and its audience, *Red Cap* could hardly be more medium-specific in adapting its multiple source texts. The set for both the Mt Isa and Roundhouse productions consisted of two elements: an abandoned ute car body from the mid-50s and a set of bleachers for the choir. The actors were always on-stage. If not required in a scene they sat and sang with the choir. By comparison, in Newcastle a bare stage was bounded by chairs on three sides, and instead of a choir there was a company of sixteen actors. For its effects *Red Cap* depends almost entirely on the presence of the actors and choir, and specifically on their skills to engage directly and collaboratively with the audience in telling the story. This often includes enrolling and designating the audience as members of the community at public meetings, thus making them complicit in the decision making and the progress of the dispute. This collaborative engagement and sense of complicity was easier to achieve at the Roundhouse and in Newcastle where the audience surrounded the action on three sides. In Mt Isa, the proscenium arch and elevated stage created a physical separation between the audience and the actors. However, the actors addressing the audience more directly from the stage recreated the atmosphere of being at one of the public meetings at the time of the dispute. With the audience being closer and more “present” in both Newcastle and at the Roundhouse the atmosphere created was more intimate and there was the sense of a spontaneous, informal gathering. Whilst it was necessary for the actors to adapt their performance according to their relationship to the space and proximity of the audience, it is the actors’ physical presence and skill that engages and involves the audience in any successful reception of the adaptation.

**10.3 Mechanics of Narrative**

In the discussion on the use of fragments above, Haseman and Gallasch both imply that works with fragmented structures place greater imaginative and conceptual demands on their audiences than do linear narrative-based forms of theatre. This has significant implications for the adaptation practitioner’s deployment of narratological
strategies of order, duration and frequency, the use of the narrator voice and the associated concept of point of view.

10.3.1 Order

“Order” usually refers to the sequence of events, or the plot. Classic realist narratives such as *Perfect Skin* are characterized by the ordering of events to produce the illusion of reality and proceed by way of a chain of cause and effect that leads to closure. Events are precipitated by disorder or a disturbance (to use the common parlance of the how-to books), which throws the recognizable world into disarray. Belsey (1980) cites Barthes in referring to this process as the “creation of enigma” (p. 70). The disorder or disturbance is most commonly caused by “murder, war, a journey or love” (Belsey, 1980, p. 70) and must be of a magnitude that provides the protagonist with sufficient motivation to cause him or her to take action, to overcome all obstacles and to restore equilibrium, thereby achieving the inevitable and requisite closure.

Disorder and closure

Although there is a key moment of disturbance (the miners’ decision to work-to-rule), *Red Cap* is far from being a classic realist narrative. The workers’ resolution unleashed the combined “historical” forces of MIM, the AWU, the Arbitration Court, the Queensland Government and the media against them. There was little that the workers could actively or legally cause to happen as they were metaphorically and literally locked out of proceedings and the work place. The workers’ action was essentially reactive, a refusal to co-operate with punitive forces of law and perceived injustice as a matter of principle. At one level the adaptation is an album of snapshots, glimpses of the effects this defiant stance had upon the workers and their families. The narrative does not lead to closure brought about by the decisive action of a single individual. The dispute ends because the workers’ decision to withhold their labour can not be sustained while men from their own ranks return to work or others are hired in their place. A kind of compromised and partial equilibrium is only restored by the capitulation of the workers.

De Lacy’s novel deals with much of the same material as *Red Cap*. However, it is a novel in the classic realist mode, charting the political development and coming of age of its narrator Peter Mooney, whose “single privileged discourse … contains and
places all the others” (Belsey, 1991, p. 92). Evidently it is not the content that determines the mode of storytelling. If Red Cap is not a text in the classic realist mode, how might its discourse be defined? And does the mode of storytelling influence order?

