

“From life, to page, to stage”: Exploring theatrical artistry,
community and storytelling with Margery and Michael Forde

by

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ABSTRACT

This research is a qualitative and ethnographic case study of the works, practices, processes and philosophies of two contemporary Queensland playwrights, Margery and Michael Forde. Over the last decade the Fordes have pursued a particular niche in the scope of contemporary writing and performance trends in Queensland's contemporary theatre privileging a continued and explicit use of real, 'community' stories as the aesthetic material of their plays. Through an agency of oral histories, testimonies and other qualitative style techniques, the Fordes execute a theatrical product and aesthetic that can be best understood as an emergent form of performance ethnography and an example of dialogic and communal theatre. This thesis explores the Fordes' developing style, approach and products over a suite of three community plays conducted over an eighteen month period; "Skating on Sandgate Road"(2009) "Cribbie"(2010) and "Behind the Cane" (2011). Using excerpts from the plays and the Fordes testimonies, this research begins by documenting the emancipatory, cathartic and dialogic themes of "Cribbie" and "Behind the Cane. The bulk of the data for this research is unpacked in the chapter "Going Skating on Sandgate Road" where the Fordes' approach is explored and documented over a period of three months. This research concludes with an analysis and discussion on the quintessential nature of the Fordes' work as an important form of community storytelling and an outstanding example of dialogic drama and emergent performance ethnography.

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“History
is what you’ve travelled on
and take with you”

- Michael Ondaantje (2004) “*The Cinnamon Peeler*”

~

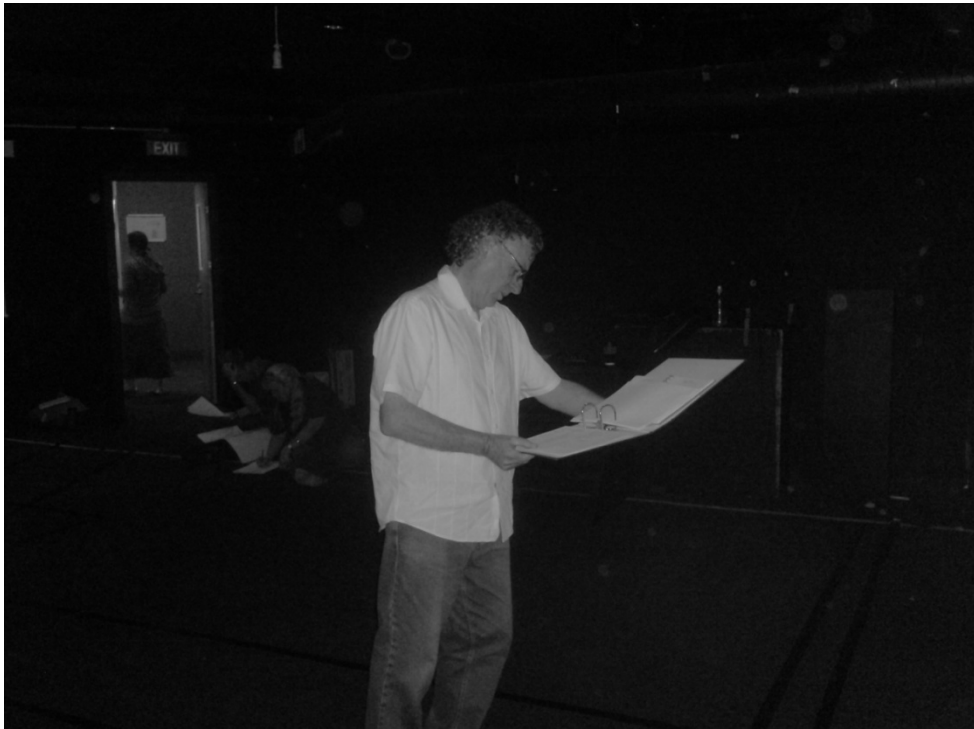
“the writer makes things real
His task: ‘to make you hear, to make you feel

it is, before all, to make you see.
To make you see. Before all. I agree

That – and no more, and it is everything.
Details that make you cringe

will make the reader see,
the self you showed to me”

- Craig Raine (2000) “*A la recherché du temps perdu*”



(Margery and Michael Forde, May 2009)

BEGINNINGS

*Poetry,
as it turns out.
Is everywhere.
With script here
and story there.
Life is so full of
drama.
The earth is the stage
the clouds, the curtains,
the horizon is the audience
which, in its infinite way
tasks us on*

(Downes. 2009. Reflective Memo in Poetry, May 2009)

Stories have to come from somewhere. Their exact origins, why, how, when and who tells stories, has been of interest to the human race for as long as we have had language. For as long as humanity has had stories we have pondered their origin, their place and their function. Theatre arrives from our instinctual and insatiable need for story, to hear, to see, to touch, feel and experience stories. Indeed, Aristotle argued that what drove theatre, what fed storytelling, was humanity's innate need to mimic and to imitate each other (in "The Poetics" translation, Heath, 1996). For Aristotle, the theatre was the microcosm of human life and society, with messages, symbols and morals all intertwined in a complexity of history, fiction, imitation, storytelling and community.

In more recent times, other theatre philosophers, such as Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal, have recognised that many stories in the theatre contain powerful, often transformative themes about the society to which they belong. As a venue of live, public entertainment, the theatre had the potential to bring stories to life in a way that can fundamentally change people

and their world. Stories have power - the theatre has power, to give voice not only to the disenfranchised or oppressed, but also the ordinary, the everyday individual allowing them to tell their stories in a variety of ways, in myriad places and to an array of audiences.

Stories - the telling of them, how they can be told and retold through the art form of theatre, and how theatre can be made, is the penultimate focus of this research. I have never subscribed to the idea that theatre is or can be made in a vacuum and that stories originate as part of some divine musing. For me, stories are a part of the human world and theatre is an agent of storytelling in society. Stories have a major part to play in how communities identify themselves, how they are able to communicate, proliferate, and survive. Meaningful theatre is a theatre that advocates and allows those stories to be told in a way that is hopefully authentic, truthful and artistically excellent. This premise is the foundation of this thesis and also the guiding principle of the works of Queensland playwrights; Margery and Michael Forde.

At the end of my 2008 honours study which attempted to offer a glimpse into contemporary main stage theatre industry in Queensland, I was left with a keen sense of the importance for theatre industry to be relevant to the society to which it belongs. I recognised like never before, the essentiality that theatre be a meaningful part of cultural life and that it must be a portal through which stories can be shared for the enjoyment and benefit of all. I explored a particular mode of thinking that pervades the aesthetic consciousness of Queensland and perhaps Australian main stage theatre companies - that audiences *need* to be able to relate to the work that is performed on stage and in order to survive, theatre companies must offer their audiences something which is engaging and artistically robust.

As Queensland novelist Nick Earls asserted, “They [the audience in Queensland] like to see a range of things, certainly including stories that feel like their own” (in Downes, 2008, p.63). I also found that for Queensland audiences, home grown stories are powerful catalysts for theatre making, theatre viewing and theatre appreciation. This notion was supported by the then La Boite Theatre Company (one of Brisbane’s longest established theatres) Artistic Director Sean Mee, who argued:

They’ve got to be plays about our stories, our culture, about the history, about the present day, about what we consider to be the future and those stories have to be perceived as worth telling. Worth the telling. In an idiosyncratic way that grows out of the community, because no national agenda, no international agenda wants to see a generic play, because theatre that is created of its own time and its own place develops its own uniqueness because of that.

(in Downes, 2008, p.59)

The foremost proponents of this perspective in Queensland today that I could find, were AWGIE award winning playwrights (Australian Writer’s Guild Awards for Excellence) Margery and Michael Forde. With them I undertook a journey that straddled discussions about Queensland’s artistic, professional and aesthetic ideologies about what audiences want to see and how to create marketable content. Our journey was not one that delved into the history of Queensland playwriting or the particulars of theatre industries in Australia in the twenty-first century per se. Rather, our exploration unpacked the essence of theatre making, the nature and aesthetic of organic storytelling, how it works, when and where it can take place, and most importantly, how theatre and storytelling operate as part of a community experience.

This thesis then, is about the theatre practice of Margery and Michael Forde. It looks closely

at how their artistry privileges community narratives and how they work with ‘real’ people to bring authentic life stories to stage. Foremost, this thesis explores the raw ingredients of the Fordes’ storytelling and how stories can be told and retold through the medium of theatre incorporating the voices of diverse community groups and individuals. Importantly, this thesis is fundamentally a story too, an unravelling of Margery and Michael Fordes’ own story, their specialised community theatre narratives, their theatre artistry and everything in between, and myself as the researcher offering reflections of the unfolding thesis.

Defining The Players

The unquestionable foci of this thesis are the playwrights themselves, Margery and Michael Forde. As a theatre researcher, it was daunting to set out on a research journey that examines the work of two of Queensland’s most respected artists but a challenge I was eager to undertake after I interviewed them initially in earlier research. (Downes 2008)

The Fordes are down to earth people and are remarkably good at talking to the younger generation even though both are in their early sixties. Michael Forde is a renowned actor and director and has worked with some of the biggest names in Queensland’s theatrical industry. He is a very likeable, charming and funny man. Margery Fordes’ talent as a playwright is something that most high school drama students in Queensland would be familiar with. Her playwriting is combined with a long and much respected career as an actor and singer in countless shows and in meeting Margery Forde, one is struck by an incredibly gentle but vibrant woman who is intelligent but also calm and composed. They are, in themselves, the most avid storytellers and it is storytelling that lies at the heart of their playwriting passion.

In 1996 Margery Forde wrote *Snapshots from Home*, a play composed from the oral histories of Queenslanders who were young children or teenagers during the Second World War. This

incredibly successful and AGWIE (Australian Writers Guild Industry Excellence) award winning play activated a mode of storytelling for which the Fordes have become renowned.

In Downes (2008) when I examined Queensland playwriting in a more generalized way, I described the Fordes' work as "a powerful and poignant example of Queensland writing which is shaped and driven by the culture, identity and narratives of a specific Queensland community." (p.71) This has since lead to more 'Queensland' stories being collected, constructed and retold by the Fordes, their most notable, the 2001 'Centenary of Federation' commissioned performance, *Way out West*. *Way out West* is one of the Fordes' most recognizable journeys into performance ethnography, spanning weeks of immersion in the lives and stories of rural communities of Western Queensland. Using qualitative ethnographic style techniques such as intensive interviews and field notes, the Fordes created a collage of stories reminiscent of the old travelling 'Federation' shows. *Way Out West* toured and performed across the Queensland 'outback' regional and western areas, mainly to audiences who could find ready, identifiable and personal resonances with the play. It was a resounding success not only with those who had helped shape the play with their home grown stories but with wider audiences in schools, theatres and university classrooms. It is through such faithful and authentic retelling of Queenslanders' stories that the Fordes have shaped their own particular aesthetic and carved a widely respected forte in Queensland's theatrical tradition. Their most recent works *Skating on Sandgate Road* (2009), *Cribbie* (2010) and *Behind the Cane*, (2011) provide significant foci for this thesis and will be unpacked in the latter parts of discussion and analysis.

Establishing Purpose And Impetus

This thesis takes the form of a *case study* using qualitative ethnographic techniques to gather information and insight about the Fordes' playwriting. Since the mid-1990s, they have

established a particular and well-known niche in the landscape of contemporary Queensland playwriting and it is through their continued and explicit use of real stories as the material for their plays that they are now respected practitioners in the area of community narratives.

The research in this thesis emerges from my previous honours' work entitled *Playing Queensland: Exploring 'community' in contemporary Queensland playwriting*, (Downes, 2008) a case study of six contemporary Queensland community playwrights. What arose from that work was a developing notion that 'the community,' was not only an audience for theatre works, but also a majority stakeholder in Queensland's theatrical identity. It became clear that this was true of the work performed on Queensland's main stage since the mid 1990's and then through to the turn of the century when many industry leaders expressed a keen interest in developing audience membership through the inclusion of creative works that had a community-centric approach.

This thesis beds down the notion of community theatre with a specific and in depth case study of the way the Fordes work. As noted, they deliberately, explicitly and consistently write plays that are by, for, and about, certain groups in Queensland's communities. Their plays are the result of extensive interaction with members of various community groups with data collected through the use of interviews, field notes, testimonies and observations. Furthermore, they seek to unpack stories both of 'every-day' people, living in the suburbs, cities, towns and communities of Queensland, and unearth the 'natural poetry' and the veritable cacophony of meaningful and interesting stories that exist in these places.

They have developed a reputation and an interest in bringing previously untold, unknown or hidden stories to light - often with a precise interest on oppressed or marginalized people's

stories and their perceptions and recollections of history and historical events. It is for this reason I include a quotation from the Canadian poet and novelist Michael Ondaantje in the opening of this thesis, as I feel it speaks to the emphasis the Fordes place in their work on the importance of personal history, personal experiences, testimonies of history and the validity of remembrances, alongside, (and perhaps occasionally, in place of) ‘official’ historical documents. The quote reads ‘history is what you’ve travelled on and take with you’ (Ondaantje, 2004, p.37).

As a case study, this research is positioned to follow the playwriting processes, philosophies and craft over a suite of three plays developed between 2009-2011, namely *Skating on Sandgate Road*, *Cribbie* and *Behind the Cane*. More specifically, the performance work *Skating on Sandgate Road* is given particular spotlight as I was able to be part of the unfolding and dynamic process of forming this play with a community group during the early research gathering stage of this research. Earlier works of the Fordes are also discussed in the literature review, with analytical emphasis concentrated on the way they approach the forming and transformation of community narratives to the stage. The content of the thesis is structured in a way that works to honour the Fordes’ own ‘voices’ alongside some of my own reflective musings as a researcher. The substance of the chapters is reflective of the extent to which I was able to talk with them about their work and document their processes first-hand.

In the case of both *Cribbie* and *Behind the Cane*, data is predominately made up of reflective content collected during or after performances in semi-structured interviews and during the observation of the plays themselves. For *Skating on Sandgate Road*, extensive structured and semi-structured qualitative interviews comprise a great deal of the data, complemented by

narrative field notes, and analytic and reflective memos collected and composed during the research that spanned several months.

The Research Paradigm

The Fordes have developed a style of playwriting which is recognizable as both *applied* and *community* theatre. In this thesis, *Applied theatre* is defined as a dimension of theatrical practice that is concerned with social, communal or other goals beyond the framework of entertainment or enjoyment. (Taylor 2002, Ackroyd 2007, Schechner 1994) *Community theatre*, is understood here as a certain theatrical model or aesthetic that arrives from political theatre but which makes a specific community or group the primary focus of its product and obtains the majority of its aesthetic material from that community. (Erven, 2000, Salway, 2005, Kupperts & Robertson, 2007, Fotheringham, 1993 & Milne 2004)

Both the process and the final product of the Fordes' work, can be seen as having overlapping elements from both *applied* and *community* theatre aesthetics and practices. However, it is their use of participant testimony gathered in interviews and from other data sources such as archival evidence and field notes, that gives their work a dimension that is definable within the parameters of qualitative research, in particular, the paradigm of 'performance ethnography'. *Performance ethnography* is defined in this research as a particular expression and incarnation of qualitative research embedded in a performance mode. Originating from interpretivist-ethnography, 'performance' or 'performing' ethnography, seeks to shift the focus of interpreting and analysing ethnographic texts away from written language to a more holistic whole-body approach as participant testimonies, oral histories and other ethnographic texts are performed or re-enacted with a dramatic lens to establish more embodied

understanding of cultural ‘others’ and greater understandings of their stories. (Kuppers 2007, Denzin 2003 & 2005, Pollock 2006, Donelan 2005)

This thesis acts as a portico for the Fordes to speak from their own perspectives and in their own words. In order to convey a fuller picture of their work, this thesis blends a variety of writing techniques, ethnographic, expressive and artistic, to analytical and critical. It works to position the Fordes in their own identifiable aesthetic framework. English poet Craig Raine captures the way they feel about the theatre they make with diverse Queensland communities and it is useful in this introduction to consider his words in order to understand where Margery and Michael Forde position themselves,

*The writer makes things real
His task: ‘to make you hear, to make you feel*

*it is, before all, to make you see.
To make you see. Before all. I agree*

*That – and no more, and it is everything.
Details that make you cringe*

*will make the reader see,
the self you showed to me*

(Raine, 2000, p.12)

It is the preoccupation with authenticity, truthfulness, honest and accurate depiction of people’s stories and the way those stories are told, that is of central interest to the Fordes and is correspondingly, a guiding principle of my own efforts to portray and represent their work in this thesis.

Essentially, this research is positioned then, within the scope of contemporary Australian theatre, performance studies, playwriting and dramaturgy (the study of the inner workings of and/or greater context behind the drama artists, works and processes). Methodologically, it is positioned as a qualitative inquiry and case study with the following underpinning foci:

(a) *Performance studies and the playwriting of community narratives.* Process and practice are the main elements of interest to this thesis. How the Fordes construct, create and conceptualize their community playwriting underpins the direction and impetus of analysis and synthesis.

(b) It stands as an *ethnographic inspired case study* highlighting two Queensland playwrights who are reinventing themselves as performance ethnographers in a specialised niche market. Ethnographic techniques such as interviews, field notes, analytic memos and member checking notes were paramount to ensuring the ‘big picture’ emerged and worked very well in a context that was rich in dialogue and dependent on the unfolding of stories.

The Research Context

The context of this research is within the scope of qualitative case study into creative artists, artistry and the performing arts. It is a critical deconstructive analysis of the Fordes’ latest community-centric plays from dramatic, theatrical and textural points of view. It is both a qualitative exploration and critical inquiry into the essential nature of their playwriting, offering a close lens on the nature of their community narratives and their playwriting modus operandi. While it is not within the parameters of this research to discuss artistic, aesthetic, professional or industry practices or trends in the greater sphere of Queensland, Australia or indeed, international applied/community theatre and playwriting, the context of this research hopes to highlight the importance of qualitative dialogue between scholars and currently working creative artists and industry professionals. During this research, the Fordes

constantly reminded me that they are not scholars or academics, but instead practitioners and artists, and that this research has been their first opportunity to consider their work with a scholarly lens. As the research progressed, they began to see themselves more and more as ‘ethnographers,’ realising that the work they do has powerful implications for not only understanding theatre as ‘voice’ but also for understanding cultural, historical and social mores and practices. They acknowledged that they are indeed, community theatre researchers, originally by accident, but now by intent.

Similar to the feature of the Fordes’ own playwriting, this research has its own form of historical impetus in that it is positioned to examine and make record of currently-working creative artists, their views, experiences and practices in a way that includes them in scholarly dialogue and hopefully, fosters creative and scholarly collaborative discourse. It is also guided by the premise of the importance of a ‘meeting’ of minds of scholar/critic/researcher and artist/practitioners to mutually explore content, form, process and experience in community theatre praxis.

The literature review unpacks existing scholarly discourse looking more closely at the emergence of community based theatre as situated inside the framework of applied theatre, and also considers the notion of performance ethnography (which fundamentally underpins the creative approach of the Fordes). Applied theatre, an emerging theatrical foundation, and described in brief earlier, is broadly theatre for beyond theatre’s own sake, and is highly congruent with how the Fordes both purpose and practice their work. Their theatre is purposefully executed with some practical *purpose* beyond the sphere of “pure entertainment” in mind and works to engage, to immerse and to inform.