**Declarative, imperative and interrogative texts**

Benveniste (1971) is cited by Belsey (1980) as presenting three modes of storytelling depending on the attitude of the speaker:

[It] is everywhere recognized that there are declarative statements, interrogative statements, and imperative statements … which reflect the three fundamental behaviours of man speaking and acting through discourse upon his interlocutor: he wishes to impart a piece of knowledge to him or to obtain some information from him or to give an order to him. (Benveniste, 1971, p. 110 as cited by Belsey, 1980, p. 90).

Belsey (1980) extrapolates from Benveniste’s modalities to make distinctions between “declarative”, “imperative” and “interrogative” texts. “Declarative” texts are those with which classic realism conforms by imparting knowledge to a reader or audience in a privileged relationship with the author. “Imperative” texts tend to be propagandist and polemical referring to the real world. Examples are sermons and party political broadcasts that exhort or order the reader to identify with one particular position or point of view in opposition to another. “Interrogative” texts disrupt “the unity of the reader by discouraging identification with a unified subject of the enunciation” (Belsey, 1980, p. 91). Belsey (1980) stipulates that whilst an interrogative text may not literally strive to obtain information from a reader or audience, it poses questions implicitly or explicitly and invites or provokes the reader or audience to answer them.

Belsey (1980) goes on to assert that these categories are not self-contained and mutually exclusive, and that it is “possible to locate one modality in a text characterized predominantly by another” (p. 92). More importantly, Belsey (1980) emphasizes that different approaches by different audiences at the point of reception can have the effect of the text being categorized as deploying different modalities. For example, some audience members categorized Red Cap as an imperative text, as agit-prop or propaganda; other audience members received it as an interrogative text posing questions for them to answer about what they might have done in the same situation or how the dispute may have been resolved more quickly and reasonably. On balance, Red
Cap does employ elements of both these modalities. It does align itself with the workers but it does not privilege a single discourse that contains and controls all others as the classic realist Perfect Skin purports to do; nor does it present a single, unified point of view. As an interrogative text Red Cap attempts to bring multiple “points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction” (Belsey, 1980, p. 92). It is the deployment of this particular characteristic of presenting multiple points of view that determines the ordering of scenes in the adaptation of Red Cap.

**Order within sequences**

As discussed above, the decision to “order” Red Cap chronologically was made during the process of defining the commissioning brief so as to provide the audience with simple information about the historical events. This bridging architecture of events arranged chronologically allowed for experimentation in ordering the fragments within each Sequence so as to present multiple points of view and still maintain a sense of dramatic progression of the narrative, as is illustrated below.

There are eight Sequences in Red Cap and each Sequence deals with a period of the dispute rather than a single event. For example, Sequence 7 covers the period from the 17th February 1965 until the end of March 1965; from MIM re-opening the mine gates and inviting the workers to return to work until just before Mackie tells the workers to return to work to save their jobs. Ten short scenes present different snapshots of the picketing and men returning to work, and examine the effect on the community through the experiences of characters we have followed throughout the play. The overall impression created by the scene fragments of this Sequence and in the music is of increasing tension which ends in a gunshot and the realization that this situation can not continue.

**Strategies for determining order**

It is important to note that the ordering of the scene fragments in Red Cap is not arbitrary. As argued above, classic realist drama proceeds by dramatic action in one scene causing an effect that causes the protagonist to take action in the next scene and so on until closure is achieved. Though the scene fragments in Red Cap are not organized or arranged causally, they confirm nonetheless to a narrative progression. For
example, Sequence 7 begins with Foots announcing the opening of the mine gates in an ironic reprise of “The Letter” song from Sequence 1. In 7(B), because Toby decides to accept Foots’ invitation and return to work, in 7(C) Mackie has to organize picket lines and names on shit sheets; and in 7(D) Mackie’s court action for reinstatement will not be heard while men still refuse to return to work. In 7(E) Toby is confronted by Lazlo and called a scab and in 7(F) Toby’s wife Doss is confronted in the street by Margaret; followed in 7 (G) by Toby singing a searing reprise of “Can You Hear the Silence” about the plight of being a union scab. None of these scenes directly causes the next one but there are clear narrative links by association, by textual reference or by a shift of point of view. The fragments are ordered to create in the audience the frame of mind to question “how and why one man oppresses another” (Mnouchkine in Bablet as cited in Drain, 1995, p. 124).