The second area under consideration, community theatre, will also be explored, in an effort to highlight how the Fordes' work can be best understood in terms of its aesthetic nature and dialogic emphasis. Their main aesthetic material is garnered from interacting with communities and community groups and is a purposeful and deliberate opening of a collaborative dialogue between them as artists and participants, as artists and the audience, and the participants and the audience. Additionally, underpinning tenets of performance ethnography will be spotlighted in order to consider the Fordes' work as a process of both empathy and embodiment, an emerging synergy of qualitative research techniques and creative artistry as they strive to execute an authentic and empathic embodiment of cultural others.

To summarise, this research is positioned in the scholarly discourse of post-modern drama research, concerned with ideas of drama not just as a work of art but also as a powerful socialising agent and crucial dialogic tool. It also seeks to affirm the argument that drama can be, and is, a powerful method by which communities can creatively and actively dialogue and create meaning. It also explores the role of the artists in emergent performance ethnography, where instead of employing 'traditional' isolated and culturally detached artistry to deliver their product, Margery and Michael Forde deliberately and purposefully immerse themselves in a community or cultural group to gather the stories of that group. Their work is purposefully dialogical and actively concerned with eliciting a collaborative and creative sharing process where community groups working with artists can work together to explore their existential and experiential realities and make meaning in dynamic and creative ways.

The Research Focus

This research is informed by three areas of drama theoretical praxis that offer different ways to define and characterize the work and/or the processes of the Fordes. Furthermore, it is

informed by data gathered through the use of qualitative methodological techniques and written in a narrative voice that hopefully encapsulates a storytelling journey for the reader. The three areas that provide springboards for understanding the Fordes' work are *applied theatre*, *community theatre* and *performance ethnography*. In the literature review, each one is defined more precisely and discussed with emphasis on how they relate to the past and present work of the Fordes.

In terms of methodology and direction, this research is framed by one overarching question; *What are the elements, processes and aesthetics of the 'community' playwriting expounded by Margery and Michael Forde?* This question is further framed by a number of sub-questions and their elements,

1. What exactly constitutes the theatre of Margery and Michael Forde? What are its identifiable elements? What are the elements that give it structure and purpose?
2. How do they work? What are the processes that give the work impetus? How is the theatre constructed and executed?
3. Why do they work in this way? What are their philosophies and underpinning tenets from which they work?
4. What does their work offer as theatrical and community performance in contemporary theatre?

These questions have been designed to give a rich insight into the Fordes' theatrical process and product at all levels and stages, allowing a deep analysis of their work documented over a period of months. The primary source material for answering these questions is the dialogue and conversations of the Fordes themselves, collected in participant interviews, informal interviews and field notes gathered in workshop sessions during the project of *Skating on Sandgate Road* and other times they met to discuss their work.

The Research Relationship

In this research I have endeavoured to undertake an ‘impressionist’ (Van Mannan & Holman-Jones 2005) view of the Fordes’ work which works to privilege both their own testimonies and my own researcher impressions of the work as I collected and analysed data. I felt that an ‘impressionist’ lens offered the ‘best of both worlds’ of qualitative and ethnographic inquiry and an opportunity to straddle and blend both factual or exactable representations of my case study participants and the more personal confessional musings that tell the story from a researcher’s viewpoint.

As a drama researcher, I had many initial struggles with unpacking the methodology that frames this thesis as many concepts about case study, qualitative epistemology and ethnography were a new frontier for me. Coming from a background of ‘traditional’ drama scholarship in my undergraduate degree, I had a limited foray into qualitative research until my 2008 honours thesis and I found the prospect both challenging and exciting.

As I have progressed through the research process, I appreciated and support Donelan’s (2005) assertions that drama practitioners (or researchers) and ethnographers share *a common frame of mind*. I have come to understand that the divide that separated the realm of the theatre from the reality of social life is, indeed, quite thin, and often blurred. I concur with Salway’s (2005) assertions that community-centric theatre is “the art form that is the closest to real social life” (p. 6). This thesis is designed in such a way to be reflective of these assertions so my own understanding that research, drama, the theatre and ‘real life,’ overlap, intertwine and blur into each other, becomes clearer and more defined for both myself and the reader.

In the methodology chapter I make note of the fact that I am not a playwright, actor nor director currently working in Queensland. My participation in the Queensland theatre industry is most often as an audience member and theatre journalist. I do have a vested personal interest in the continuing excellence and proliferation of outstanding Queensland playwriting and performance making but I am not directly involved in theatre industries in a professional way. Similarly, previous to this thesis, my only contact with Margery and Michael Forde had been the interview I conducted with them in my (2008) thesis and previous to that I had never met them at all but knew of them by reputation. I have strived to represent them honestly and accurately, and strove for authenticity in data interpretation – in many ways they became research partners and mentors.

Constraints and Special Considerations

It is beyond the scope of this research to comment on trends, both artistic and professional of creative artists or theatre companies or professionals other than Margery and Michael Forde. This is a case study about them only. It is also outside of the scope of this thesis to argue that the Fordes' work is indicative of any particular trend or professional or aesthetic philosophy in the Queensland or Australian performing arts contexts but based on research for this research, it is fair to suggest that Queensland theatre has always be particularly sympathetic to 'home grown' theatre works.

In terms of authenticity, the Fordes viewed and approved all transcripts as thorough, fair and accurate representations of themselves and their words. They approved the construction of their testimonies into the theatrical style play-scripts that are seen later in this thesis and gave constant feedback to my own analytic memos and field notes. In the field notes, I strove to

report as authentically as possible about what I saw, heard and experienced but it is also important to note that as with any ethnographic process, there will always be moments or nuances in those moments that may have gone unnoticed in my observations. What has been observed and recorded however, has been carefully transcribed, checked and shared with the key stakeholders in an endeavour that authenticity remains at the heart of this unfolding story. Ideologies, perspectives and points of view as expressed by the Fordes in this case study have been included without censure or alteration by me as the researcher.

Methodology Overview

Using the paradigm of case study, this thesis allowed a narrow lens to focus exclusively and explicitly on the Fordes' work. The techniques of 'structured participant interviews' and 'field notes' formed the bulk of the data collection and allowed a 'thick' (Greetz 1973) description of their work to evolve. Data reporting and analysis are constructed creatively with interviews and often presented in the style of a theatrical play-script, whilst field notes and analysis were recorded in a more creative narrative style. Analytic and reflective memos in poetry are also used to include my impressions and perceptions as researcher and to further elucidate the mood or essence of a particular piece of data or analysis.

Data trustworthiness was maintained through a triangulation process using multiple data sources to confirm and clarify research finding and data was coded for emergent themes. An extensive, collaborative member check process was also used allowing a close check on authenticity to continue throughout the research process. As a researcher, I align strongly with Ely's (1991) articulate assertion that qualitative researchers "are those that want their participants to speak for themselves" (p.1) and this has been the guiding principle of the methodological design of this research. The methodological chapter will unpack the

qualitative approaches used in more depth and allow a more precise understanding of the processes followed during the research process.

The Research Contribution

This research offers a substantial contribution to the understanding of community theatre narratives and ethno drama practice in the context of contemporary Australian dramatic scholarship. It is unique in that it is a distinctive case study of playwrights Margery and Michael Forde. Currently, no other case study of their work exists and certainly there is little scholarly documentation of their recent ethno dramatic works. This research also offers contributions to theatrical, dramatic, artistic and qualitative scholarship in the following ways:

- a) It contributes to understandings of applied and community theatre theories, praxis and philosophies and the way ethno dramatic approaches to community stories can empower, enfranchise and affirm dispossessed or voiceless groups and individuals. It contributes to the understanding and implementation of playwriting praxis that has an emphasis on community narratives.
- b) It contributes to the body of knowledge of drama as a discipline, especially in terms of the poetics of ‘real life’ stories and how they can be realized dramatically. It contributes to understandings of community-centric drama praxis; that is, drama that has an explicit community focus, aesthetic or ideal.
- c) It contributes to the understanding of community based theatre as an important form contained within the wider approach known as applied theatre.
- d) It contributes to the scholarly discourse relating to Queensland theatre including its history and traditions and makes an important contribution to a gap in scholarly

knowledge that relates to more contemporary movements, ideologies and realities in Queensland's theatrical climate.

- e) It contributes to the understanding of the possibilities of performance ethnography as a research method and as a tool for creating meaningful collaborative and community dialogues in theatre and the use of qualitative research methodology in the creative arts.

Unfolding The Story

Whilst Chapters Two and Three provided the necessary literature review and methodology overview of this thesis, it is in Chapter Four, 'Telling Untold Stories' where the reader is first transported into the storytelling process where two of the Fordes' most successful plays are discussed. The first section highlights *Cribbie*, (2009) an ethnodrama comprised from the oral histories and testimonies of the inhabitants of Cribb Island, a former suburb of Brisbane that was reclaimed to make way for the construction of the Brisbane International Airport. *Cribbie* uses myriad voices of the displaced residents to tell a story that is rich with themes of dispossession, community and home. So powerful was this play as a piece of Queensland dramatic history, that it recently has been published by Playlab in Brisbane.

The second section of this chapter considers the Fordes' latest production *Behind the Cane* (2009). This distinctive and highly successful play is comprised of the oral histories and testimonies of the descendants of the South Sea Islander peoples who were forcibly brought to far north Queensland to cut sugarcane in the late nineteenth century. Similar to *Cribbie*, it uses oral history and personal testimonies to tell stories of those whose point of view and experiences have previously gone mostly overlooked by popular discourse. *Behind the Cane* also highlights themes of oppression, belonging, home and community alongside notions of ethnicity, family, country and culture.

Chapter Five, 'Going Skating on Sandgate Road' forms the bulk of the analysis of the Fordes' playwriting processes and practice. It follows their work over the entire creation of their 2009 play *Skating on Sandgate Road*, a documentary style play developed from the oral histories and testimonies of seventeen seniors from the Brisbane suburb of Nundah. This chapter traces over three months of the Fordes' work with those involved, beginning with the initial interview of participants, working through the early workshopping and writing phases, to the final rehearsal, performance and aftermath. This chapter also discusses the themes and broader relevance of *Skating on Sandgate Road*, using excerpts from the play to invite the reader deeper into the experience of the participants.

Chapter Six, 'Curtain' offers a summation of the themes of the Fordes' work, their structure, practices and philosophies. The conclusion summarises the analysis of each of the three plays alongside a final comment on the Fordes' overall approach. Recommendations for future research in this area are offered with a specific focus on the theatrical importance of community narratives in the future of the Fordes' creative endeavours.

In the next chapter Chapter Two, "Providing the Script", the scholarly foundation for this research is presented in detail, defining and contextualizing the Fordes' work within the larger scope of theatre and drama scholarship.

PROVIDING THE SCRIPT

Literature Review

*Moving between shelves like a ghost,
coughing, my breath expels dust containing
philosophy and mythology in equal parts.
A potion, a heady brew,
words stacked in thousands,
books like lines of prayer script.
Like a spectre I speak only in whispers
take a book down from the shelf
and like a heart – open it.*

(Downes. 2010. Reflective Memo in Poetry)

Introduction

This chapter explores the scholarly foundations that guide and underpin this research. As research, this thesis is positioned globally in the established discipline of scholarly drama. Drama has a recorded research tradition that extends far into the ancient world and in the case of Western theatre, the earliest commentaries on creative arts and theatre can be found in the works of Plato and most notably Aristotle. Drama, both as an art form and a socialising agent, has been readily and thoroughly discussed by philosophers, historians and scholars.

Study into drama, like all creative arts, poses deep philosophical questions on the nature of human existence, social behaviours, psychology, aesthetics, and the way in which individual, groups, cultures and societies create meaning and understand their existence. This research is influenced by dramatic theories arising from the political and community theatre movements beginning in the 1940s and 1950s inspired by influential theatre pioneers Bertolt Brecht and Augusto Boal. It is also crucially directed by theories of *performance ethnography* and *ethnodrama* (under the broader heading of *Applied Theatre*) that find their origins in the post

colonial and post-modernist movements of the 1970s. (Conquergood 1976 et al & Denzin 2003)

As flagged in the introduction, this thesis asserts that the Fordes' work operates in each of these dimensions at the same time and each of them exists in symbiosis with the others. As performance ethnography and artistry share many of the same goals to elicit empathy and unravel existential and experiential meanings of the human conditions, the Fordes' work can be understood as an evolving journey towards this goal using many different elements and modes. It is to these modes that this discussion now turns.

Purposes and Practices: The Applied Theatre Dimension

It is difficult to offer one definition which encompasses the entire scope of applied theatre. As Ackroyd (2000) notes "the term applied theatre is relatively new. It brings together a broad range of dramatic activity carried out by a host of diverse bodies and groups" (p.1). She suggests that defining or categorizing a particular theatre practice as 'applied theatre' is a question of intention on the part of the practitioners, She argues, "they [should] share a belief in the power of theatre form to address something beyond the form itself" (p.1). In basic terms, this means theatre for more than theatre's own sake. Applied theatre is concerned with representing, through the medium of theatre, something beyond the theatre itself. It has some function other than simply to entertain. Whilst this offers us a good working definition, it is very broad in terms of the different practices it admits under the heading of applied theatre and needs to be considered with a more defined lens.

The idea of using theatre for something more than entertainment is not something new. The founder of the 'Theatre of the Oppressed' Augusto Boal, argues that "all theatre is necessarily political" (1979 p.1) and that "relations between theatre and politics is as old as theatre...and

politics” (p.3). Boal argues that any conception of theatre which is not political or not for some purpose beyond simple enjoyment and entertainment, is the construct of the rich and cultured elite. In advocating the ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ as a radical and one of the first postulated examples of intentionally ‘Applied Theatre’, Boal states, “in order to understand this poetics of the oppressed, one must keep in mind its main objectives: to change the people.” (p.122) Boal argues that the audience shouldn’t be passive in the theatre and indeed should be changed from spectators into collaborators and even creators of the drama. He argues “all the truly revolutionary theatrical groups should transfer to the people the means of production in the theatre so the people themselves may utilise them.” (p.4) Similar to Boal, Bertolt Brecht saw the theatre as the stage in which the class struggle is played out and asserts that theatre should only ever be applied and is not strictly just for enjoyment. Bertolt Brecht certainly asserted in his ‘Epic Theatre’ that theatre has important and powerful political and moral applications and therefore it has important political and moral responsibilities.

Schechner (1994) poses a less extreme view than the political theatre theorists Brecht and Boal when he poses the idea of an efficacy and entertainment continuum in theatre. Schechner (1994) states, “efficacy and entertainment are not so much opposed to each other; rather they form poles on a continuum. No performance is pure efficacy or pure entertainment’ (p.120). Similarly, Plotkin (in Ackroyd 2000) identifies that applied theatre “[should have] some other purpose overshadow[ing] the entertainment function.” (p.3) Ramussen (2000) extends on the view of this complex relationship between entertaining an audience and educating an audience. He asserts that applied theatre combines a whole varied range of dramatic, aesthetic and cultural practises and therefore it is difficult to define exactly what theatrical entertainment is and what constitutes a form of education. He warns that

applied theatre praxis is most normally associated with theatre practices and practitioners who are interested (as Brecht and Boal were) in raising the audience's sense and/or awareness of disempowerment and elucidating the class struggle. Ramussen (2000) adds that understanding applied theatre is not as simple as pitting classes against each other in debates about what is 'entertaining' and 'aesthetic' (p. 2-3) and that "the wish to facilitate drama and theatre as a powerful medium, affecting changes for the attendants is a family resemblance found by those exercising the practice of applied theatre." (p.4). He stresses,

The question of 'applied' theatre is a question of context as it is of intention. If we could see applied drama and theatre as applications to cultural contexts, more than inferior applications from theatre, we should see not one or three Methods, but hundreds of distinctive approaches emerging from a number of sets of complex contexts. (p.5)

By this, Ramussen (2000) means that applied theatre is literally theatre 'applied' and intended for use in specific cultural or situational contexts. He argues that theatre which is specifically intended for specific purpose is the most effective mode of applied theatre. Taylor (2002) extends this understanding in writing,

Applied theatre is becoming a more frequent description of theatre work conducted outside of conventional mainstream theatre houses for the purpose of transforming or changing human behaviour. Applied theatre is characterised by its desire to influence human activity, to raise issues, have audience members problem solve those issues. (p.3)

Taylor's (2002) definition aligns with the various perspectives of Boal (1976), Ackroyd (2000) and Ramussen (2000) blending their different emphases. He asserts that applied theatre is categorized by the intention of the practitioners as 'applied' to certain contexts and situations and is usually for the purpose of changing, transforming, informing or educating people's behaviour and views and that such work usually takes place outside the main stage.

Taylor (2002) also contends, “throughout time there have been many individuals interested in the power of theatre to affect human behaviour” (p.17) and that “theatre has often been used as an instrument to teach and raise issues of cultural interest”. (p.17)

Condensing these arguments, a working definition of applied theatre begins to shape itself. Taylor (2002), like Ramussen (2000) assures that applied theatre is best used when applied to a specific context or situation. Indeed, the power of theatre as a communicative, political and transformative tool to empower class struggle or simply inform and direct behaviours, has been long noted by theatre scholars since ancient Greece and is particularly emphasised by contemporary theatre theorists such as Brecht and Boal. In recent times Taylor (2002) as well as O’Toole (2003) have argued that applied theatre is being employed more and more in a variety of international and cultural contexts as a means of social and theatrical expression. Further, Lepp (2202), alerts us to the growing use of applied theatre in a variety of social and cultural contexts. In her discussion of the education of nursing students and graduates, she highlights the increasing power of drama and theatre to challenge individuals to explore meaning and interpersonal communication across myriad situations. Ackroyd (2000) also acknowledges that in recent times, the uses of applied theatre have become almost boundless being used in various therapeutic, educational, professional and political contexts.

Ackroyd (2007) advocates a more succinct and accurate definition of applied theatre that is truer to the reality of its actual practice. She argues that applied theatre has moved from being an umbrella term to refer to a range of particular forms of theatre practice sharing specific common features, ‘to become a term referring to a specific form itself’ (p.1). She asserts that the term ‘applied theatre’ has become its own discourse and is not indicative of a specific practice but instead relates to a range or practices, contexts and motivations. She adds “there is a rhetoric of transformation in the new discourse of applied theatre” (p.5) and that this has

come about from a notion of the ‘usefulness’ [sic: application] of theatre art and artists in an economic sense. (Ackroyd, 2007, pgs. 4-7) She warns about having too narrow a view of its origins stating ‘it has been identified as having roots in the libertarian of twentieth century drama education, community theatre and alternative or political theatres’ (p.6) and that ‘art has for centuries been seen as cathartic, instrumental, instructive.’ (p.7)

What Ackroyd (2007) and O’Toole (in Ackroyd 2007) warn against, is the overly moral ‘enshrining’ of the term of applied theatre .O’Toole (in Ackroyd 2007) observes, the use of the term applied theatre is often restricted to settings where theatre is ‘being used for explicit social benefit,’ (page.3) whereas it can be used (as is the case of the Fordes) for exploring real people’s stories and allowing those stories to advocate for themselves. (p.8) This complexity as expounded by Ackroyd (2007) and O’Toole, (in Ackroyd 2007) is that the term of applied theatre has, in recent times, become synonymous with a kind of pure, egalitarian form of theatre which is exclusively beneficial to the participants and the discipline and that such definitions are not considerate of the real scope of applied theatre which may be used for a variety of purposes not all of which as generally ethical and not all of which so universally beneficial for all involved.