A further ordering strategy as evidenced in Sequence 7 is the spine of alternating fragments involving either Toby or Doss that both charts the emotional impact of events upon this couple and by extension, upon the community, and brings a sense of coherence to the Sequence. This strategy is deployed economically and successfully in most of the Sequences. However in the La Boite production where actors played multiple roles and in Newcastle where actors played only one role, it became apparent that Sequences 3 and 5 lack the clarity and coherence of other Sequences. This is due in part to the challenges of the content derived from court proceedings and union meetings, and partly due to the decision to give voice to that language by adapting transcripts, which tended to make the men involved seem “faceless” and by comparison less engaging than the townspeople who do not feature in these two Sequences. Despite the attempt to present the elaborate argument and density of information both verbally and visually by PowerPoint slides, no apparent progress is made in the resolution of the dispute. There is no obvious dramatic spine and consequently there is less of a sense of narrative development in these Sequences.

Summary

In a future production of the play it may be necessary to simplify the use of legal language in these Sequences, as well as identifying the characters more clearly and individually, and perhaps most importantly to incorporate fragments that show the effect of these proceedings on the townspeople. Reducing and simplifying the
courtroom and meeting fragments and adding other fragments that show the point of view of the townspeople involves deployment of the narrative strategies of “duration” and “frequency”.

10.3.2  Duration
The story time of the dispute in Mt Isa is eight months from the end of August 1964 to the beginning of April 1965. The discourse time of Red Cap is ninety minutes, of which almost sixty minutes are sung. Some sections of the songs underscore the spoken text as in the Christmas party of Sequence 4 and the picketing referred to above in Sequence 7. With so much of the work dependent on the songs for its impact, the role of the fragments was to provide connective tissue, to fill narrative gaps. Of necessity the scene fragments had to be concise, clear in their emotional focus and the information they impart, and essential to the progress of the narrative.

As argued extensively above, the text of the adaptation is adapted further and refined in the rehearsal process. For example, lines were edited from the Toby and Doss fragments in Sequence 1 so that their interpolations did not hold up the meeting. The text for Mackie’s back-story in Sequence 2 (A) was re-written to be more rhythmical so as to fit the musical vamp that underscored it. Verses and choruses were cut from the carols at the Christmas party and from the Counting Song in Sequence 7. Monologues and speeches were cut in many sequences as they would not sustain. Once a point is made or information imparted, the audience is ready to move on.

It is instructive to think of Red Cap in terms of its rhythms, both musically and in the cadence of the fragments. In retrospect it is interesting to note that Sequence 3 is both the longest at ten pages before the overlapping lockout speeches, and the slowest with only six fragments of about equal duration. This apparent sensation of stasis, of hitting the same note and lack of progression is exacerbated by a failure to present different points of view, giving the impression of faceless men running on the spot. Sequence 5 suffers the same malaise. Though only six pages in length, its five fragments are again of roughly equal duration and similarly lack variety in point of view and rhythmical attack.
Summary
A more considered analysis of duration of the fragments and of the Sequences in either the script dramaturgy phase or in the rehearsal process may have delivered a more successful outcome. However, though the fragments in these sequences apparently satisfy medium-specific demands on the page and on the stage, it is often only after an audience has engaged with the production in its theatre context that one begins to assess what works in performance and what requires attention to achieve the desired effect in future productions.