Applied theatre generally seeks to invite artist and audience into a dialogue where they can collaboratively explore both personal and social identities. Because of its origin in anti-establishment movements, applied theatre is most effective at exploring and deconstructing social and cultural power roles. It is often used to discuss and collaboratively dialogue notions of social and cultural power as well as understand how humans are affected on a personal scale by larger political and social ideas and mores. *The Applied Theatre Researcher/ IDEA Journal* convened by Griffith University (founded by Philip Taylor) offers

rich scholarly discourse and excellent examples of the purposes and functions of applied theatre. In picking up on the functions of applied theatre, Prendergast and Saxon (2009) offer an excellent overview that resonates strongly with the intentions and processes of Margery and Michael Forde in the making of their community plays,

- Focus on multiple perspectives.
- Disregard for sequence except for effective structure.
- Endings that can remain open for questioning.
- Less reliance on words (in some cases) and emphasis on movement and image as theatre language.
- Greater reliance on polished improvisation.
- Theatre as a close direct reflection of life (e.g. The Fordes' community plays derived from interviews and discussions) often with an overt political intent to raise awareness and generate change.
- A collective approach to making theatre where the makers themselves become aware of change.
- Issues of local importance that may or may not be transferable to other communities.
- Audience as an important and active participant in the creation of understanding and often, the action. (Prendergast & Saxon. p. 11)

The overwhelming strength of applied theatre across a range of different contexts is made evident by many of the projects discussed in the journal which highlight its ability to invite participants to actively critique and deconstruct established power hierarchies, social structures and behaviours through performance. Applied theatre also invites participants to explore social and emotional situations within relative safe performance boundaries, thereby making them more aware of their own emotional, social and cognitive processes and

behaviours whilst supported by other participants. *The Applied Theatre Researcher/IDEA Journal* exposes a variety of dimensions of applied theatre which in turn form three distinct categories and contexts where it may be used:

- Educational. Drama for teaching/learning and as part of the teaching/learning process.
- Therapeutic. Drama as a health care intervention, as a form of counselling and as a form of treatment for illness and disability.
- Advocational/Empowering. Drama with a social agenda, drama to enact socio-political change, drama as part of the political process or used to elicit and explore socio-political issues.

These categorisations resonate with Ramussen's (2000) reflections that applied theatre should be defined as an application for various complex contexts instead of awarded a global definition. Ramussen's (2000) thoughts are most helpful in categorising applied theatre as a question of application to process, rather than a global definition across multiple contexts and techniques and particularly useful for exploring the work of the Fordes in future chapters.

Explorations of 'Applied Theatre'

In an attempt to position the work of the Fordes within the scope of the 'applied theatre' framework, it is useful to consider examples of the ways in which it has manifested and been used by artists and practitioners around the world. For the purpose of this discussion, the terms *drama and theatre* will be used interchangeably with an understanding that one is contained within the other, theatre the more 'formal representation' of drama as conveyed to an audience and bounded by both technical and production considerations that drama activity (e.g. improvisations, role play, process drama) may, but may not necessarily have. Drama, as

a term is also what is used in Australian educational contexts to denote a discipline studied by secondary school students. Drama, in this sense, inherently subsumes the notion of theatre.

In an educational context, theatre or drama is used in the teaching learning process. This doesn't mean simply the teaching of drama as a discipline subject but the use of theatre and dramatic devices to facilitate the teaching and learning of 'anything'. Applied theatre used for educational benefits occurs in almost all formal education settings and contexts from early childhood education to tertiary education. There is extensive research on the different forms, contexts and effects of using theatre as a teaching learning tool across all these different settings. In the context of schools, Gallagher (2001) notes that drama used in classrooms, can radically alter a teacher's perception of students as well as the students' understanding of themselves and the issues that they are exploring (p. 2) Furthermore, through the construction of fictional worlds, students can engage with and interact in fictional realities which in turn, can facilitate deeper understanding in students of their own reality and the reality of others. Gallagher assures that the central importance of using drama in the classroom is that it 'invites' students into the experience of learning. (p.6). Kim (2002) similarly argues that in educational settings, "drama making allows us to be conscious of ourselves struggling to make meanings, and therefore to be openly and actively responsive to learning in both a creative and critical mode" (p. 3).

Second, the opportunity of reflection and a safe space where ideas and concepts can be supportively explored is paramount to the use of drama as a therapeutic tool. Drama/theatre as a venue for dialogue and emotional catharsis, plays an important role in the healing process. Drama is used both for individual healing but also to facilitate good health and health practices in groups and communities. In drama, role playing, memories and notions of

identity, can all be explored with relative safety and calls the participants to co-explore realms with artists in a space that empowers and allows free expression and creative experimentation with emotion and thought.

Balfour (2009) argues that the use of drama/theatre as therapy allows people who are suffering from an illness or condition to communicate in an open and honest way without fear or judgement or reprisal. Balfour (2009) exemplifies applied theatre used with returned military service people suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, as an important and viable form of therapy offering participants the opportunity to collaboratively explore and communicate their experiences and concerns in a safe environment. Gjaerum & Ramsal (2008) further elaborate that applied theatre can be used as an intervention to promote healing and health in realms such as self-esteem and confidence. They add, that through involving themselves in drama activities, participants can gain better communication skills and confidence and that applied theatre for a participant suffering can be a kind of emancipatory process, breaking the cycle of victimisation or other oppression.

The notion of applied theatre being part of an emancipatory process enables the third context of applied theatre as ‘theatre with a socio-political agenda’. There are a wide variety of social and political applications for theatre and it is one of the most prevalent contexts in which applied theatre is used. Boal envisioned theatre as a political forum as much as a political tool and the ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ was inherently designed to be theatre to enact and enable social and political change both on small and larger scales. Some of the applications of the advocational and empowering context of theatre range from educating participants to be aware of social, political and cultural issues to elucidating injustices and highlighting marginalized groups.

Social and political applied theatre can be in the form of agitational propaganda theatre or “agitprop”, which is a particular mode of political theatre heavily influenced by Brechtian and Boalian techniques. Famously practised by “The Popular Theatre Troupe” in Queensland in the 1980s, this technique of theatre is highly Marxist in nature and seeks to dramatically draw audience attention to class inequality and other socio-economic issue. Agitprop theatre is one of the most intense and deliberate forms of applied theatre used for a political purpose since most of it is heavily themed and aimed with a revolutionary agenda.

Since applied theatre has its roots in the political theatre movements of Boal and Brecht, there is a plethora of different techniques, practices and practitioners but one of the overarching emphases in applied theatre used for socio-political purposes, is its involvement of communities and community groups as collaborating artists or as sources for the aesthetic materials of their theatre. This is particularly congruent with the original Boalian intention for shifting the focus of theatre from the educated bourgeois classes to the oppressed proletariat. Applied theatre in the communities actively seeks to empower social, political and cultural change and understanding for the participants of the projects and to ‘give a voice’ to those participants. It is also the most congruent element to how the Fordes are in part, applied theatre artists. In order to further position the work of the Fordes within the literature review, it is important to also unpack the notion of community theatre in more depth for it is the elements of the ‘community narrative’ that drives the contemporary work of the Fordes and is indeed, the main focus of this thesis.

Aesthetics and Dialogues: The Community Theatre Dimension

Community theatre is best understood as a particular expression of political theatre that is both an ‘offshoot’ of a strong political theatre tradition but also as a mode of theatre that is independent and unique in its own right. In Downes, (2008) I argued that “theatre since the ancient Greeks has been a complexity of collaboration, community (e.g. the civic duty of the Greek chorus) and storytelling” (p. 8) and while I maintain that theatre is in general, as first advocated by Aristotle, a complexity of imitation, collaboration and community, ‘community theatre’ is a distinct theatrical movement which is born of a very particular political movement and philosophical idea. For the purpose of this thesis, the work of the Fordes’ is best understood as community theatre rather than ‘community based theatre’ which is an offshoot of the former.

In ‘community based theatre’, the organic defining element is that community members come together to explore and present a performance based on a shared interest or issue. (Prendergast & Saxon 2009). The Fordes’ work is a hybrid of both community and community based theatre drawing on elements from both approaches. They seek to provide stories from communities which they then shape and construct for theatre. Both community and community based theatre aim for what Neelands (1984) Prendergast & Saxon (2009) call *conspectus*, a rainbow of ideas and perspectives on an issue, all of which are recognised and included in the final dramatic product. These perspectives may span the political, the social, the cultural, the religious or the spiritual and give depth and authenticity to the script and final performance.

Traditionally, community theatre/based theatre has been inherently political, a voice of the people, a platform to be heard through the theatre when there was no sounding board. Whilst

the name community theatre may be relatively new in terms of theatre genres, its elements of the politic and in some cases, protest are not.

It is fair to suggest that many forms of theatre, from the ancient Greeks, to Shakespeare, to contemporary times, is heavily encoded with political messages. Modern political theatre stems from a particular political and philosophical movement that is easily linked to ideas of utopian socialism and egalitarianism. Errol O'Neill (1995) describes how political theatre, in particular, the protest and 'agit-prop' style which is most associated with modern political theatre movements, was born out of a generation of protest during the Vietnam War and Cold War periods. These periods in history, famous for social changes across many aspects of society, saw theatre that famously rejected capitalist, elitist and imperialistic ideals in favour of a more utilitarian and egalitarian philosophy. Political theatre in the 1950s and 1960s was shaped by young, socialist, university educated theatre artists (Fotheringham 1992, Watt 1995, Milne 2004) whose main agendas were breaking down the status quo and developing a 'new' wave in theatre that was highly political, anti-establishment and accessible by 'the masses' and not just the rich and 'cultured' elite.

Fuelled by the work of playwrights and theatre theorists Bertolt Brecht, Arthur Miller, Augusto Boal, and others, the political theatre revolution swept through America, the United Kingdom and Australia, but nowhere more so than Queensland which was home to the infamous and powerful political theatre companies "The Popular Theatre Troupe" and "The Street Arts Performing Theatre Company". During the 1960s and 1970s, political theatre started to develop a particular niche in presenting theatre to the masses. Such 'masses' are defined by Tuttle (1999) as groups of people who don't normally have access to theatre and are rarely represented on stage. The inclusion of marginalized or disadvantaged groups in

theatre began a distinct form of political theatre, known as 'community theatre'. The focus on including marginalized groups, led to the use of home grown stories and lived experiences to expose and debate social justice issues. In this way, real human stories were used to create what Billingham (2005) describes as, theatre with a powerful social and political agenda. Boon (2005) argues that the political impact of community theatre is to "bring divided communities together" and "to engage creatively, productively and meaningfully with a wide range of issues" (p. 1). This strength which is both a political, aesthetic and cultural one is further expounded by Salway (2005) who argues that community theatre, "is the art form that is the closest to actual social life" (p.6). In *Community Theatre: Global Perspectives*, Eugene Van Erven (2000) defines community theatre as:

An important device for communities to collectively share stories, to participate in political dialogue, and to break down the increasing exclusion of marginalized groups. It is practiced all over the world by growing numbers of people. (p. 2)

He argues that the strength of community theatre has its uniqueness in the fact that "its material and aesthetic forms always directly (if not exclusively) come from 'the' community whose interests it tried to express" (p. 18). The argument Billingham (2005) and Boon (2005) pose is that community theatre is a distinct form of political theatre which is strengthened by the inclusion of the real-life stories of marginalized groups. This definition is a good explanation for the birth of community theatre which Erven (2000) claims is the mode of theatre that opens a dialogue with communities and allows them to collectively share their stories. Salway (2005) concurs that community theatre is set aside from other theatrical styles by its inclusion of real people and real stories.

Community theatre in Australia is a foundational work by Richard Fotheringham that explicitly discusses the development of community theatre in Australia. Fotheringham (1992) defines community theatre as a specific approach when “the community and the artists devise a performance project with the intention, not only of entertaining, but also saying something about the community’s life experiences.” (p.20) This stance parallels with Erven’s (2000) and Salway’s (2005) argument that community theatre is reflective; incorporating real life experiences and stories of members of particular groups and/or members in the community.

Fotheringham (1992) describes the rise of contemporary community theatre in Australia since the 1970s. He argues that community theatre is most often a kind of theatre which is developed and staged outside the mainstream theatre industry by artists who he describes as ‘relatively young (and relatively idealistic) as well as having little to no practical knowledge of the practical and administrative demands of theatre-making’ (p.27). This is similar to O’Niell’s (1995) and Watt’s (1995) definition of the kind of artists who developed the ‘new wave’ political theatre in Australia from which community theatre was born. The artists that O’Niell (1995), Watt (1995) and Fotheringham (1992) describe are essentially the same: young, idealistic university educated theatre-artists who seek to challenge the established status quo and also traditional concepts of theatre.

Watt (1995) extends on the view describing community theatre artists in Australia as viewing the place of the arts in the community as a way to ‘engage in meaningful dialogue with their audience’. (p.8) Furthermore, he asserts that their socialist and anti-traditionalist views on theatre created a theatre product that was ‘portable, cheap and capable of reaching audiences other than those who patronized “real” theatre’ (p.15). Watt (1995) and Fotheringham (1992) concur that these community theatre artists favoured a more collaborative approach than their

mainstream theatre counterparts. With financial resources scarce or unavailable to emerging and amateur theatre groups, the artists further embraced their socialist and egalitarian philosophies and formed communal groups, presumably styled on groups such as ‘the Berliner Ensemble’.

These groups were highly socially active, finding new ways to stage theatre that did not rely on the financial support of corporate or government funding bodies and mainstream theatre companies. The approach of communal and highly collaborative theatre making is another aspect that set community theatre apart from other theatrical styles. The theatre artists of “The Popular Theatre Troupe” and “Street Arts Performing Theatre Company” and other similar Australian community theatre ensembles became known for their rejection of traditional theatre rules and hierarchies, favouring instead, collaborative and communal creation of theatre that was political and deeply connected to the community which inspired it.

Although these groups and movements unquestionably gained the most influence during the 1970s and 1980s, Healy (2000) argues that ‘community’ and political playwriting in Queensland can be traced back to much earlier movements and traditions. Healy (2000) notes that certain trends at turn of the century Queensland (and Australian) playwriting are identifiable as the ideological roots that influenced the development of a strong community and political theatre tradition in Queensland. She notes that this kind of playwriting championed the working class and often satirized or ridiculed the rich and cultured aristocrat. Healy (2000) asserts that these themes of ‘rich Vs. poor’, “country Vs. city” and ‘working class Vs. aristocrat’ provided the impetus for an emerging aesthetic in early Queensland writing which was highly political and even pre-socialist.

Healy (2000) and Radic (2006) note that community drama in Queensland can be traced to origins that are well before the socialist movements of the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. Healy observes that in the ‘Great Depression’ due to the high cost of maintaining (and attending) main stage theatre, audiences began to patronize amateur theatre companies that were far more ‘community’ minded than their main stage counterparts. Mee (in Downes 2008) argues that the difference in theatre companies like ‘The Brisbane Repertory Theatre Company’ (now *La Boite Theatre Company*) was not just limited to economic ideologies that made it more attractive to patrons during the 1920s but that it was also the aesthetic and artistic motivations of companies like Brisbane Rep in the 1920s that made them attractive to local audiences. Mee believes that this was because the emphasis on work that was new and specifically written for a Queensland audience.

While the work of writers like George Landen Dann can be seen as quintessentially ‘Queensland’ flavoured, they are not necessarily what is meant by ‘community’ theatre. Milne (2004) states: ‘The community arts movement in Australia has always been somewhat coy about questions of definition, whether of community or of art’ (pp. 221) and offers the following useful description of the community theatre movement in Australia.

Australian community theatre pieces have been structured around life in specific towns or suburbs, particular immigrant communities, nurses and coalminers, issues of local concern like domestic violence or occupational health and safety, the deaf and the wheelchair-bound, old age pensioners and fishing fleets, strikes, bushfires, droughts, earthquakes and other disasters as well as local identities of the past (p.222).

In Downes, (2008) I posed that the idea of a ‘specific’ cultural group, subgroup or location was at the core of the aesthetic of ‘community’ that pervades Queensland’s theatrical scene.

This particular idea of the *specific* community theatre; that is community theatre which is specifically designed for a specific community group, was expounded by the majority of the playwrights I interviewed in previous research. (Downes 2008) In particular, Queensland artists Sean Mee, Saffron Benner and Margery and Michael Forde (in Downes 2008) all described a theatrical aesthetic that was close to Milne's (2004) description of Australian community theatre ideologies. Their views were mainly focused on the idea that stories of 'communities' were the most immediate and meaningful way to connect to a local audience.

In a very real sense, they felt that including the stories of the local community actively worked to deconstruct perceived and actual barriers between artists and the community that reinforce elitism and cultural exclusivist ideas. These ideals date to the very foundation of 'community theatre', that to give the 'community voice' pride of place and equal ownership of the theatrical product encourages a theatre culture which serves to break down socioeconomic and cultural stereotypes and barriers. Ideas of an 'everyman' theatre as advocated by Brecht, are sought to be actualised through community theatre where the voices of groups in the community form the basis of the theatre.

Kuppers & Robertson (2007) assert that through community theatre practices, groups of people can meld together into political aesthetic action.' (p.11) They argue that through the portal of community theatre, established notions of political, social, cultural and individual differences are deconstructed and transcended. They add that by seriously reflecting on notions of difference allows a process whereby communities can collectively empathise together and enact sustainable political growth and change (p.11). Taylor (2003) strengthens this view in a discussion on applied theatre when he writes, 'Applied theatre is a people's theatre. It demands community presence and action and it especially requires a commitment

to help others to help themselves.’ (p.27) These attributes are some of the foundational features of the community theatre movement which has sought to deconstruct social and cultural power roles and re-empower communal and cultural groups that have been ignored, overlooked or excluded from ‘traditional’ forms of theatre. As Boal writes:

The bourgeoisie already know what their world is like, their world, and is able to present images of this complete, finished world. The bourgeoisie presents the spectacle. On the other hand, the proletariat and the oppressed classes do not know yet what their world will be like; consequently their theatre will be the rehearsal, not the finished spectacle. This is quite true, though it is equally true that their theatre can present images of transition.
(in Kuppers & Robertson, 2007, p.13)

This ‘transition’ that Boal writes about, occurs from allowing communities into the dialogue of the theatre where they have previously been excluded. Aesthetically, the transition between the ‘traditional’ and ‘bourgeoisie’ theatres and the socialist-egalitarian community themed theatres is understood in the notions of theatrical product. As Boal argues, the ‘traditional’ playwright constructs a theatrical product out of their social and cultural reality, however this can often neglect the experiences and realities of the ‘oppressed classes’ who have no conduit through which they can express their social and cultural identity. According to Boal, ‘community theatre’ enacts a ‘transition’ or transformative process where the nature of theatre as it has been constructed by the ‘bourgeoisie’ is actively challenged and deconstructed. Transformation and transition is one of empowerment, giving the oppressed and marginalized communities a chance to re-invent the whole concept of theatre and theatrical product to better suit their need to express their cultural and social existences. (in Kuppers and Robertson, 2007, p.9)

There are many tools, processes and practices that community theatre employs to enable this transformative process to take place. The key element that must exist for community theatre

to execute the empowerment is to create what Friere (in Kuppers & Robertson, 2007) describes as a 'critical and liberating dialogue, which presupposes action' (p.24). Similarly to Boal, Brecht, Fotheringham and Watt, Friere places the crucial element of community theatre in the community itself instead of from outside. Friere argues that for true 'liberation' or transformation to take place by and through the venue of theatre, the community must be critically, reflectively, and actively involved.

Community theatre's quintessential element is that it must engage in a dialogue where the community is the central contributor. How community theatre executes this is a complex issue but is one of central importance to the notion of community theatre itself. Kuppers (2007) offers important insight about how ideas of community and notions of theatre can coexist in a way that fosters the all-important transformative and liberating dialogue. She writes, 'storytelling, sharing language and myth making are the offerings that allow the horizon of community to appear.' (p.36) Kuppers adds that through the invitation to share stories and collectively and collaboratively share language and experiences (akin to Erven's {2000}, definitions of community theatre), a theatrical form is executed which is inherently dialogical, removing individual artists or participants' egos from the equation and enacting a context where equal opportunity to make stories and make meaning from the stories is realised. She states,

Wanting to listen, hear and tell, we are abandoned to the distance between the story and our I's, but we lean in, move our heads into the circle, hovering between the space between the I and the communal story. (p.36)

Kuppers (2007) is advocating the theatre of change that was envisioned by Boal and Brecht - a mode of theatre that is active and works as an agent of empowerment and social and

political change instead of a venue for entertainment. She reacts against dramas that value individual egos, whether they be artist or community collaborators and instead fosters a move to theatre of transformation and of change through meaningful dialogue. The dialogue becomes meaningful that it is neither abstracted from the individual human dimensions that are explored in all dramas nor heavily laden with political ideas of the community. Instead the story becomes a communal sharing experience where all participants are invited equally into the dialogue and thereby equally entitled to construct meaning and enact change.

Kuppers' (2007) notion of community theatre is theatre that goes beyond sole benefit for either the artists or that of the community, but rather is one where there is mutual benefit for all and where personal change takes place alongside political and social change. As Kuppers stresses, 'our work is not located within art therapy, changing ourselves, but within political labour, changing ourselves and our world'. (p.36) Hence, community theatre is best understood as a theatre whereby personal as well as political changes and transformations can occur through the dialogue. As was earlier described by Billingham (2005), Boon (2005), Salway (2005) and realised by Watt (1995), in discussing the development of community theatre, it is the personal stories from marginalized groups in the community that are the most politically powerful and it is because they are the stories of real people experiencing real human situations and dilemmas that they become so powerful and offer the opportunities to be used to enact personal and political transformation.

Community Theatre and Lived Experience

Kuppers (2007) expounds that the nature of an experience being an authentic 'lived experience' activates it as a way of communication and connectivity that is achievable only in communal storytelling and community theatre. She provides the example of an everyday

event such as “walking up the street” to describe that real everyday events that occur in human lives, are a veritable complexity of symbol, metaphor, emotional and spiritual phenomenon. She believes, ‘the “soulless” plan becomes a lived experience that could potentially open up a moment of difference.’ (p.40) For Kuppers, (2007) communal storytelling and myth making are the processes by which human beings equalise the difference between their individual and communal existences and also how communities can collaboratively make meaning and contextualise their environments. Through community theatre she argues that storytelling and myth making ‘allows us to see ourselves as not fixed in discourse but to experience discourse as spielraum [room to play/playroom]’ (pp.40-41). This notion that individuals and groups are not ‘fixed’ in discourse, links to the foundation of community theatre to challenge and deconstruct preconceived and established notions of being. What Kuppers (2007) is describing is that this can go far beyond notions of political existence but extend also to social, cultural and spiritual existences as well.

The argument for seeing lives as ‘experiences’ that can be understood and explored in the spielraum is central to how community theatre operates aesthetically. This refers to the taking of fragments and pieces of real lives and interpreting them in terms of their experiential elements, then relocating them to the deliberate “play room” of theatre where they can be collaboratively explored and deconstructed. This notion of how individual and communal experiences can be interpreted and explored through theatre is further discussed in the next section on performance ethnography.

Kuppers’ (2007) arguments that both individual and social lives can be viewed as experience and as discourse at the same time, enables a theatrical aesthetic that treats real lives as texts and texts as real lives at the same time in a veritable complexity. She advocates the same kind

of dialogic thinking that Boal envisaged that theatre can act as an agent of personal, social, political and communal empowerment and change. What is unveiled through examining the praxis and philosophies of community theatre is that personal and communal meanings are inextricably linked and intertwined.

Gonzalez (in Kuppers & Robertson 2007) adds that theatre making deliberately brings people together to “experience to world of the production” (p.49). Taking Kuppers (2007) as well as Billingham’s, (2005) Boon’s (2005) and Salway’s (2005) earlier assertions that community theatre is an aesthetic that allows personal and social realities to be replicated, deconstructed and explored in a dialogic, collaborative and experiential way, it can be argued that participants of community theatre are invited to actively deconstruct and reconstruct their personal, cultural, communal and social realities in the microcosm of theatre.

Theatre as a microcosm of a society and as a fictional model of human behaviour takes on further strength when the theatre model is directly and purposefully engaged with notions of community and communality. Kershaw (in Kuppers & Robertson 2007) summarises this line of thought to congeal with Boal’s (and even Aristotle’s) view of the nature and purpose of theatre, in stating that theatre, should be ‘an ideological transaction between a company of performers and their audience’ (p.7) and that community theatre can be understood as ‘a public arena for the collective exploration of ideological meaning. (p.78)

Fundamentally, this thesis identifies two dominate forms of community theatre, both commonly defined in that they draw aesthetic material from a community or community group which forms the base of the script and the performance. Put simply, the first form of community theatre uses professional artists to re-interpret the voices of the community whilst

the second form uses the community members themselves as artists and collaborators. Whilst this latter form of community theatre also has significant input by the artists shaping the work, a far greater responsibility is given to the community themselves in being an integral part of the performance itself and in forming the script and direction of the dramatic work.

In respect to the work of the Fordes, although there has been an evolution of their approach which sees a hybrid of both forms of community narrative (both theatre driven by themselves as artists and by the community members as well), generally they work as artists generating the community narrative. Predominately they involve members of the community as storytellers and not as collaborative artists in the technical and performative dimensions of theatre. The one exception has been in their latest work - *Behind the Cane* (which will be discussed later in the thesis), where there has been a greater focus on the ownership of the performance by those whose stories are being told.

Community Performance With Communities As Artists

This second form, where the community is more actively involved in the dramatic result, has been widely documented in terms of its applications, projects and contexts and resonates closely with Boal's original vision for a theatrical aesthetic that was created by the proletariat. The main elemental goal of this type of community theatre is to involve the community in all levels of production, from the initial conceptual design to the final performance and ongoing feedback. In the contemporary sphere, Kuppers (2007) describes that these performances are usually part of more extensive community intervention works and indeed can have a long-term duration over the course of months and in some cases, years, with multiple performances, dialogues and other activities happening in the scope of the project.

There is a wide range of documentary and scholarly sources of community theatre contexts and projects which are useful in understanding community theatre which is managed and driven by artists in residence. In particular, this thesis draws on several compendiums of community performance anthologies, namely Fotheringham's (1992) foundational work on community theatre in Australia, Erven's (2000) *Community theatre: Global perspectives*, Billingham's (2005) and Boon's (2005) work on examining contemporary international community and 'interventionist' dramas and Koppers & Robertson's (2007) work *The community performance reader*.

Fotheringham (1992) records a number of community arts projects in Australia and more specifically, Queensland. A particular project known as *The Logan City Project* (1983) is discussed where they rationalise their project focused on the youth of Logan as, 'they were first generation residents of Logan, and the concept of giving a creative voice to the new residents of a new city seemed appropriate and interesting.' (p. 80) Using local high school students as the collaborative artists, the arts-practitioners determined they would create a community theatre performance that honoured the 'history, lifestyle and aspirations of the youth community of Woodridge and Kingston'. (p.80) The high school students were mentored under an experienced community theatre writer and encouraged to interview members of the community to garner the real life experiences. At every stage, the students were involved as the primary artists and their community served as the main basis for the aesthetic materials of the performance.

Stanwell & Jones (in Fotheringham 1992) write that there was a large amount of local support as people were keen to experience the artwork that was generated by and about their

own community and they attribute this to the overwhelming enthusiasm and high audience numbers. They note that the lack of funding was not necessarily a negative aspect of their project as 'the co-operative spirit and inventiveness generated by a lean budget gave enormous strength to the project'. (p. 88) Importantly, it was the collaborative measure of this project that gave it impetus and value.

Co-operation, collaboration and allowing community members to 'invent' their own art works is the most crucial element of this type of community theatre. Sawyer (in Fotheringham 1992) writes of her interactions with a community group of elders called *The Tombolas* in Carringbush, Victoria in 1983. She recounts the reflections of a playwright working with *The Tombolas* as saying, 'I found I had to create scenes built from the experiences of individuals in the cast, so they wouldn't so much be learning lines as acting out what they had done as youngsters'. (p.99) This element where stories are gathered directly from the community is highly similar to the Fordes' process and also key to their emergence as performance ethnographers. Sawyer writes that these stories inspired by the history of the group were some of the most positively received by *The Tombolas* and their audiences.

Innes (in Fotheringham 1992) also elaborates on the sense of affirmation and positivity when artists work with community participants to stage and tell their own stories. She recounts her work throughout the 1980s with a community theatre of disabled people. Innes affirms that that involvement in theatre, and learning the skills of theatrical craft, from acting and writing, to setting and staging, is profoundly empowering and affirming for marginalized people, particularly the disabled and that seeing the efforts come to fruition breaks down many stereotypes of disability and fosters a more inclusive community. (p.124)

Erven (2000) also offers a case study of several community theatre ensembles and projects around the world. In particular, he describes that modern Philippine community theatre draws on a rich cultural history interwoven with strong elements of communal dance, ritual and celebration. Erven notes that one of the challenges faced by Philippine community theatre is introducing new, contemporary material and practices, because many conservative and 'traditionalist' ideas pervade the Philippine culture and the introduction of new work is often met with resistance and is rarely very successful. He urges ongoing work in the Philippines community theatre movement to stay true to cultural roots but also to tell stories and execute a form of theatre that is viable and meaningful for a contemporary Filipino society.

Erven (2000) also describes community theatre movements of the Netherlands as drawing from a highly political theatre movement (quite similar to the US, UK and Australian community theatre traditions) observing that the Netherlands' approach to community theatre is a deep and pragmatic examination of their individual and social experiences and realities. He identifies that the great strength that emerges from the Netherlands' approach is the attention to the details of individual social lives and how these can be used to compose, dictate and shape the drama. He writes, 'Although situations, plots and characters can be fictional, actors fill them in, like empty shells as it were, with recognizable elements drawn from their own lives'.(p.61) Erven (2000) notes that this early 1980's approach to community theatre was categorised by extensive improvisation and workshopping.

This is a technique also employed by the Fordes in the same way as an explorative tool to investigate the emotions and actions of a particular situation, scene, character or piece of

dialogue. Part of their fundamental *modus operandi* is a dedicated period of directed and deliberate improvisation and ‘trial and error’ where they play out and replay various contexts, situations and circumstances, deeply probing for emotional and experiential detail. Erven (2000) records a participant response of these community theatre improvisations which is useful here in understanding the work of the Fordes,

You dig much deeper into subjects than you would normally do. What may look like a superficial theme turns out to contain a lot more underneath. All kinds of aspects and experiences affect people differently, or similarly without them realizing it. You use those deeper layers of experience when you prepare your assignments, because that is the material that you will be working with later to address your audience. Even though that point is still a long way off, you have to concern yourself with that from the beginning, because later you will benefit a great deal from everything you pick up now. Attitudes people adopt when sharing their experiences, the way they jump up to demonstrate something, the little signals of aggression when they remember something unpleasant. Those are the things you hear and see.
(p.60)

This is a poignant example of the kind of dialogical aesthetic that is executed in community theatre projects. It links strongly with Kupperts (2007) earlier realisations that viewing personal and communal lives as experiences can lead to very deep understandings of their universality and revelations of the poetic in the ordinary. McDonnell (2005) describes this same powerful evocative sense in his reactions to a community theatre work composed with inmates of an Irish prison,

The theatre is created in a cell, a kitchen, a community space, a theatre and in one man's head. It arrives through the agency of cigarette papers smuggled in mouths from a prison, a tape recorder, paper and pen, debate and argument. It is begun by men, and taken forward with a deeper agenda by women. It is part reportage, part text, and part improvisation. A particular issue, interrogation, becomes a prism through which other experiences are refracted. However, while the script exists, and can be re-interpreted, what cannot be reproduced is this process, the collective ‘method’ by which the play came to be made. It was a method conjured out of the interaction of people with an unstable reality, and negotiated amid politically created limitations on access, resources, space and time. Belfast Community Theatre

demonstrated a politics of improvisation that moves us beyond notions of devising, to embrace both the sequence of human activities that produced the script, and the means by which nationalists survived an unpredictable and hostile reality. (p.43)

McDonnell's articulate description is congruent with the evolving notion of community theatre as evocative of a space where personal, social and cultural existences can be collaboratively deconstructed, reconstructed and explored. It also serves as a dialogical and communicative venue where personal experiences can be 'mined' for their universal and communal themes. Community theatre is a venue where particular stories can become universal stories, actively challenging cultural stereotypes, privileging and empowering peoples to make, share and communicate their lives, experiences and how they make meaning of their worlds.

As Kuppers earlier argued, community theatre is a 'political labour, changing ourselves and our world' (p.36) and that the elements which dictate community theatre is not limited to notions of 'communities' themselves but also ideas of 'co-habitation, embodiment and enworldedness'. (p.37) These elements strive to foster a transition in narrative, symbology and ideas to enact what Kershaw (in Kuppers 2007) earlier referred as the ideological transition between artists and an audience. She calls for a process of embodiment where the individual narratives, symbols and ideas form the essential parts of the communal arts making process. She (2007) asserts that through this process of embodiment, barriers between individual experiences and communal experiences can be challenged and blurred. Embodiment also acts as an agent of social empowerment, allowing those who have not lived the particular experiences of others to do so in a creative way. Through the 'labour', (Kuppers 2007) community theatre practices, individuals and communities can be

communally empowered by the embodiment and re-imaging and imaging of lives, experiences and contexts.

Community Theatre with Non-Community Artists

Community theatre does not necessarily have to be composed of and comprise members of the community. Erven's (2000) description allows the possibility for the community or community groups to be the ideological springboard and source for aesthetic materials for artists rather than the participants alone. This form is usually the approach of the Fordes as they employ a range of qualitative ethnographic techniques, namely interviews, to gather histories and testimonies from people in the form of narratives. They use this as their aesthetic blueprint to create and construct theatre that is community grounded, dialogical but also aesthetically and artistically viable.

These elements of their work see it transition and blur between a form of community theatre and an emergent performance ethnography. The use of qualitative style research methodology and the roles that they place themselves into are similar to the way an 'observational ethnographer', sees their work evolve in aesthetics from community theatre to performance ethnography. In addition, empathy and embodiment form much of the scope of the community narrative work of the Fordes as they seek to unravel different perceptions, points of view, experiences and lifestyles. This is a defining element of community theatre artists but also of performance ethnographers.

Embodiment and Empathy: The Performance Ethnography Dimension.

The form of community theatre that the Fordes pursue can be positioned inside the much larger emergent arts based method of qualitative research and theatre praxis known as

performance ethnography. Oberg (2008) provides a simple but useful starting point for understanding performance ethnography;

By using the theatre as a place of research, performance ethnography transforms the theatre from a place of entertainment to a venue for participatory action research that extends beyond the performance itself.
(p.1)

As stated, performance ethnography is developed from the field of qualitative inquiry. It is a particular paradigm through which data is interpreted and analysed, It is formulated from interpretive ethnography where qualitative data is explored and interpreted in ways that are beyond traditional anthropological and ethnological methods. Performance ethnography is the deliberate creative interpretation of qualitative data through an artistic media, usually dance, music or drama.

Through the process of performance ethnography, the researcher becomes involved in a creative dialogue with the participant in order to attend to the experiential, emotional, kinaesthetic and existential phenomena that is not usually privileged by traditional forms of ethnography. Performance ethnography arrives from a strong post-modern and post-colonial tradition where research seeks to understand the cultural 'other' and their existence and in doing so moves away from the purely scientific dimensions of anthropology. In an effort to break down barriers between researcher and participant that can be seen to reinforce socio-cultural stereotypes and beliefs, performance ethnography actively engages with the lived reality of the participant and forces the researcher to come to an understanding of the existential and emotional realities of that participant which are explored through drama.

Pineau (1995) argues that performance ethnography is a 'deep kinesthetic attunement that allows us to attend experiential phenomenal in an embodied rather than purely

intellectualized way. (p.46) Through this attribute of embodiment, the researcher attempts to understand the existential and experiential realities of the other instead of just documenting them. Alexander (2008) states, 'in a literal sense of the aphorism "walking a mile in someone else's shoes," performance ethnography most often entails an embodied experience of the cultural practices of the other'. (p.77) Oberg adds that through these attributes 'performance ethnography offers a relevant context for exploring and examining social practices. (p. 1)

For Oberg, the central element of performance ethnography is the opportunity it offers for researchers and participants to collaboratively explore and critique social and cultural values in a "social and dialogical venue." (p.2) The social and dialogical venue that Oberg speaks of in the context of this thesis is that of theatre, although performance ethnography is realized in other artistic media such as music, visual art and dance. A great deal of contemporary scholarly material focuses on the development of performance ethnography in theatre. Foundational performance ethnographer, Denzin, (2003) describes performance ethnography as the method of putting the sociological data and imagination into practice in an effort to understand human experiences. Furthermore, Denzin (2003) asserts that performance ethnography challenges established modes of how qualitative data is collected, interpreted and used. The performance ethnographer, as opposed to the 'traditional' ethnographer or anthropologist, seeks to understand the existence of the participant from their point of view instead of describing from an outsider position.