10.3.3 Frequency
As a narrative strategy extrapolated from Genette’s temporal categories, frequency refers to the number of times an event occurs in a story compared to the number of times it is mentioned or revisited in the textual discourse. When an industrial dispute lasts as long as that in Mt Isa, similar kinds of events recur: union meetings, public meetings, court proceedings, conversations in the street, domestic arguments, pickets and protests, lockouts and the endless waiting for something to happen. In constructing *Red Cap* it was useful in practical terms to expand the concept of frequency to include iterations of similar scenes and to consider structural patterns as much as narrative sequences. If one accepts Haseman’s (1998) claim that the imagination seeks coherence in a work comprised of fragments as *Red Cap* is, then frequency is a determining factor in establishing coherence and rendering it meaningful. Furthermore, close analysis reveals that the structural integrity of the work is contingent on a number of overlapping or interlocking patterns. The first consideration of the use of this strategy in a music-theatre work is in the repetition and recurrence of musical motifs in songs and in the use of reprises, some examples of which are mentioned above. Although outside any area of expertise in my own practice, I was aware of Iain Grandage’s compositions for new songs making reference to chordal patterns from songs he had already completed.

Narrative patterns
Having decided on a structure that makes use of fragments to present multiple voices and points of view, the need to limit the number of character voices became
evident so that the same characters could be kept alive from Sequence to Sequence. Mackie is ubiquitous, but his presence is destabilized and undermined by having him played by different actors. A sense of coherence must then be created by regular appearances in many of the Sequences by Lazlo, Toby, Doss and Margaret. This allows the audience to follow the journeys of familiar characters through frequent glimpses of either their direct involvement in the action or their reactions to the effect on their lives. As identified above, that the audience loses sight of these particular characters in Sequences 3 and 5 is to the probable detriment of the effectiveness of the play and may need to be addressed in future productions.

Another narrative pattern is established by the recurrence of scenes of workers’ meetings. In scene fragment 2 (F) the workers affirm Mackie as their chosen leader after he is sacked by MIM and expelled from the AWU; the workers reaffirm his leadership in 3 (F) after the State of Emergency is declared; and 5 (F) is the scene after the compulsory conference where Mackie famously carries his chair from the back of the hall up on to the stage with the workers chanting, “We want Mackie.” Moreover, each of these scenes was staged to emphasise that at these particular points Mackie gave the workers and their families the opportunity to make a decision, whether to fight on for what they believed in or to end the dispute. This is not to say he was not a persuasive and manipulative orator, but by getting the workers and their families to vote on decisions he not only politicized them, he got them to commit to a course of action.

**Summary**

Again, with the benefit of hindsight, a more considered analysis of frequency as a narrative strategy in the writing and rehearsal phases may have allowed for the refinement of the interlocking patterns: of repetitions and recurrences of songs, of scenes and information on slides, and in particular the regular reappearance of familiar characters. Because of time constraints, the focus of the deployment of this narrative strategy in the development of the adaptation text and in the production was on imparting the story of the dispute accurately and economically. In pursuing this aim the creative team, for a time, also lost sight of those three or four characters and the importance of their function in not only giving their view of the story but in engaging the audience and accompanying them on every stage of the journey. The importance of
frequency as a narrative strategy to bring coherence to a work in this particular genre of theatre making cannot be overstated.

### 10.3.4 The Narrator and Point of View

Stam (2005) asserts that the term “point of view” is ambiguous and problematic as every contributing element can theoretically assume a narrational point of view because of the multi-track and multi-form nature of film. By extension to theatre and to *Red Cap* in particular, Stam’s argument is that every contributor and every contributing element - the writer of the adaptation, the director, the actors and their characters, the owners of the source texts, the designers of lighting and sound, the composer and his music, the PowerPoint slides - all have different points of view and differing degrees of influence on the production. If one accepts that for the most part and for most audiences the adaptation of *Red Cap* can be categorized as an interrogative text, then what for Stam is theoretically problematic can usefully be harnessed in practical terms to bring multiple “points of view into unresolved collision or contradiction” (Belsey, 1991, p. 92).