Denzin (2003) realizes that traditional qualitative research can be abstracted and distanced from their participants and that traditionalist ethnographic and anthropological research is removed from the realities of the existence of cultural 'others'. For Denzin, performance

ethnography forces the researcher to think outside of traditionalist and established qualitative research paradigms. Oberg takes up this point,

Performance ethnography acts as a social conscience and tool of liberation gravitating away from the academic notion of research grounded in facts and science and toward research situated in the midst of human experience. (p. 3)

This is achieved because instead of a traditionalist ethnographic approach where the researcher's interpretation of the participant's experience was privileged, performance ethnography strives to *invite* the participant into the research process and relationship with the researcher to collaboratively make meaning and interpret experiences and social and cultural practices. Performance ethnographers realize the need for dialogical research between those who are studied and those who study and how meaning can be collaboratively constructed. Warren (2006) claims that the great strength of performance ethnography is that 'it gives life to people in context, makes embodied practices meaningful, and generates analysis for seeing the conditions that make the socially taken for granted visible as a process'. (p. 318) For Warren, performance ethnography allows everyday events to be closely examined and explored through production and performance so that what seems to be unravels to be a complexity of dramatic and symbolic elements.

The central strength for Warren (2006) is that performance ethnography considers cultural experiences as 'living moments, enfolded experiences, real people in real places.' (p.318) More precisely, Pollock (2006) notes four distinct elements in performance ethnography that separates it in contrast to traditional ethnographic fields of inquiry,

- It shifts the object of ethnography to performance, redefining the cultural field that the ethnographer writes as broadly composed of radically contingent, omnipermeable, micro- and macro performances.

- It shifts the relationship of the researcher and the ostensibly “researched” (the field and field subjects), reconfiguring longstanding subject-object relations as copperformative; beyond anything like documentary interview. It is the reciprocal intervention of each on the other, transforming each in turn.
- It has consequently moved the writing in the “writing of culture” into a performance frame such that performance ethnography manifests given power relations in the poesis of their undoing. It not only allows for, but requires variously sensuous retellings and ongoing re-creations, in word and body.
- By emphasizing the kinetic values of doing of ethnographic research, it charges the activism nascent in putting one’s body on the line, whether that line is on the page or on the stage, in vigil or in protest, or connecting interlocutors in dialogue.

(p. 325)

This means that in contrast to traditionalist paradigms of ethnographic study which value textual depictions of reality, performance ethnography also privileges kinaesthetic, dramatic and non-linguistic explorations of experiential ‘lived’ phenomena. This methodology strives for a more all-encompassing view of participants and how they experience and view their lives as much more than just text or what the written word can convey. It invites participants to be active in the shaping of how their reality is depicted, presented and understood by those who research them.

Pollock (2006) outlines that performance ethnography challenges notions of culture in the research paradigm and that it is designed to empower both the researcher/artist and the

participant through their collaborative explorations of cultural and social identities. By collaboratively working to deconstruct and understand social identities through cultural practices, researchers and participants are able to contextualise and communicate their own experiences. Through the deliberate medium of theatre, languages, practices and other cultural information is decoded and then relayed to an audience. With this in mind, Schnechner (1993) writes of the necessity of performance to assist in understanding culture,

The best way to...understand, enliven, investigate, get in touch with, outwit, contend with, defend oneself against, love...others, other cultures, the elusive and the intimate "I-thou", the other in oneself, the other opposed to oneself, the feared, the hated, envied, different other...is to perform. (p.1)

Schnechner goes on to describe performance as 'behaviour heightened, if ever so slightly, and publically displayed, twice behaved behaviour'. (p.1) This aligns Pollock's (2006) assertion of performance ethnography as being a process where culture, cultural languages and practices can be examined in the deliberate form of theatre. For Pollock, (2006) and for Schnechner, (1993) the crucial element of performance as a way of exploring, negotiating and imagining culture, is the deliberateness of the performance and artistic process.

Earlier Kupper (2007) posed that community theatre animates the everyday individual experiences and behaviours held unknown. Untapped moments of 'poetry' in life and what seems to be mundane experiences can become moments of realisation through the performance experience. Similarly, Schnechner (1993), Denzin (2003) and Pollock (2006) concur that (as yet) unknown and untapped moments of poetry, realisation and artistic, cognitive and empathic understandings lay in cultural practices just waiting to be uncovered in the deliberate medium of arts and theatre. It is through this process that notions of 'the

other' both in the context of the individual self and in a socio-cultural context of the 'the other' be examined, explored and deconstructed.

Drama practitioner, Kate Donelan (2005) notes that 'ethnographic texts are constructed and crafted and various literary conventions are applied within various genres of ethnographic writing, to create cultural portraits to represent 'others''. (p.14) Through the deliberate techniques of theatrical artistry coupled with the experiences and narratives recorded as part of the ethnographic data, Donelan (2005) concurs with Schnechner (1993) that concepts of 'otherness' can be deconstructed and explored. The notion of community theatre is paramount here particularly with reference to many of the community narratives created by Margery and Michael Forde. The 'other' has ranged from war veterans, outback groups and Gen Y rave party worshippers to a marginalised group of senior citizens in one suburb of Brisbane. This 'otherness' is the 'bones' of the theatrical work of the Fordes - to raise awareness of stories and perspectives that may otherwise have never been heard.

Grounding a theatrical narrative in the gathered experiences collected through ethnographic processes gives more political, social and cultural assets to the material than just fiction alone is capable. Correspondingly, allowing imaginative and creative work into the research process fulfils Denzin's (2003) and Oberg's (2008) ideas that research can engage with participants in a creative and meaningful instead of culturally abstracted way. Donelan (2005) believes that ethnography can be used to unravel and unpack notions of culture with a more finely tuned 'lens' than perhaps traditional forms of qualitative research,

Ethnographers immerse themselves in the complexities of a social environment in order to build an understanding of the beliefs, motivations and behaviours of the people they are studying. Within an interpretivist paradigm, contemporary ethnographers view the world as socially

constructed, within multiple, ever changing realities. An ethnographic fieldworker is not a neutral, detached observer but an engaged co-participant in a dialogical relationship with people within a particular context. Interplay, interaction and collaboration characterize the relationship between researchers and participants. Ethnographic texts are constructed and crafted, designed to illuminate and to evoke multiple perspectives of people within their social world. (p. 75)

Margery and Michael Forde had not previously formally considered themselves to be ethnographers until this research invited them to consider the process through which they work professionally now all of the time. Throughout the dialogue with them during the process of this thesis, it has become explicit to them that in order to tell stories as theatre, they have naturally entered into a dialogical relationship with community participants which demands interplay, interaction and deep levels of collaboration. Their texts are finely crafted and evolved using the words of the 'other' in ways that strive for authenticity and an organic structure. They have become theatre ethnographers and community narrative technicians.

Performance ethnography or as Donelan (2005) labels it, 'performing ethnography' emerges as a communal and dialogic meaning making process that allows participants and researchers to collaboratively reach understandings of experiential, cultural and social themes together. As Denzin (2003) and Donelan (2005) realise, the ethnographic researchers and the subjects of their research are immersed in a meaning making process of themselves and their social and cultural worlds. What unfolds is a collaborative and shared process by which meaning is creatively negotiated and verified. As Donelan (2005) found, ethnography places the emphasis on experiential and subjective perceptions of socio-cultural behaviours, system, mores and existences rather than on objective, empirical data. Performance ethnography seeks to engage with this data in a way which is related to the circumstance, context, culture and community it was gathered in rather than being abstracted from it. (Pollock 2006)

Importantly, performance ethnography aims ‘to develop the story as it is experienced by participants’ (Woods, 1994, p. 311). How this is achieved is a complex process. Denzin (2003) states that ‘performance texts are situated in complex systems of discourse’ (p.468) and there are many different forms of performance across a range of modes and media that inform and interrelate to one another. The strong emergence of performance as a mode of conveying socio-cultural research occurs when ‘we inhabit a performance based, dramaturgical culture. The dividing line between performer and audience blurs, and culture itself becomes a dramatic performance.’ (Denzin, 2003, p.467)

Furthermore, Denzin (2003) argues that this is achieved ‘through the act of co-participation’ (p.470) where audiences and participants are constantly invited [back] into dialogue with the artists and researchers. For Denzin ‘a good performance text must be more than cathartic, it must be political, moving people to action and reflection’. (p.470) He observes,

Performances return to memory, not lived experience, as the site of criticism, interpretation and action. It is understood that experience exists only in its representation; it does not stand outside memory or perception. The meanings of facts are always reconstituted in the telling as they are remembered and connected to other events. Hence the appeal of the performative text does not lie in its offer of the certainty of the factual. The appeal is more complicated than that. Working from the site of memory, the reflexive, performed text as readers as viewers (or co-performers) to relive the experience through the writer’s or performer’s eyes. Readers thus move through re-created experience with the performer. This allows them to relive the experience for themselves. (p.471)

This communal and deliberate notion of ‘reliving’ and ‘representation’ [or re-representation] inhabits the same aesthetic dimension as Kuppers (2007) earlier ideas about re-imaging. Following Denzin’s (2003) line of argument, the ideological transaction that takes place is

not limited to intellectual and socio-political or socio-cultural dimensions but instead, performance ethnography allows a whole other dimension of communication of existential, emotional and most importantly, experiential themes. It draws participants, researchers and audiences into a space where cultural, social and political notions and behaviours are deconstructed, but also where individual and communal emotive, spiritual, existential and experiential themes can be represented, explored, imagined and communicated.

Foley & Valenzuela (2008) enrich this perspective in their assertions that contemporary and critical ethnographers should abandon 'traditionalist' and 'positivist' notions that they are or can be abstracted from their field of study. They argue that once this change is made in the ethnographer's research consciousness 'it makes little sense to ignore more intuitive or subjective ways of knowing'. (p.288) The *ways* they speak of include the way individuals and cultures perform their social and cultural lives and how cultures and individuals use performance and art making as part of their imaging and imagining of their self.

As Kuppers (2007) earlier asserted, communal story sharing and story making allow a process whereby individuals, cultures and communities can establish, verify, deconstruct, test, reconstruct and re-imagine their senses and elements of identity. One of the foundational scholars of performance ethnography, Dwight Conquergood (in Kuppers & Robertson 2007) asserts that 'ethnographers study the diversity and unity of cultural performance as a universal resource for deepening and clarifying the meaningfulness of life. (p.57) He argues that performance ethnographers are immersed in a type of moral act quite akin to Kuppers (2007) earlier realisations of 'labour' whereby the researcher/practitioner's self, the participant and the wider audience are both emotionally and politically changed by the work.

Conquergood (in Kuppers & Robertson 2007) argues that performance ethnographers are driven into the morally complex nature of their work since they ‘celebrate the indissoluble link between art and life, ethnographers present performance as vulnerable and open to dialogue with the world’. (p.58). This element of the performance ethnographer’s work, stakes them in the age old debate of the difference (or similarity) between the arts and real life. As Salway (2005) adds, community theatre arts are the most politically powerful since they are the art that is the closest to actual life. However for Conquergood, (in Kuppers & Robertson 2007) analysis, interpretation and representation are not the only marks of good performance ethnography but an invitation to dialogue between researcher and participant and the researcher, participant and the wider audience.

Through the performing of the ‘other’s’ cultural and social behaviours, practices and experiences, the ethnographer (or in this case, the ethnographic/playwrights) makes themselves, the culture, its practice and the participants, vulnerable to criticism and observation from people outside of the culture. Since performance ethnography is situated in post-colonial discourse, its political and cultural agenda cannot be ignored since it opens a veritable ‘Pandora’s Box’ of possibilities, both positive and negative for the researcher, the participant and the culture and cultural behaviours and practices on display. (Conquergood in Kuppers & Robertson 2007). Conquergood (in Kuppers & Robertson 2007) defines four different forms of non- effective performance ethnography;

- *The Custodian’s Rip Off*

Conquergood defines this performance as where the researchers/practitioners purposefully use the data and materials for their own benefit, whether that benefit be

financial, political or ideological. He refers to performing elements out of context or against the wishes of the participants simply because it is good performance material.

- *The Enthusiast's Infatuation*

This form of performance ethnography occurs when researchers/practitioners are too fascinated by the cultural others they study and continue to establish points of likeness between themselves, their audience and the cultural others. Conquergood describes this form of performance ethnography as assumptive and clichéd, not honouring the complexity (and the beauty) of resistance and of cultural difference. It is performance ethnography dominated by an ideology of sameness or likeness, is simply too easy and doesn't honour the difference or dissonance of cultures and the tension that comes from inter-cultural communication.

- *The Curator's Exhibitionism*

Conquergood explains that this type of performance re-affirms socio-cultural stereotypes (particularly paternalistic and misguided romantic notions akin to colonial thinking) instead of closely examining and deconstructing them. Conquergood describes that this kind of performance focuses on the difference of the other and is pervaded by ideologies of exposing and focusing on the differentness (and alien-ness and other-ness of the other and their cultural behaviours, practices and experiences). These type of performances “resemble curio postcards, souvenirs, trophies brought back from the tour for display cases.” (in Kuppers & Robertson (2007) p.63)

- *The Skeptic's Cop-Out*

This is performance where detachment and 'traditionalist' and 'positivist' ideologies pervade the researcher's/practitioner's motivations and practices. Here, the researcher abstracts themselves as far as possible from their participant and refuses to enter into a cultural, social or moral dialogue with them.

Conquergood (in Kuppers & Robertson 2007) warns the avoidance of these four types of performance ethnography and instead advocates what he describes as "dialogical performance",

This performative stance struggles to bring together different voices, world views, value systems and beliefs so that they can have a conversation with one another. The aim of dialogical performance is to bring self and other together so that they can question, debate and challenge one another. (p.65)

This is the goal that lies at the aesthetic and ideological core of Margery and Michael Fordes' playwriting, but instead of it being a tangible goal, it operates as an ongoing premise to the kind of theatre that should be worked towards. It has been an implicit tenet in the community theatre work they have always done. Their type of community performance is enabled where the researcher's/playwrights', as in this case, consciousness and practices are pervaded by an equal concern for their own and the other's human dignity and seek to foster a dialogue and debate the honours both the tensions of difference and the sameness between human beings existential and experiential realities and socio cultural practices with equal measure.

Explorations of Performance Ethnography

In his book *Ethnodrama: An anthology of reality theatre*, Saldana offers one of the best collections of excerpts from performance ethnographic work available in the scope of contemporary research. He offers a view of ethnographic devised projects/theatre works that cover a variety of topics and contexts and the processes employed to approach the performance work. For clarity, it is useful to divide them into three categories,

1. Ethnographic Monologue

Ethnographic monologue is also referred to as auto-narrative or ethno-narrative and represents the verbatim testimony of transcribed field notes, analytic and reflective memos. It is usually centres around the researcher and is highly confessional. Other forms of ethnographic monologue perform, word for word, extensive dialogue and speeches from participants.

2. Verbatim Theatre

Verbatim theatre is characterised by the use of exact word for word testimony as it was spoken by participants. Similar to monologue, much credence is given to extensive dialogue and speeches by participants, however verbatim theatre allows for the representation and performance of conversation as well as individual speeches. Verbatim theatre is distinguished by its emphasis on re-creating as true and as close to life as possible the words, speech, language and style of delivery of the participant.

3. Ethnodrama

Ethnodrama is influenced by verbatim theatre in that it is still extensively preoccupied with the representing and performing the exact testimony of participants, relating and communicating their exact words. Ethnodramas, however, allow for the dramatic representation of recounted events and

experiences in the testimony, where verbatim and ethnographic monologue tend to strive for a spoken or language-centric delivery. Ethnodrama allows for the dramatisation of testimony, in essence participants related stories and experiences can be re-created and re-imagined on stage through the use of theatrical staging and elements. The essential difference between a verbatim theatre product and an ethnodrama is the use of theatrical techniques to stage participant testimony. Verbatim theatre usually would perform the participant telling their story or giving their testimony, usually with a view towards being as authentic and exact replica as possible, whereas ethnodrama would still tell the story but may choose to “act” this story out instead of having it performed verbatim.

Community and Applied Theatre Artists – Margery And Michael Forde

The Fordes’ work is a contemporary example that good theatre is for ‘beyond theatre’s own sake’, a central and basic premise of applied and community theatre ideology. The aspect that makes the Fordes have merit beyond just the artistic or aesthetic product, is how deeply embedded their work is in the notions of community and artistry. Their work serves a dual role of being not only educational but also as advocational and empowering. The work not only seeks to represent and affirm groups in the community, but to educate a larger audience about the lives, experiences and struggles of specific groups, unveiling histories and personal ideologies that may previously have remained private or unheard. Their work is not strictly political and they are very clear that they do not have a political agenda hidden in their playwriting and if there are political themes and messages in their plays, these come from the people they interviewed and not the Fordes themselves.

Many of their plays do however touch on social and political themes and messages. The Fordes see themselves as literary conduits by which these messages are relayed to larger audiences, enabling both a dialogue and a space for people to speak openly and be listened to. In many ways this serves as an emancipatory exercise where people who have been previously unable to tell their stories or their version of events, may do so. They are intuitive 'performance ethnographers' coming into the process by *practice* rather than by study, gathering data through interviews and informal dialogue, transcribing the responses and processing the words into a play-script. In this way, they encapsulate the life and times of the specific community group they are working with.

It is useful here to consider some of the works of the Fordes and to position them inside this literature review. Indeed, it is important to understand the evolution of the playwriting of the Fordes and how what was a purely fictional approach in the beginning shaped over time into writing with a strong ethnographic based grounded in community settings. In 1996, Margery Forde changed the way she approached playwriting. For the first time, she worked with an oral historian who collected the stories of people who were children and teenagers during the Second World War. These histories documented what it was like growing up during wartime Australia and specifically sought to uncover the untold and personal histories of ordinary people during an extraordinary period in history. What came from these histories was the play *Snapshots from Home* for which Margery would eventually win an AGWIE award. In the notes from *Snapshots from Home* Margery Forde (1997) writes, 'I decided to write a collage of memories, a collection of "snap-shots" linked together by visual images, radio broadcasts, dance, music and songs.' (p.x)

Instead of using 'set-characters' in a linear narrative, she chose a number of "voices" which represent multiple roles and parts to suit different parts of the play sequence. This technique is usually employed in Brechtian style Epic Theatre as a tool to disrupt emotional catharsis, but in *Snapshots from Home* it is used as a realistic interpretation of the dialogue that was gathered by the oral historian. In this way, Margery Forde is able to communicate the personal realities and experiences that relate to the overarching historical context. It also works to provide an insight into the language of the participants. Margery Forde is able to craft a work of theatre that is deeply personal but also quite documentary in that it conveys important cultural and historical events in Australian history through the voices of people that were experiencing it firsthand. Using the recorded oral histories of these people, this work is an exemplar of applied theatre/performance ethnography used across two contexts. The first is an educational context in that it serves as an Australian historical document, composed in part by scholarly research which can be used as a teaching and learning tool. Also, it works as an empowering text, allowing the history of the events of the Second World War to be presented in a different and fuller way by privileging people whose point of view is not normally included in existing historical documents of the events.

With the ideas and images explored in the play being reinterpreted from real people's perceptions of historical events, a certain parochial point of connection between the play and the community is established. One of these images is created by the re-told stories of people who believed the Japanese forces were going to invade Queensland:

Voice 4 (Radio Broadcast): *Reports of Japanese midget submarines entering Sydney Harbour have been confirmed. Torpedoes were fired and a barracks ship has been sunk.*

Voice 3 (Child One): *Mum really panicked when she heard that. She went straight into action.*

Voice 1 (Mum 1): *Alright you kids, Get under that kitchen table...and don't move!!*

(Forde, 1996, p.28)

Not only does this dialogue dramatically display the intensity and emotion of the experience, its effect is doubled by the fact that it is someone's real life experience. This not only serves to connect with the audience and the history of the 'community' but also intensifies the drama. As an example of a shared cultural history which explores the social realities of the time, *Snapshots From Home* describes parochial experiences unique to the time period that it depicts. For example the "popular" war time dances patronised by visiting American soldiers in Queensland provided a vivid snapshot of a time of racial tension and prejudice;

Voice 1 (Country girl): *In Winton, every time a convoy came through a dance would be arranged. The white Yanks came to the dance. The black soldiers weren't allowed in.*

Voice 2 (Country girl): *There was a dance in the Winton Town Hall. Two American Negroes came to the door of the hall and walked in but they were quickly shuffled out.*

(Forde, 1996, p.44)

Similarly to *Skating on Sandgate Road*, *Snapshots from home* is structured chronologically along with the war years, beginning in 1939 and ending in 1945. This allowed the dialogue to be organised into sections where it was most chronologically and contextually appropriate. Told from the point of view of children and young people, the play begins with many of the voices of childhood coming to grips with the realities of their worlds at war;

Voice 3 (Young boy, about 11): *There are men practising being soldiers in the main street of Caloundra. They're using brooms as pretend rifles, and carrying the, on their shoulders. And they shoot the broom handles up in the air...like this...a-a-a-a-*

(Forde, 1996, p.65)

Snapshots such as this, evolve from the participant telling their stories in the form of dialogue, a much noted phenomena when working with reality theatres. Margery Forde, in the introduction to *Snapshots from home*, explains her reasons for structuring a play in this way,

I decided to write a collage of memories, a collection of “snapshots”...linked together by visual images, radio broadcasts, dance, music and songs. This required some extensive research. For example, finding exactly the right songs from the era was vital; they had to do more than just atmosphere, they had to flow with the text and underscore the drama.

Because these were collective memories, four actors would play a multitude of roles. They would be the voices of the twenty four people whose stories were being told. I did not want this to be a retrospective piece or to have a sense of “knowing”... it was important that it had an innocence and an immediacy be told from the perspective of those who had lived through the events. The stories in “Snapshots from Home” are true, and wherever possible, the actual words of the storytellers were woven into the dramatic scenarios.

(Forde, 1996, p.x)

What is evident from these descriptions, is that Margery Forde employed techniques of collage theatre in the writing of *Snapshots from home* that are closely akin to Brechtian playwriting techniques of alienation. However, as previously noted, her goal is not to use these techniques to disrupt emotional catharsis as Brecht envisages, but instead to draw attention to the “immediacy” and reality of the stories. Instead of creating a ‘fourth wall’ style production, she attempts to create a work of theatre where the stories can be explored in context. Music, dance, radio broadcasts and other media, serve as contextualising tools that place the stories in a certain time and place. This both strengthens the element of reminiscence in the play, adding to its function as a historical dialogue, but also strives for a

sense of immediacy, that these events are happening in the present space of the theatre. The director of the premiere production of *Snapshots from home* Jim Vile (1996) notes,

The success of “Snapshots from home” is due to the genuine voice of the piece. It’s not a sonic overblown tale of unimaginable bravery we’ve grown up with in the movies, but a story of quiet but real heroism. It is this we tried to capture in our rehearsals. We aimed at portraying ordinary people in extraordinary times getting on with their lives with courage, humour and forbearance

(Vile, p.xvi)

Half the interest in collage theatre is for the audience to experience how one scene with its own colour and texture segues into the new scene with its own emotions and theatricality. The juxtaposition of the scenes is what frequently creates the humour or the anguish: the dramatic irony.

(p.xvi)

Snapshots from Home is a vivid example of how the Fordes strive to show the different textures and colours of life as it is felt and experienced by the participants they work with and make their memories present in the here and now whilst providing an historical archive. It is through this dialogical transaction that the participants, the artists and the audience can collaboratively engage in a process of re-identifying and re-imaging their social and cultural histories. Instead of a play being a fictional representation of events in the Second World War, or privileging the established historical discourses, *Snapshots from Home* provided a realistic lens on the ‘lived experiences’ of a specific community group. This gives the play a tremendous social, political and cultural aesthetic and aligns with Salways’ (2005) realisations that community theatre is the most powerful form of theatre both emotionally and politically because such stories are ‘the closest to actual social life’. (p.6)

This notion of empowerment and education through creating a theatrical space where stories can be shared is the cornerstone of most of the Fordes' work. Margery Forde's play *X-Stacy* (1998) was compiled using 'journalistic' [qualitative ethnographic] techniques where Margery Forde immersed herself in the underground rave/dance clubs of Brisbane to discover the experiences of youth rave/dance culture. She openly conversed with young people about the 'lure' of these underground rave parties and explored their youth 'rituals' in their communal space. Similarly to *Snapshots from Home*, *X-Stacy* privileges the voices of young people and unravels a narrative that was garnered from experience. Also as an educative text, it contains many themes straddling family, group membership, religion, belonging, adolescence and drug abuse. *X-Stacy* has become widely used in Queensland high schools for its powerful anti-drug message and also faithful representation of many of the experiential and 'deviant' elements of an adolescent's world. It also contains messages that juxtapose spiritual ecstasy against the effects of amphetamines (Extasy) and compares and contrasts themes of group membership between churches, families and nightclubs.

X-Stacy works to convey the realities of youth culture with authenticity and intensity. The play is composed of the language idiom used by the specific youth community of the 'rave' and it is this authentic use of language that hooks the younger audience from the very first page. Emerging from a form of participant observation, strong themes of dialogue and embodiment are enabled in the text of *X-Stacy* which calls the audience into the world of those who have experienced it firsthand. Margery Forde reflects on the gathering of data,

Some of my daughter's friends took me to raves and dance parties so I could experience them first hand. And it's not hard to see why they're drawn to it. It's very exciting and tribal. The music's extraordinarily loud, and it comes on like a tidal wave. It pounds through your feet and into your heart.

(Forde, 1998, p.113)

It is through such immersion and observation of the culture that *X-Stacy* gains its realistic essence, the nature of the reality of the dance party and its essence was directly experienced by Forde which then informed the creation of the script and the realistic depiction of that environment on stage. On the structure of the play and the pursuit of a realistic re-imagining of the experience and the environment, Forde writes,

I suppose you'd call it naturalism, but it's a heightened naturalism. A playwright is constantly trying to find ways of bringing human truths to the stage but to do it in a heightened form.

(Forde, 1998, p.95)

It is this 'heightened naturalism' that becomes a defining structural and aesthetic feature of the Fordes' later work, with the realistic agency of participant's oral histories and testimonies embellished and given extra sensory impetus through the use of non-naturalistic techniques such as sound, music and breaking of character.

In 2001 on a Centenary of Federation commission, the Fordes collaborated on the community derived play *Way out West*. Comprised of oral histories and testimonies collected in interviews as well as some field observations and notes *Way out West* is the recollected and recounted stories of people and communities in regional western Queensland. It is a play that primarily explores the Australian 'outback' and the people and communities who reside in it. Structured around the event of "Federation shows" which were travelling outback circuses that toured around regional Australian communities, the play was developed to re-create and mimic these travelling shows and after its creation, was toured back to western regional Queensland to the same locations and communities from where the stories came. It marked

the real beginning on the Fordes' artistic collaborations toward a community-narrative aesthetic. As they recount in their foreword to the play,

Before asking people to tell us their stories we explained that we wanted this show to be something different. It wasn't going to be theatre that was created for a city audience and then taken out into the country...In the towns we visited there seemed to be a tradition of storytelling, a real sense of valuing their own life experiences and wanting to pass them on. People genuinely enjoyed just sitting down and having a bit of a yarn with us. And we loved it! We found ourselves constantly caught up in the humour and honesty and colour of the stories.

(Forde & Forde, 2001, pp.15-16)

Way out West (2001) again straddles the applied theatre contexts of education and empowerment. Similarly to *Snapshots from home*, it uses ethnographic techniques to gather the stories and viewpoints of people from regional western Queensland. As an empowerment text, it operates in the same way as *Snapshots from Home* in that it allows perspectives, experiences and emotions that may have been previously overlooked to be voiced, celebration and affirmed. It educates by way of gathering historical recollections of a bygone era.

Way out West signalled the beginning of the Fordes' collaborative mastery with form, process and aesthetic, community-centric. As they reflected, they purposefully designed the script and the show to be directly relevant and meaningful to the community and audience that was going to be its primary viewer. They related that they 'wanted the audience to feel a strong sense of ownership. After all, these are their own stories we are reflecting back at them.' (Forde&Forde, 2001, p.18) As this was the intention of the Fordes, much of the dialogue is explicit in its reference to the agency by which the stories arrived as can be seen in the extract below;

Woman 1: *Righto! Give that thing a belt would you love?*

[Man 2 (The Boxer) enthusiastically beats the drum.]

Alright folks. Hurry, hurry, hurry! We're getting ready to start, it'll be all happening on the inside so don't muck around! Roll up and see the show! Be shocked and amazed! True Queensland stories that beggar description

(Forde & Forde, 2001. p.25)

The dialogue of *Way out West* is thick with iconic and imagery-rich descriptions of local places, people and phenomena that serve to make it identifiable and deeply rooted in the community from which it came. The agency of reality created a venue where the communities of regional Queensland could collaboratively and creatively tell their own stories, to their own communities. This would become the principle feature and the philosophical underpinning of the Fordes' future work. Similar to *Snapshots from Home* and the later Forde plays addressed later in this thesis, *Way out West* uses a variety of narrative and dialogue techniques to convey the stories as well as a number of theatrical techniques to add complexity and flavour to the play. Some of these techniques are recognizable as Brechtian style techniques of alienation but similar to the Fordes' other works, the inclusion of song, movement or other classically disruptive techniques are used to heighten the emotional intensity of particular segments and stories.

Looking back on the plays, the Fordes' work can be seen in terms of process and practice as a form of applied theatre and more specifically, as a work of performance ethnography. Their work is fundamentally and purposefully constructed to serve higher idealistic and aesthetic purposes that just theatrical entertainment. Their past works have been a complexity of applied theatre techniques that foster a dialogic process between themselves and their

participants and the larger audience and their theatrical product straddles the contexts educational and advocational/empowering drama. Their plays can be used as teaching and learning devices, particularly in the sense that they present alternate perspectives and oral histories about important historical events and eras.

Taking Erven's (2000) definition of 'a community' in this sense, as the basis of aesthetic material, the Fordes work in ways which activate and animate community voices. More precisely, it is theatre that fosters communal ideologies and dialogues. (Kershaw in Kuppers 2007). They consciously establish a praxis which initially places them as 'gatherers' of the stories, and resist putting any of their own personal or political biases on the community participants. Instead, their interview processes allow people to speak for themselves.

The Fordes' work is an ongoing search for communal ideals, experiences and commonality that can evoke powerful senses of empathy and catharsis. The empathy and catharsis that they pursue in much of their work is strongly linked to the aesthetic of community arts practices. (Kuppers (2007) Through allowing the authentic community voice to guide and pervade all their artistic and aesthetic processes, they immerse themselves in the political and the experiential 'labour' that Kuppers describes.

All of the Fordes plays enjoyed well-attended and lengthy runs in main stage venues in Brisbane and often toured regionally and occasionally inter-nationally as well. All four of their major collaborative pieces have been published and remain in wide circulation with some of the plays (*Snapshots from Home*, *X-Stacy* and *Way out West*) also being included on Queensland high school drama syllabi. Despite this, the Fordes have received virtually no

scholarly comment or any critical attention outside of the occasional show review until I included them in my 2008 honours thesis.

The Fordes as Emerging Community Narrative Artists

There has been no scholarly comment on the Fordes' work to date. Similar to other currently working artists, writers and creative industry professionals in Queensland there is a dearth of scholarly (or other) material beyond journalism and/or reviews on their work. Previous research (Downes, 2008) my honours thesis entitled "Playing Queensland: Exploring notions of 'community' on the contemporary Queensland Stage," sought to undertake a qualitative case study with some of the leading artists in Queensland's contemporary theatrical industry. My research briefly touched on the work of Margery and Michael Forde, who, at the time (and still do) best represented the notion of a 'community' aesthetic in their theatrical writing. I discovered that the Fordes, like most of the other artists that I interviewed, were proponents of a 'Queenslander' aesthetic which arose from a consciousness of the Queensland audience and what that audience enjoyed seeing on stage,

Like all audiences, firstly, people come to see great theatre, great story-telling. If the great stories are Queensland stories – then that's terrific. Audiences love to see their own stories on stage. Not just rural but also urban stories. They like to hear their own voices on stage.

(in Downes, 2008, p. 56)

The decision to immerse themselves and specialize in stories from reality as well as a community aesthetic stemmed from an awareness of what the Queensland audience wanted to see and what was the most viable theatrical product in Queensland. They noticed that, in Queensland, stories that reflected some of the parochial essences, images, languages and experience of Queensland were typically the most successful and beloved plays. (Downes

2008) They also explained that, for them, the writing of specific, ‘real’, personal and communal stories was more than just catering to a parochial niche in the Queensland theatrical aesthetic. Instead it represented a deeper and broader quest to uncover moments of ‘natural’ poetry and deeper, more ‘universal truths’ of the human condition,

Many of us have tried to reflect the human condition in the very specific experience of the people of our state. This is not parochial, but it is the way we believe we can explore the general human condition by being very specific to character, time and place in our stories.

(In Downes, 2008, p.53)

It was noted (Downes, 2008) that the Fordes were preoccupied, much more than many other currently working Queensland playwrights, with presenting an as-close-as-possible envisioning or imagining of real lives, situations, experiences, places and phenomena. Their work was focused on exploring ‘reality’ and was invested in the telling of ‘real’ or ‘true-to-life’ stories. Instead of presenting a fictionalized portrayal of the popular ‘Queenslander’ aesthetic, they constructed their portrayals from real agencies, participant testimonies, oral histories and interviews. In this way, their depictions of language, ideas, images, situations, places, people and communities retained more authenticity and a closer semblance to actual social life than perhaps those of other plays. Sean Mee (then the Artistic Director of La Boite theatre company and multiple-time collaborator with the Fordes) noted,

Margery and Michael Forde write plays I think that, are deeply imbedded in the Australian psyche, no , not the Australian or Queensland psyche, in their own world, in the world of their family, in the world of their suburb, in the world of their people. The write extraordinary stories about very ordinary people.

(In Downes, 2008, p.57)

The Fordes themselves spoke about their form as both a professional and aesthetic decision that came from an evolving sensibility towards the imbedded power and poetics of the Queensland parochial discourse. It stems, for them from an impression of the particular essence, flavour and landscape of the theatrical landscape in Queensland;

We feel that Queensland writers have always been aware of the needs, interests and concerns of their audiences. We have noticed that this is a distinguishing feature of much Queensland work. We are very conscious of our audience. This doesn't mean pandering to them but it does mean that we are always conscious of the game we are sharing with them.

(In Downes, 2008, p. 54)

It also emerges from the Fordes' own self-confessed love of 'everyday', 'local' and 'home grown' stories, a strong assertion that such parochial 'Queensland' and community-centric narratives offer deep insights into the more overarching universal truths and insights into the human experience that some drama work cannot. They stated 'the plays we most love are those that reflect life with intensity, passion and integrity.' (p.54) When recounting playwrights and artists working in Queensland who influence them, they immediately praised Indigenous writers such as Leah Purcell, Wesley Enoch and Deborah Mailman because 'their stories demonstrate powerfully how we can find the universal in the deeply personal' (p.58).

The Fordes spoke at length about how their particular form and method of working arrived from not just a consciousness of the Queensland audience and what kind of work was relevant and attractive to them, but also the poetic, aesthetic and dialogic importance of producing and conducting creative work that was, as Mee explained, deeply entrenched and embedded in the worlds and psyche of everyday Queenslanders. They asserted that there was definite relevance and importance to continuing to create work that was culturally and communally specific and linked to part of the collective theatrical and communal identity of Queensland as they offered their vision of the future of Queensland playwriting;

We hope that Queensland playwrights will continue to develop their own voice and reflect their own culture. There are some worrying trends to a sort of bland mid-pacific non-place as the settings for some plays. This would be a pity, because our culture is worth exploring and presenting on stage, and we have only scratched the surface.

(in Downes 2008. p.57)

At the conclusion of my 2008 research, I felt much the same way as they did in relation to their journeys into creating culturally and community-centric work for Queensland audiences. I was encouraged by their allusions to the deeper dialogic, poetic and aesthetic nature of their work and wanted to investigate these aspects in more detail. My 2008 work focused on industry insights and professional practice and was geared towards questions of the Queensland audience and creative industry at the time. It did not look into the style or art form itself and I was interested in exploring those facets as well, alongside the notion of catering to Queensland's particular theatre audience tastes.

The fact that the Fordes were arguably the strongest examples and proponents of the 'community' aesthetic in contemporary Queensland playwriting was part of the reason that gave impetus to this case study. It was also their self-confessed search for poetry, deeper truths and extraordinary stories among the seemingly mundane and 'everyday' experiences of people and communities in Queensland that drove me to focus on them in this research.

This literature review has established the philosophical and scholarly tenets on which this research is founded and has also offered an overview of the Fordes' own literary influences and perspectives. The next chapter, *Stagings* outlines the methodological overview for this research. The research design and approach will be defined and discussed in detail with a specific lens on the practical methodological considerations of conducting this case study.

Modes of data reporting, trustworthiness and the ethical safeguards of this research will also be discussed in detail providing the qualitative framework that supports this research.

STAGINGS

METHODOLOGY

*Like pieces come together,
in unity from disunity,
and from order, chaos is born
as a solar star smashing, crumbling, burning, smouldering,
the frameworks of artistry, opening and closing
as an iris.*

*Grappling with getting into words as one gets into old shoes
and skin,
I begin
to unravel the phenomena of things.*

(Downes.2009. Reflective memo in poetry)

Identifying an Epistemology and Defining the Research

The goal of this research is to explore and critique through a case study approach, the ‘community narrative’ dramatic works of Queensland playwrights Margery and Michael Forde. Methodologically, this thesis is framed by qualitative ethnographic enquiry with a distinct focus on the evolving community theatre work of the Fordes. More specifically, this thesis considers the dramatic process of the Fordes’ playwriting with a particular emphasis on their latest community plays *Skating on Sandgate Road* (2009) *Cribbie* (2010) and *Behind the Cane* (2011). Combining field work with intensive interview and questionnaire methodology, this thesis strives to elicit how the work of the Fordes seeks to represent and portray ‘home grown stories’ of groups in Queensland communities through creative processes that involve storytelling, artistic collaboration and shared histories.