This is not to claim that these elements contest with one another for some predominant narrational role. Either working in harmony or in tension, all elements contribute to and affect the tone of the audience’s reception of the adaptation. Furthermore, all the elements are calibrated in the writing, direction, performance and production to control “intimacy and distance … and access to characters’ knowledge and consciousness” (Stam, 2005, p. 35). If the audience is to receive the work as coherent then the play itself must be able to be perceived holistically rather than as disparate elements pulling in different directions.

**Multiple points of view and multiple narrators**

Whilst there is not a single designated narrator in *Red Cap*, in presenting multiple points of view the audience is engaged by a range of narrational devices. The PowerPoint slides used in the Roundhouse production provided a chronology of historical facts that occurred during the course of the dispute. The Newcastle production used the device of a wandering journalist who declaimed the content of the slides in the manner of news headlines rather than projecting them on to a screen. The actor playing the journalist was left with the unenviable challenge of trying to create a character voice
from intermittent, rather dry factual pronouncements. At times the choir functions as a Greek Chorus, both commenting on and participating in the action. For example, as participants at the Christmas party in Sequence 4 and as picketers singing the “Counting Song” in Sequence 7. Sequence 6 essentially presents the point of view of two women via two interwoven monologues; one narrated by Margaret and the other sung by Elizabeth about her meeting and falling in love with Mackie. The Toby/Doss narrative proceeds by a series of domestic vignettes that chart Toby’s journey from Mackie-champion to scab, while Doss moves from being suspicious of Mackie to being a supporter. Margaret’s journey is from loyal disciple to feeling betrayed. Lazlo remains loyal to the end and is not re-employed.

Invoking Belsey (1980) above on imperative and interrogative texts, it might be said that different approaches by different audiences at the point of reception can have the effect of the text being categorized as deploying different modalities. A reductive analysis of the adaptation of Red Cap could assert that there is only one point of view presented: that of an author identifying with Mackie and the workers. However, if one reads or receives Red Cap as an interrogative text, if the author can be located at all, then these mini-narratives about the workers are not only questioning and contradictory, they present different points of view on both Mackie and the dispute.

**Mackie as *de facto* narrator**

Perhaps the most contentious narrator device is the character of Mackie and how he is represented to the audience. No doubt there were audiences in whose mind Mackie became a *de facto* narrator despite being played by different actors because of his ubiquitous presence and his power to influence the workers if not events. Having all the actors play Mackie at various times was an attempt to destabilize and undermine the audience’s expectations or illusions of Mackie as a hero figure by drawing attention to both the textuality and the “playing-ness” of the play. The audience is then distanced or alienated from Mackie rather than being interpolated into his potentially overwhelming discourse.

This strategy only met with mixed success in the play script, and in either of the productions. When one actor plays Mackie (as in the Newcastle production), it creates in the audience’s mind the expectation that he will deliver closure. Furthermore, it
requires a charismatic performance for the audience to understand how he was able to exert his influence over so many people for so long, particularly as the fragments of his speeches used in the script of the adaptation do not allow for empathetic character development. As argued above, the script is not conceived with Mackie as a hero figure, emphasized by the deliberate lack of a character song as it never seemed appropriate that Mackie should have one. “Everybody Pays”, the song in Sequence 8 was always intended to be Mackie’s song and though it was rewritten several times during rehearsals it could not be made to work with Mackie singing it without it seeming cynical, irresponsible and self-righteous.

By having all the actors play Mackie, the La Boite production was more effective in creating a distance between Mackie and the audience and between Mackie and other characters. However, the attribution of specific Mackie fragments to particular actors tended to be arbitrary rather than strategic. It was determined more by who was available to play Mackie in the scene rather than a thought through connection or resonance with some other character the actor was also playing; or that attributing Mackie to a particular actor in a scene might provide some further comment on the event. Nor was thought given to this strategic doubling in the writing and script development phase. Consequently, the director Sean Mee felt that from Sequence 6 onwards only one of the actors should play Mackie so that the audience could identify with the character, which to some extent undermined the interrogative relationship that had been established with the audience. It was a little like offering the audience a security blanket and announcing that the play would be less demanding from this point onwards so that they might more readily accept the uncertainty of its rather downbeat ending. Whilst this analysis is made with the benefit of hindsight, this apparent lack of confidence in the audience accepting the concept of an ephemeral, enigmatic and ultimately unknowable Mackie is due in part to the relatively short timeframe for both script development and rehearsal.