A case study was deemed the most appropriate research paradigm for this research as it allowed a close and focused examination of specific individuals in a particular practice and

context. This research employs qualitative ethnographic research techniques in order to gather data and interprets this data through a range of narrative styles. Case study, as described by Carroll (1996), is particularly appropriate for drama research as drama evokes a myriad of diverse experiences, contexts and situations to be explored and analysed. Taylor (1996) and O'Toole (2003, 2006) add that case study is one of the most useful and widely used methods of enquiry into drama practice as it allows close and 'thick' description of participants, experiences and their associated context with possible high levels of disclosure and analysis.

Data was collected and analysed using qualitative tools such as interviews, analytic field notes, analytic and reflective memos and triangulated with the use of extensive member checking and follow-up reflective processes. The use of case study meant that participant voices could be more strongly represented, scrutinised and honoured through the use of an ethnographic 'lens' and this also meant data was able to be analysed and discussed in a more creative and narrative way through the use of participant voices and my own voice as researcher.

As noted in Chapter one, this research was guided by the overarching question, 'What are the elements, processes and aesthetics of the 'community' playwriting expounded by Margery and Michael Forde? Furthermore, it is framed by the following sub-questions,

- *What exactly constitutes the theatre of Margery and Michael Forde?* What are its identifiable elements? What are the elements that give it structure and purpose?
- *How do they work?* What are the processes that give the work impetus? How is the theatre constructed and executed?

- *Why do they work in this way?* What are their philosophies and underpinning tenets from which they work?
- *What does their work offer as theatrical and community performance in contemporary theatre?*

In every case study, the researcher is concerned with asking questions that capture the experiences of groups and individuals in various contexts and indeed, how they make meaning in those contexts. The questions stated above are the essential ingredients that inform the direction and modus operandi of the research. The following figure deconstructs these pivotal questions in more depth and breadth.

FIGURE 1

The Research Question: What are the elements, processes and aesthetics of the ‘community’ playwriting expounded by Margery and Michael Forde.

SUB-QUESTIONS	QUALITATIVE TOOL	FOCUS
How do they work? What are the processes that give the work impetus? How is the theatre constructed and executed?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical analysis of works. • Interviews. • Field logs • Analytic memos 	The Fordes’ approach, influences and impetus for writing community narratives.
What are the elements and themes that can be identified as ‘community’ and ‘Queensland’ in the Fordes’ contemporary work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Critical analysis of current works • Interviews. • Field notes. 	Exploration of the community elements of the plays.
What does their work offer as theatrical and community performance in contemporary theatre?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews. • Field Log. 	Deconstructing the plays more closely – purpose, current and past public performances and their function.
Why do they work in this way? What are their philosophies and underpinning tenets from which they work?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interviews. • Field Log. • Analytic memos 	Discussion and observation. Member checking and evaluation.

(Figure adapted from Sanders (2003) ‘Overview of Research Design’ Tables p.100)

Case Study as Methodology

Case study is a method of qualitative phenomenological inquiry of specific groups, individuals and practices. Put simply, case study allows the researcher to focus solely and

closely on the participants or groups they are studying and therefore provide a more detailed and accurate representation of it. Yin provides a useful definition (2009) describing case study as an empirical inquiry that,

- Investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context.
- Can be applied in research where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. (p.18)

And,

Case study method (is used) to understand a real-life phenomenon (or participants) in depth,(and) such understandings encompass important contextual conditions highly pertinent to the phenomenon of your study.

(p.18)

This research finds Yin's description useful for this mode of case study. The phenomenon researched is the theatrical 'aesthetic' of two contemporary and active playwrights and the specific context and conditions are the community framework in which they work. Important to this case study are also the following sources of exploration:

- The most recent work of the Fordes; *Skating on Sandgate Road*, (2009) Cribbie, (2009) and *Behind the Cane* (2011).
- Ethnographic field notes compiled in the workshop sessions of *Skating on Sandgate Road* over a three month period.
- Responses from interviews with Margery and Michael Forde, both formal and informal.
- Research analytic memos in poetry which help capture some of the more immediate responses of my work in the field with the Fordes and related performances.

As a methodological approach, O'Toole (2006) argues that case study is one of the most common forms of phenomenological inquiry into drama based contexts today. Sanders (2003) supports this claim in arguing that case study using qualitative ethnographic techniques is a 'highly effective and informative mode of working' in drama as it can 'offers a collaborative partnership with the participants in the research.' (2003 p.84) This notion of 'partnership' is further explored by Taylor (1996) who describes the case study relationship of researcher and participant in drama activity as a deeply immersive one that allows a closer research 'lens' than more traditional research. For Taylor (1998), the possibility awarded by case study and qualitative ethnographic enquiry allows researchers to get closer to the subject because it means that "[case study] best honours the life stories of the people with whom we work". (p.75)

Taylor (1996) adds that 'studies (in drama and performance) which incorporate case study or ethnographic techniques are becoming increasingly popular' (p.37) and 'the techniques we adopt to investigate or practice will inform our evolving perspective' (p.44). Donelan (1992) adds that "nothing gets you closer [to the research subject] than (the use of) ethnography (in drama)' (in Dunn 2000). Additionally, drama researcher, Peter O'Connor (2003) realizes that 'qualitative research acknowledges that as a researcher, I am immersed in a journey with the participants,' (p. 97) and that case study 'seems the most appropriate way to capture the fleeting and transitory nature of drama'. (p.97)

Carroll (in Taylor, 1996) enriches this view in stressing that through case study, the drama researcher is deeply involved in the structures, processes and outcomes of their research. The specific focus and deep involvement in the subject of the research offered through case study, often leads to in depth studies in drama of particular groups, texts, theatre buildings, theatre

companies or ensembles, practices, events or contexts in their natural settings. O'Toole (2006) confirms that case study in drama can be applied to any variety of specific or particular phenomena and used to understand that phenomena in the context of its natural setting.

This thesis is particularly informed by interpretive ethnographic techniques in drama (Dunn 2000, Sanders 2003, O'Connor 2003, Donelan 2005) in that it seeks to elicit some of the experiences, opinions and viewpoints of the Fordes in their most recent works. Similar to the work of O'Connor (2003), it is not the intention of this thesis to capture the full lived experience of the Fordes during the process of one of the focus plays in this thesis *Skating on Sandgate Road* but rather to employ ethnographic techniques to aid the case study enquiry.

Combining an interpretive ethnographic case study with critical analysis allowed me to 'unpack' process as well as product in an effort to identify themes, meanings and ideas explored by the Fordes in their work and more implicitly understand how 'community narratives' and their own style of theatre (which fits well under the banner of applied theatre' and performance ethnography') emerged from their work with specific community Queensland groups.

The Use of Interviews

One of the most significant methods of collecting data during the process of this research was through both informal and more structured interviews with the Fordes and at times, those who contributed to the process in some way. In particular, the informal conversational mode of interviews with more open ended questions allowed a flow of dialogue rich in weight and depth. In not locking the interviewees into specific and inflexible questioning, the Fordes

were invited to let their thoughts flow and the conversation to change direction if need be. Neuman (2003) describes the benefits of open ended questions and interviews in the following ways:

- They permit an unlimited number of possible answers.
- Respondents can answer in detail and can qualify and clarify responses.
- Unanticipated findings can be discovered.
- They permit adequate answers to complex issues.
- They permit creativity, self expression and richness of detail.
- They reveal a respondent's logic, thinking process and frame of reference. (p.278)

Specifically, Neuman (2003) argues in favour of interviews describing that 'the interview is a social relationship (with the participants)'(p.292). The 'social' element of interviews in qualitative research makes them an excellent ethnographic tool when exploring complex relationships and ideas. In this research, interviews were audio-taped, transcribed and then deconstructed to identify emergent themes. Gardner (in Ely et al 1991) and Sanders (2005) both advocate the use of coding emergent themes and elements uncovered in the analysis of data. The coding of data under emergent themes creates an ease of understanding for the researcher and also allows the reader a fuller understanding of the findings of the research by the evolving development of correlative and concurrent themes. As themes emerge and become persistent and reoccurring, patterns are more readily identified.

These patterns can be interpreted to make generalizations and more specific, conclusive findings about the context or phenomena studied in a clear way that is strengthened by the physical data. There is natural triangulation of data as themes are colour coded, checked and

verified by the researcher. I also examined the transcripts of the ethnographic field notes compiled during *Skating on Sandgate Road* as well as data collected from the interviews and progressively identified and coded shared elements emerging from the data. What emerged were four global themes that helped categorize the largest amount of data.

- The importance of authentic languages. (LANG)
- The essence and aesthetics of storytelling. (STORY)
- The emergence of personal testimonies, values and ideas. (ORAL)
- The relationship of the playwrights to the building narrative and participants. (REL)

Each of these four global themes contain sub-themes and elements that help clarify the emerging elements further and at this point, it is useful to consider how these themes contributed to the overall understanding of the case study data.

1. The importance of authentic language

This theme emerged in relation to the essentiality of gathering, understanding and communicating the authentic language of participants. It was vital in understanding dialogical playwriting praxis. It also relates to how language was constructed and used by both participants to collaboratively verify and position experiential, existential and aesthetic meaning. Elements that pervade this theme centre on the observation that the Fordes encounter dialogue as narrative and that the participants' use of language form the central and main aesthetic elements of the formation of their work. Furthermore, this theme is pervaded by the notions of communal and personal languages and their overlap, in particular, how 'personal' stories transition through the Fordes' artistic process to becoming 'universal

stories'. In particular, this theme develops through realizations of the importance of ensuring the authenticity of participant dialogue and narration.

2. The essence and aesthetics of storytelling

What emerged from the data is the central role that notions of storytelling play in the work of the Fordes. They see themselves equally as storytellers and as story-collectors and this theme is pervaded by the notion of the narrative 'act' both in a personal dimension (the story that a participant tells to the Fordes), and also in the theatrical dimension (the story that the Fordes tell to the audience). This theme became evident through continual emphasis that they place on the different forms of narrative; personal, communal, cultural and theatrical, and how each form of narrative blends and blurs into the others.

3. The emergence of personal testimonies, values and ideas

This theme emerged from an evolving sense of the significance of personal oral histories and testimonies and how they relate to shaping the overall work of the Fordes both aesthetically and structurally. Since the material that they receive from participants is usually in the form of personal oral histories and testimonies, an understanding of the structures and processes of conveying and communicating both personal existential and experiential meanings is paramount but so is the knowledge of how too these stories can convey both 'universal' and 'communal' meanings. This theme also relates to the sensitivity in the Fordes' awareness of the willingness of participants to allow their personal stories to be used in performance and the sense of responsibility that they, as playwrights, face with this in mind.

4. The relationship of the playwright to building narrative and their relationship with participants

The Fordes' own experiences and feelings in relation to their work and the participants are the focus here. Blurring the boundary between dramatists and emergent performance ethnographers, the relationship with their work and the participants emerged as a complexity of empathic and aesthetic elements. What materialized were notions of embodiment and emotional catharsis both as human beings, storytellers, artists and in the theatre. For the Fordes, the nature of dialogue and emotional catharsis theatrically as well as relationally, lies at the heart of unravelling and exploring human social relationships. Perhaps most importantly, is their relationship as artists to the participants whose stories they gather.

Performance Ethnography as Case Study

This research positions the work of the Fordes within the context of emergent performance ethnography and more broadly under the banner of applied theatre. As Taylor (2006) reminds us, applied theatre is fundamentally an umbrella term that encompasses a wider variety of theatre forms that exist outside the more traditional mainstream approaches. The way the Fordes work is both 'applied' and 'ethnographic' in intent and form. For the purpose of this case study, it is acknowledged that performance ethnography functions as the pivotal device for the Fordes' play script formation with an ever present cognisance that their work is activated in myriad ways outside traditional forms – it is, indeed, applied and innovative. As an ethnographic researcher, their work allowed me to hear stories being gathered firstly, as verbatim, and then transformed into the language of theatre whilst still maintaining authenticity and contextual meaning. As a case study medium, performance ethnography is rich in providing an in depth 'lens' into the minds and feelings of the participants as they happen on the ground in a raw and organic way. It allows a portal into the past, present and

future aspirations and thoughts of the participants, and brings to the audience an intimate invitation to share in the lives of others in ways that are deeply humanistic.

Denzin (2003) asserts that unlike many forms of ‘traditional’ qualitative ethnographic and anthropological approaches, performance ethnography seeks to place the researcher and the research within the social and cultural realities of those it concerns. He argues against the overly scientific and abstracted approach of traditional qualitative processes which downplayed the importance of subjectivity, emotions and experiences of participants. Instead, he argues that performance ethnography calls on the researcher to *imagine* and treat qualitative data as a living essence and not attempt to abstract or distance themselves from it. Warren (2006) adds that the great strength of performance ethnography is that it allows living moments to be explored through an artistic lens, whereby the everyday can become poetic and meaningful.

For Pollock (2006) performance ethnography evokes “dialogic research” (p.6) that gives equal weight to both the participant’s and the researcher’s viewpoints and experiences and invites them into a dialogue where they can collaboratively construct meaning. The methodology utilised in this research was shaped to allow those viewpoints to emerge without intentional bias or preconceived perceptions. The gathering and reporting of data relied heavily on member checking and numerous informal and more formal interviews and discussions.

Reporting the Data – Finding a Research Voice

In terms of field notes and reporting data, I employed a technique of narration heavily influenced by impressionist techniques (see over) in qualitative data reporting. Indeed, as

storytelling was at the heart of the research, I wanted to become a storyteller of a kind; to invite the reader ‘into’ the experience. Holman Jones (2005) as well as Brady (2005), describes the growing use in “auto ethnographic” techniques (Holman Jones, 2005 p. 764) in qualitative research. As argued by Holman Jones, *narrative reporting of data* values the researcher’s place and experience as well as the subject of the study. It seemed natural, in the context of describing an organic, fluid, malleable praxis such as the Fordes’ creation of a ‘community’ play, to adopt a style of data representation that was equally as organic, fluid and myriad. Although the thesis privileges the work of the Fordes, the narrative stance utilized to analyse and muse over the research findings allows a richer and deeper gaze into the journey for the reader.

Van Maanen (in Holman Jones 2005) identifies three modes of ethnographic narrative; realist, confessional and impressionist. The realist mode concentrates on representing, as authentically as possible, the participant’s experience whereas confessional modes recognize and value the researcher’s experience. Impressionist modes combine elements of the two and are highly structured around anecdotal evidence as well as the researcher’s personal understanding of the ‘happenings’ in the field. Narrative in research was new to me and thus I originally strove for a realist mode of storytelling which privileged the Fordes’ experiences but allowed a creative reporting and analysis of data from my research point of view. However, as the research progressed and my understanding of the process grew, I realised that a combination, ‘impressionist’ mode of narrative would allow a fuller, more creative ‘telling’ of the research story.

I wanted to include a number of different narrative tools which would further elucidate my discussion. I included anecdotes, poetry, self-reflections, quotes and descriptive passages

written from my field notes. Brady (2005) as well as Stewart (2005) argue in favour of creating poetic qualitative research. Stewart (2005) argues that “cultural poesis,” the creativity of all ordinary things, (p. 1028) is be a powerful method of conveying ethnographic, anthropological and sociological participants. Brady advocates that through the use of poetry in research ‘we [researchers] can tap into the sensuous-intellectual continuum as we know and experience it’. Indeed, Richardson (1995) resonates strongly with my position as a researcher and writer when she writes,

Writing interviews as poetry honours the speaker’s pauses, repetitions, alliterations, narrative strategies and so on. Poetry may actually better represent the speaker than the practice of quoting snippets of prose.

(pp. 114-115)

I formulated the research design to give maximum emphasis to the Fordes and their processes of bringing true life stories to stage. I wanted to present their ideas and experiences in a way that was both academically meaningful and creative as I felt this best captured the way in which they approach, conceptualize and offer their work. For the Fordes and for myself in writing this thesis, artistry and research are inextricably linked and one process informs and brings about the other.

Ensuring an Authentic Voice – Trustworthiness

I structured the interview transcripts and many of the analytical memos composed by the Fordes and myself in forms of theatrical style script, poetry and reflective narration. This aligns with the incorporation in this research of certain techniques and elements of performance ethnography which I feel honours the spirit and style of the Fordes and their works. They too found resonance with this form of data analysis and reflection as it tapped into their love of storytelling and creative dialogue delivered through a theatrical framework.

When checking that my observations had been as authentic to the moment as possible, they found that the way I recorded my field notes and memos in a creative mode actually engaged their interest and reflections more acutely. Using the method advocated by Richardson (1995) I have employed some analytic and reflective memos using poetry where I feel it adds clarity or further emphasis to the mood and essence of the data and the analysis. It allows me to include my views and experiences as the researcher in a way that is not disruptive to the other data and serves to add to the dialogue that I had with the Fordes.

Additionally, research data in the form of interview transcriptions and observations in the field were given to the Fordes as a form of ‘member checking’. Their feedback was essential in gauging the trustworthiness of my transcriptions and the interpretations of that data. As part of member checking, I made the transcripts of all interviews and field notes available to the Fordes on a regular basis. They were excited to read analyses of their work ‘as it happened’ and were enthusiastic in giving feedback, clarification and affirmation. As I transcribed my field notes as well as the interview data, I made sure to send regular copies to them for reading in their own time. They were engaged collaborators in the research journey and relished the opportunity to clarify any ambiguities I felt or anything I wasn’t sure about. This proved invaluable to understanding the nature of the emerging data as it allowed them to use me and my research as a conduit through which to speak about their work and the way they approach, understand, conceptualize and execute it in a way that they have not been able to before.

Another qualitative approach was the use of ‘peer checking’ where I read my observations over to my supervisor mentor who had been privy to the unfolding work in *Skating on Sandgate Road* and knew the Fordes’ work first hand. She was able to validate specific

observations and interpretations whilst still maintaining an objective stance. Lincoln and Guba (in Sanders 2003) noted the importance of member checking when they wrote,

The process of peer debriefing helps keep the 'inquirer' honest them to searching questions by an experiences protagonist doing their best to play the devil's advocate.

(in Sanders 2003. p.111)

Indeed, I found this to be a rigorous way to gain another perspective from those who had also been *in the field* but may have experienced the same event in quite different ways. It proved an invaluable way to ensure my field logs and transcriptions were as authentic as possible and did justice to the stories that were unfolding.

Three Dimensions: Analytical, Ethnographic And Artistic

Expanding on the above discussions of data reporting and narrative, I have elected to present this research in a threefold manner. I have chosen to apply analytical writing, ethnographic writing and a more artistic writing to offer a fuller and more rounded exploration of the work of the Fordes. Creative and performing arts research deals with a number of artistic, philosophical, existential, experiential, aesthetic and phenomenological themes. In this research I found that 'one voice' was not always the most effective way to convey the totality of the Fordes as creative artists and their works. Taking O'Toole's (2006) earlier assertions of case study, I wanted to provide a fuller and deeper exploration than just offered by one 'voice' and allow a merging, if not a triangulation, of myriad nuances emerging from the field work, the interviews and the observational memos.