10.3.5 Second Take

It is useful in conclusion to reflect on what I would do differently had I the opportunity to adapt Red Cap again and to apply what was learned in the practice of writing the adaptation and in the process of its production. Initially conceived as a play for voices, and for giving voice to a community, this changed as research and
conversations with stakeholders uncovered fragments of speech and action, images and anecdotes that could be attributed to particular archetypal characters and expanded into points of view about events as they unfolded. Though these mini-narratives already have a limited dramatic shape they could further be developed and enhanced for greater dramatic impact. It would also be necessary to chart the pattern of their recurrence throughout the play and to address the omissions referred to above where the audience loses sight of Toby, Doss, Margaret and others in Sequences 3 and 5.

If more of these mini-narrative fragments were included in Sequences 3 and 5, there would need to be a commensurate reduction in the court proceeding and meeting scenes. It would be necessary to re-think how the characters in the mini-narrative strands might carry the appropriate information load of some of those scenes. It would also necessitate greater and clearer character delineation of MIM and AWU personnel so that the audience is not left trying to engage with “faceless” men. This would also ensure a more acute and possibly more balanced presentation of their point of view.

I would continue with the convention of having all the actors playing Mackie but I would be more strategic in how, when and by whom the Red Cap role was presented. I believe that it is essential to risk the rotation of this role to the very end of the play to maintain the integrity of its interrogative nature. However, the script needs to establish better the rationale for doing so, so that it is imperative to incorporate this convention rather than leaving it as optional.

As with Perfect Skin, it is evident that relatively simple changes in approach can have major implications for the writing and production of the adaptation. If Red Cap had been adapted in the manner outlined above, it would have necessitated some differences in approach by the actors and the director as their reception of it in the first instance would have been different. Consequently, the audience’s reception of it would be different from the existing play adaptation. Significantly, though the narrative itself remains essentially the same, the reception of the story, its themes and characters would be re-programmed according to the choices made to better satisfy the medium-specific requirements of the theatre production. It is prudent to remind ourselves that these afterthoughts, these tentative conclusions have only been drawn after the adaptation has been produced and performed in front of thirty different audiences followed by a period of
reflection and analysis on the adaptation’s effectiveness as a theatrical work. It is only after the event that one can conclude whether the template and its analytical tools might serve as a workable model to use in the practice of adapting existing texts, both factual and fictional for the theatre.
11. CONCLUSION

Adaptation is ubiquitous as a process, a creative practice and as a product. Theatre companies and playwrights have always adapted extant works. More than two thousand years ago the ancient Greeks fashioned plays from adaptations of their history, mythology and epic poetry. Four hundred years ago no less a playwright than Shakespeare created his “original” works by freely adapting chronicles of history, romantic tales and plays by others. Adaptation has ever been a useful way for playwrights and theatre producers to find a new story for their audiences or to retell in a different medium one that has caught the public’s imagination. The reasons for engaging in this practice are both economic and creative. A popular contemporary novel or a well-read classic is assumed to have an inbuilt, interested audience. An innovative approach to adaptation, whether by a single playwright or a self-devising group has the potential to reinvigorate individual practice and theatrical production. Postmodernism would have us acknowledge that any text is written by precursor texts; and as all playwrights read stories in novels and a range of news media, watch television, films and other plays, their original works bear unacknowledged intertextual relationships to a whole range of precursor texts.

This research project has argued that adaptation is a useful tool and viable practice for the creative theatre practitioner. In her conclusion, Cardwell (2007) hopes for a broader understanding of “adaptation studies as part of ‘aesthetics’ … providing a unique possibility for intermedia, interdisciplinary study” (p. 62). But more importantly for the practitioner, she “reiterates the inspiration that adaptation studies provides” (Cardwell, 2007, p. 62). For Cardwell and for the practitioner:

Adaptations illuminate points of contention, raise questions and problems, and allow multiple perspectives to suggest answers (Cardwell, 2007, p. 62).

As such, not only does adaptation extend the possibilities by which practitioners might earn a living, it provides a lens through which to examine, extend and reinvigorate practice. Eschewing issues of fidelity criticism of the adaptation, the project has further sought to establish how comparative analysis can usefully serve the creative practitioner in the writing of adaptations. A suite of analytical tools was formulated by combining: a medium-specific focus in comparative analysis, the practical application of the mechanics of narrative, and ethical considerations and
obligations to the source text, its author and audience in negotiating the commissioning brief. These elements are explicated theoretically in the literature review, applied in practice in the writing of the adaptations, and defined in the following analysis of them.

In arguing the legitimacy of adaptation as a means of creating new theatre works, and through analysis of the two works, the project articulates how the adaptation is shaped by constraints and limitations of resources, legal and moral rights, the materiality of live performance and the influence of the collaborative nature of theatre production. The project has asserted that changing any one of these constraints or limitations can affect the script outcome of the adaptation so at this level, creating the script for the adaptation is a research experiment. Citing first Cronenberg and then Burroughs, Zurbrugg argues that in adapting Burroughs’ *Naked Lunch* Cronenberg felt:

Forced to … fuse my own sensibility with Burroughs and create a third thing that neither he nor I would have done on his own (Cronenberg, 1997, p. 162); at once confirming Burroughs’ dictum that: “No two minds ever come together without, thereby, creating … a third mind” (Burroughs, 1979, p. 25 as cited in Zurbrugg, 1999, p. 100)

Extrapolating from Zurbrugg one might argue that every mind brought to bear upon an adaptation has an influence that affects the outcome; and an adaptation (like any play script), is merely a blueprint for a theatre production. At the next level, the production is also essentially a research experiment, the outcome of which is directly affected and influenced by the creative participants. A different group of artists will produce a different outcome, even from the same script of the adaptation. The next level is the audience’s reception of the adaptation, which can be re-programmed by any alteration to the requisite components of either the scripting or production levels. The exegetical analysis of this multi-level research has endeavoured to establish the inseparable link between theory and practice in that theory informs practice and practice informs theory. Theoretical analysis has informed and influenced the practice of writing the two plays and reflection upon the production outcomes has informed and influenced the interpretive analysis that followed.

In writing two plays, this project has employed a practice-led and practice-based methodology in which the practice has led the exegesis and in turn been led by it. By employing a tri-partite methodology of developing analytical tools in conjunction with practice, deploying them in practice and analysing their effectiveness both during and
post production, the thesis has sought to elucidate that the practical and exegetical approaches to the research are interdependent. Whilst it is possible to read or see a production of the plays on their own, as far as this research project is concerned, the exegesis cannot be considered without the practice, and the practice cannot be considered without the exegesis. It is only by considering their mutual dependency that one can approach the research question and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of this study as an adaptation template and its analytical tools as providing a workable model to use in the practice of adapting existing texts, both factual and fictional for the theatre.

The project has also argued that in practice, adaptation requires high competence in many of the same craft skills that a playwright might use in creating an original work. Indeed, the practice component of the research project assumes a high level of practical experience and general knowledge of existing theatrical forms. While there are many generic how-to books on playwrighting (and this project refers to and adapts Sam Smiley’s common methodology), there is very little practical advice on how to adapt a novel or factual materials for the theatre. However, as the theoretical literature on adaptation for film and television is extensive, the suite of analytical tools was developed from an interpretive analysis of this discourse. The tools are not intended to provide step-by-step instructions in the practice of playwrighting but rather are designed to stimulate consideration of specific issues that arise in the practice of adapting existing texts whatever their sources.

Taken together with the practice-led methodology incorporating creative work, with reflection and exegesis, these tools constitute a template for adaptation practice. This template assumes that adaptation declares itself, allowing for a level of comparative analysis with the source text(s) and admitting a high degree of interpretive relevance. The template includes close consideration of genre, authorial and medium-specific contexts in determining the constraints, limitations and available resources that will shape the adaptation. In adapting the source text(s) to the medium of theatre and the specific demands of performance, it proposes application of the mechanics of narrative with particular attention to order, duration, frequency, the narrator and point of view. These largely practical tools played a significant and effective role in giving form to the script of Red Cap and the subsequent production. As Everett (2007) observes “the
implication that there is any such thing as a ‘typical’ adaptation or a single route would be grossly misleading” (p. 162). Rather than being prescriptive rules, in the hands of future practitioners/researchers, these concepts are flexible and adaptable enough to allow experimentation with sub-genres of working class and political theatre, with fragments, multiple voices, languages and narrators, as well as in style of acting performance, while at the same time providing a theoretical and philosophical rationale for the choices made. In different circumstances these elements may be delineated in a commissioning brief, especially if the brief is narrowly prescribed before any background research into the source text(s) has begun. What became evident in the research practice and the comparative analysis of the two projects is the importance of the adaptation practitioner being able to negotiate an evolving commissioning brief. This is not to deny or to impinge upon the legal and moral rights of the author of the source text; rather it is to allow the adaptation practitioner the space to negotiate or renegotiate the commissioning brief after a period of research exploration of the source text and its contexts. The approach to this initial exploration should be focused by medium-specific demands of theatre with particular consideration given to narrative gaps, the lack of dramatic conflict, calibration of tone and the time-space materiality of live performance. The project asserts that a flexibility of approach that permits the commissioning brief to evolve or emerge is more likely to negotiate a happy alignment of aesthetic and ethical demands and allow the adaptation to succeed on its own terms in re-programming the audience’s reception of the narrative.

In essence, what the adapting practitioner is negotiating is the size and boundaries of an agreed creative “search space”. This search space is delineated by the kinds of collaborative agreements articulated in the discussions above. For example, the search space for *Red Cap* was much larger and allowed for greater flexibility of approach to the adaptation than that for *Perfect Skin*, which was more narrowly defined by pre-existing contractual arrangements between the author and La Boite Theatre Company. The final decision for the adapting writer is whether or not she or he is comfortable working within the limits of the agreed search space defined by the commissioning brief.

Finally, this project has sought to argue that rather than being a poor or slavish copy of the source text, through the agency of medium-specificity an adaptation has
more in common with so-called original works of theatre. In developing a suite of analytical tools and assessing their effectiveness in the practice of adaptation this research project has advocated for a deeper understanding of the interdependency of theory and practice in adaptation studies as they relate to theatre. Furthermore, it has sought to create a methodology for a reflective approach to adaptation that is adaptable and flexible enough so that it permits each adaptation to come into being on its own terms, generating new knowledge both in practice and in theory. By implication this study concludes as Stam provocatively does:

Adaptations in a sense make manifest what is true of all works of art – that they are all on some level “derivative.” And in this sense, the study of adaptation potentially impacts our understanding of all films [here, theatre] (Stam, 2005, p.45)

While adaptation has the natural attribute of provoking interrogation into the possibilities of its use to create theatre, the investigation into the theoretical imperatives of drama can serve to reinvigorate practice and create new forms of theatrical expression. I hope that this research project and the conclusions arrived at are of practical benefit to other playwrights in providing a template of analytical tools that is a workable model to use in the practice of adapting existing texts, both factual and fictional for the theatre.
WORKS CITED