I include analytical writing to position the discussion from an academic standpoint. This allowed the data to be dissected in a very directed and focused way. This research voice is

most useful for discussing the themes and elements of the Fordes' writing and also positioning their work against the larger scope of playwriting and discourse of creative arts. I consider this technique to be the same as an exegesis or supplementary critical or scholarly material that often accompanies creative art works or creative research, particularly in the emerging field of research by creative works.

I employ ethnographic texts as per Denzin (2003), Van Maanen (in Holman Jones 2005) Donelan (2005) and Sanders (2003) to present and discuss the data that I collected with the Fordes in the field. Ethnographic field logs as well as reflective writing is used to unpack the Fordes' experiences, processes and ideals in a deeper way than a pragmatic elemental and thematic discussion can achieve. As previously mentioned, I combine this with artistic writing, using poetry and play script to honour the experiential and existential dimensions of this research and the Fordes' work. As well as presenting the interviews as play-scripts, I have structured the field notes gathered during workshop and rehearsal sessions as a narrative using modelling from Sanders (2005), Brady (2005) and Denzin (2003). I have constructed field notes as a narrative to capture the essence of the events as they were occurring and in order to form a cohesive link between the analysis and other data used. I felt that in doing this, the reader is transported through a richness of story and imagery.

The Researcher 'Lens' – Considerations

In any research that represents real people and their lived experiences, the importance of accurate, authentic and trustworthy data is paramount. As Sanders (2003) reminds us, in order to enable authentic stories to be told, 'the issue of trustworthiness in data analysis should be constantly at the forefront of the researcher's consciousness' (p.109). In previous research, (Downes 2008) I developed some ideas about the positioning of the notion of community in

the aesthetic ideology of Queensland's contemporary theatrical industry. Of course I was already familiar with the Fordes' work having studied it from high school and through my undergraduate degrees, and one challenge for me was to allow them as participants in the research to have their own voice and to let the data unravel without imposing my own perspective on it. .

I originally chose the "research posture" (Sanders 2003) of a detached and silent observer, but I found that this was difficult to maintain as the Fordes would often talk to me or interact with me in different ways during the workshops. I did relish the opportunity to be able to have informal discussions with them at vital moments of their production work and moved after some consideration, to a participant observer role. (Gillham, 2008, Stake, 2010, O'Toole 2006, Sanders 2003) This proved to work very well. I was acutely aware not to impart my own view wittingly on the unravelling data and I relied on analytic memos and reflections to strengthen and deepen the interview and field work data. Analytic memos alerted me to inconsistencies in my observations or to emerging issues I may have faced as a qualitative researcher. These proved to be essential musings that forced me to consider and at times, reconsider the research at a much deeper level than field notes alone could give.

I constantly examined and explored my relationship with the Fordes as research participants and developed a keen sense of when to ask questions and when to remain silent. My presence in the work shop sessions was not an invisible one but I strove at all times to be unobtrusive. This didn't deter the Fordes from approaching me on occasions but usually this only occurred during breaks. At other times, I was able to slip into a more passive participant observer role without any problems or interruptions. Often some of the most valuable dialogue and data arose through informal conversations or interactions with the Fordes in moments least

expected and I was aware of the importance of harnessing informal ‘off the cuff’ conversations with them if the opportunity arose.

Data Triangulation

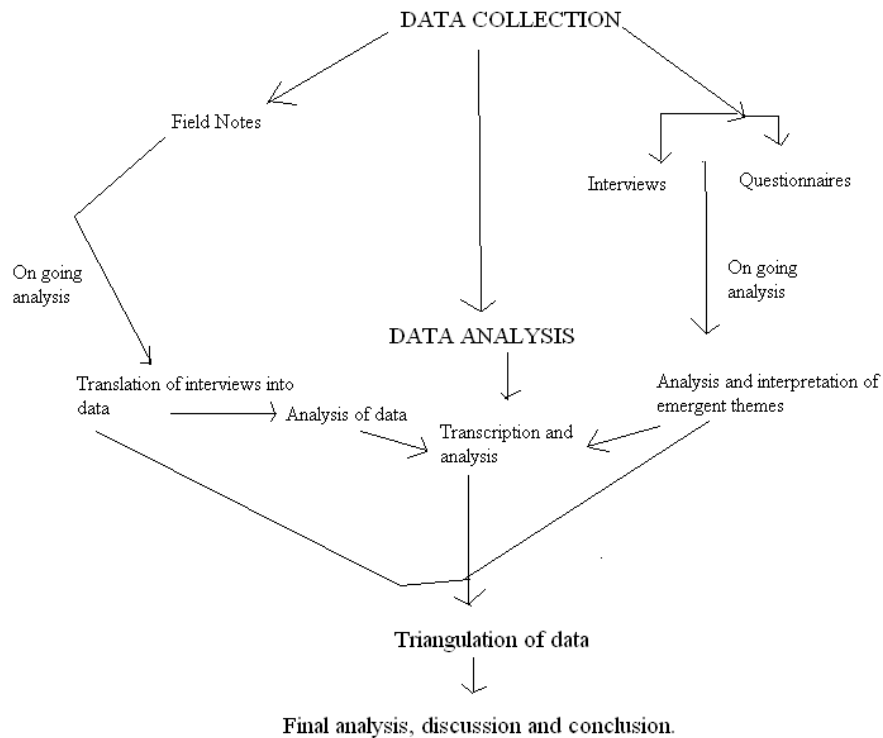
In the triangulation of data in drama research, I employed the method advocated by Sanders (2003) and defined by Taylor (1996) as a method of using different source data to *clarify, crystallise and confirm research findings*. Richardson & St Pierre (2005) write that ‘in triangulation, a researcher deploys different methods—interviews, census data, documents, and the like to “validate” findings.’ (p.963) Stake (2010) extends this point arguing, ‘triangulation serves to clarify meaning by identifying different ways the case [study] is seen’ (p.122) and that ‘triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning.’ (p.122)

As mentioned above, along with the previously discussed methods of qualitative ethnographic enquiry, I also employed *member checking* as part of my ongoing triangulation and data assurance process. This allowed me to strive for authenticity in the data gathered on the Fordes’ work but also gave them the opportunity to reflect on their own work as seen through the eyes of an observer. The figure below is useful in understanding the processes followed in the triangulation of this research. It is a flow chart adapted from Sanders (2003) which I have found particularly useful.

WORKSHOP CONTEXT SITE OF CASE STUDY

Questions posed

- What are the Fordes' processes?
- What are the Fordes' viewpoints, opinions, philosophies and experiences?
- How do the Fordes bring a 'Queensland' 'community' play to life?
- What are the views and experiences of some of their collaborating participants?
- How is their work shaped and realised?



(Figure adapted from an original design by Sanders (2003) 'Overview of Research Design' Tables p.100)

Constraints and Boundaries

In the introductory chapter, I outlined a number of constraints of this research. For clarity, they are discussed in more detail here. As within any single focused case study, there are always limitations and constraints on how the research is conducted, what the research 'captures' in the data collection and what the research reveals in the end. This thesis explored the broader area of applied theatre as an area of practice and research in the

literature review and argued that community narrative work such as that undertaken by the Fordes manifests as a form of performance ethnography under the umbrella of applied theatre. This thesis acknowledges that applied theatre has many dimensions and is approached in myriad ways and contexts across the world. It is not within the scope of this research to address applied or community theatre theories or traditions in detail across all drama contexts or to attempt to analyse the emerging complexities of these areas for theatre practices. Furthermore, this thesis does not comprehensively address the use of applied theatre as praxis for social justice, therapeutic use or as an educative tool for empowerment and learning in schools or other higher education. Rather, it concerns itself with the way the Fordes 'apply theatre' to tell stories and to give voice to community groups and individuals who may not ordinarily be heard. It is about their evolving approach and their emerging niche as Queensland playwrights who use ethnography to make theatre about real people and engaging life stories.

Additionally, whist student actors were involved in *Skating on Sandgate Road* and are mentioned in this thesis when discussing that play in particular, they are primarily incidental to the research rather than pivotal. Some discussion of their work as actors is important in order to demonstrate the process of the theatre experience in *Skating on Sandgate Road* but this thesis does not address their experiences in any depth. It is also beyond the scope of this research to discuss or explore the wider trends of 'community' writing in Queensland or the current and future trends in Queensland's playwriting aesthetic in general. Contemporary creative industries are a complexity of artistic, aesthetic, political and economic issues and as such form a thesis in themselves.

This research does not address community reaction to the plays in a formal sense except to note the success and positive responses of those involved and who viewed the community narratives as performance. What this thesis does attempt to do is to explore and analyse how the Fordes facilitated the play *Skating on Sandgate Road* from inception to collection, to performance, and how projects such as *Cribbie* and *Behind the Cane* represent the Fordes' approach to writing community narratives using their own unique theatre ethnographic lenses. It is concerned with the how, the why and the ways the Fordes weave storytelling through the use of community collaboration and theatre praxis.

In terms of researcher bias, it was paramount to be cognisant of maintaining a 'neutral' lens whilst observing the dramatic process of *Skating on Sandgate Road*. As outlined previously, maintaining the 'authenticity' in data was addressed by a careful triangulation process by collecting data through a variety of methods and also maintaining close member checking with the playwrights and other stakeholders throughout the analysis period. However, there may be moments or 'understandings' not captured in my field notes or observations and this stands as an acknowledgement of the difficulty for the ethnographic researcher in gathering every nuance that can emerge in the field context.

The following constraints are summarised as follows,

- The research focused solely on the Fordes' play-works and not on any other contemporary Queensland artist or arts organisation.
- The research is predominately focused on "process" – interpretation of data focuses on the "how" and "why". Participant behaviour, other than that of Margery and Michael Forde is not recorded unless it is important in understanding the process.

- This research is firstly and foremostly about the Fordes' particular praxis in this particular context. Broader discussions of applied theatre across contexts such as drama therapy, drama for social justice, drama and the aged were not the foci.

Ethical Considerations

As should be the case with all qualitative research, the ethical integrity of data collection, storage and usage continues to be at the forefront of the researcher's mind. In the twenty first century, the researcher is confronted with a world of increasing complexities of the collection and storage of information. In an age of increasing exposure to digital media, the nature of how information is collected, collated, stored and shared is an ongoing consideration and of a constant importance to the researcher. There are three specific areas that relate to the ethical considerations of this research. The first is the overarching question of morality and ethical standard. Is this research ethical to conduct? Second, will the outcomes be of benefit to humanity and society? Third, is the dignity and well being of the human being upheld and uplifted in this research?

I was guided by the Australian Catholic University's ethical standards regarding research involving human participants. The ethical standards of the university as governed and dictated by the Catholic Mission of the University acknowledge the ultimate freedom and dignity of the human being as well as championing the freedom of inquiry, research and the pursuit of knowledge. In accordance with university regulations, this research adheres strictly to all areas of the ethical standard of research at Australian Catholic University. My own personal ethical standard, arising from a personal belief in that all peoples should be treated equally and fairly was congruent with the university philosophies.

The second area of concern was the safety of participants. It is essential that participants must be protected at all times from unnecessary and undue harm through their voluntary participation in qualitative research. In accordance with Australian Catholic University regulations this research was submitted to the *Committee for Research Using Human Participants* for approval. I had previous experience in the ethical clearance procedures from Downes (2008) and many of the ethical issues that pertain to this research relating to participant welfare were the same. Since this thesis is very specifically about Margery and Michael Forde, a stipulation was made that they would allow their real names to be used and they were agreeable to this and signed the University consent form which allowed their real names to be used. Other ethical conditions were:

- No harm would be caused to participants.
- Participation was entirely voluntary.
- Participants could withdraw their involvement in the study at any time without comment or justification.
- Participants would have access to their transcripts and all collected data.
- Data would be stored in accordance with university regulations.

In accordance with university guidelines, data in the form of printed transcripts was stored in a locked cabinet in my principal supervisor's office. All physical audiotapes were stored in the same location. All digital files are stored in an encrypted folder on an external hard drive device that remains in my possession. In accordance with university regulations these documents are to be stored for five years and then destroyed or deleted in accordance with the established protocols. All unpublished scripts are regarded as copyright to Margery and Michael Forde and are stored in the same location as the other documents.

In conclusion, the ethical standards of research were and continue to be crucially important in this research and I feel that I have satisfied both my own and the university's requirements for both the ethical standard of the research overall, the welfare of the participants and the integrity of the data. I have worked to ensure that the methodology, whilst rigorous, allowed for a freedom of discourse, of sharing and listening, invited the odd random insight gained around a coffee table, and an invitation to muse, create and celebrate storytelling and community collaboration.

The next chapter entitled "From life, to page, to stage: Telling Untold Stories," privileges the analytical component of the thesis. It begins with a spotlight on two community theatre projects *Cribbie* (2010) and *Behind the Cane* (2011) by Margery and Michael Forde. Both plays have been significant in highlighting the voices of two distinct community groups in Queensland. The process that brought these projects to fruition will be closely scrutinized alongside the testimonies of the Fordes themselves about the way they work and the processes they employ to gather content for dramatic and literary purposes. In addition, there will be a discussion of the final published draft of the scripts and reflections of the live performances of these plays.

“From life, to page, to stage”

Telling Untold Stories

Part One

Cribbie

This chapter begins the dialogue about the essential nature of the Fordes’ theatre work. As posed earlier in the methodology chapter, ‘the what’ in terms of their dramatic and ethnographic work, is the first essential element in unpacking this case study of their developing process and theatrical approach. While the main focus of interviews between myself and the Fordes predominately explores their 2009 work *Skating on Sandgate Road*, a number of other important community ethnographic-style works punctuate their growing niche in contemporary Queensland playwriting.

Since 2009, over a period of eighteen months to two years, the Fordes’ work tracked an evolution of three community-driven ethnographic works with highly similar content, process, subject matter, themes and reflections. However the works are stylistically varied and pertain to very different community groups and participants. Thus, it is important when framing this case study holistically to include both of the other plays, *Cribbie* (2009) and *Behind the Cane* (2011) alongside the pivotal play of this research, *Skating on Sandgate Road* (2009). These works reflect the Fordes’ powerful connections with displaced persons and communities and their distinct interest in bringing unknown or untold stories to the stage.

In *Cribbie*, they explore the ramifications of political decisions on one distinct community and document the personal and lived experiences of individuals in a specific historical time. The work is also a remembrance of a bygone era and reflects on the importance of communal belonging, friendship and family. It is an important play as it traces a unique history of a town that has now disappeared, a 'ghost town' where generations of families (including the famous music group 'The Bee Gees') lived and thrived before development destroyed their community. Their stories were never told and never considered as valuable until the Fordes embarked on gathering them for performance. The play itself begins with a moment of sincere invitation to the audience to come 'inside' the community, to remember, to affirm, and to acknowledge that Cribb Island had been a home, a stronghold and a place of identity for so many. A single voice captures this moment of 'place';

Do you remember how to get to Cribb Island?

Do you remember how you got to Cribb Island? If you're comin' from town and you're going to Nudgee Beach ... you been to Nudgee Beach? Well, you're going along Nudgee Road, and there's a hill ... a little hill. And down at the bottom of the hill, there's a right hand turn. And that drove you to Cribbie. I'm just trying to fit it in your mind, that's all.

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.1)

For Margery and Michael Forde, there is a substantial difference between history that is recorded and history that is lived. This is the central point of their entire ethnographic style playwriting, that what people remember, what they feel, what they say, and what they experience, is as worthwhile an interpretation of history as any scholarly historical document will record. It is in this way that their work is a scholarly and historical endeavour as much as an artistic one. The work also serves an animating emancipatory function where people are invited to re-imagine and re-conceptualize the past by re-telling historical events and situations from 'their point of view'.

What the Fordes strive to encounter is the realities of the people who have experienced, live or lived in a particular time, place or event and to bring their stories to life on the stage. In a literal sense they seek to undertake a kind of “reading between the lines” of history, casting a lens on the personal and remembered experiences that actively deconstructs and reveal links between people’s personal memories and wider cultural and societal experiences. The idea of ‘truth’ is difficult to define and well outside the parameters of this research, but what is evident through observing the Fordes’ work, is that they are on a ‘truth’ seeking journey.

Their work with the former residents of Brisbane’s Cribb Island saw them dealing with the kind of ‘marginalized groups’ that Erven (2000) describes in *Community theatre: Global Perspectives*. They encountered a group of people who had been displaced from their homes in order to make way for the expansion of the Brisbane International Airport. *Cribbie* is the story of these residents whose homes were destroyed in the name of progress. What resulted was the embodiment and as an authentic as possible (the stories of these residents) representation of those who were displaced both geographically and culturally from their home and whom, until their story was told theatrically, had little of their history formally recorded.

It was also an important history lesson for the Fordes themselves, who like most Brisbane non Cribbie residents, knew a little about what had happened to the people there but had no real appreciation of the hardships and despair their displacement caused. We see this in the Fordes’ following response about what they knew about Cribbie before writing of the play;

BRENT: What did you know about Cribbie before going? Did you know much about it? The people? What happened there?

MICHAEL: No we didn't really, I had never been.

MARGERY: I had gone as a child, I remember Dad driving us through the area. When we went back to look around it all sort of came back and I thought "gee!" [pauses]

MICHAEL: I had never been, I mean you remember reading about it happening in the paper and not really thinking much about it at the time, you didn't know very much about it really.

MARGERY: And I think you were, we were guilty of not caring. I mean, collectively, we used to joke about Cribbie, Mum would say "I'm sending you to live at Cribbie!" and I think we didn't know and we were guilty of not finding out.

(Interview 5, June 2010, Lines 7 – 26)

Going to "Cribbie". Finding the Stories

In *Cribbie*, the Fordes were placed in a situation where it became impossible for them to not confront some negative aspects of south east Queensland history that had been blurred and in some cases, overlooked. As mentioned briefly, the heartland of this "Cribb Island" community was claimed by the State Government of Queensland during the 1970s in order to expand and build the Brisbane International Airport. The people of Cribb Island faced not only a major displacement of their homes but a fracturing of family and community spirit. It was the perfect dramatic example of State utilitarianism versus individual or community-centered humanist belonging.

The Fordes discovered a kind of 'collective apathy' towards this group of people and their performance ethnography work seeks to empower an otherwise maligned group to finally tell 'their side of it'. Cultural and geographic displacement taps into some very complex social, political and cultural ideas, particularly the idea that "the needs of the many outweigh the needs of the few". Essentially, the former inhabitants of Cribb Island were, and continue to

be, a part of what is a wider cultural, political and philosophical debate of what happens to people when progress and economic imperatives outweigh a concern for the common good.

The notion of the authority of the state versus the needs of smaller, marginalized communities, linked with ideas of the necessity of progress and utilitarianism over humanism, and creates a powerful political agenda within *Cribbie*. Of all the Forde's works to date, *Cribbie* contains some of the most outstandingly political themes fuelled and given impetus by the voices of the 'wronged'. As such, there are a number of very complex social, political and philosophical ideas operating within the text. The reason for this is not the Forde's own political motivation or perspectives, but rather what the former Cribb Island residents told them.

In *Cribbie*, the voices encountered are charged with real anger and political distemper relating how the power of the state came to bear on them and their stories serve to create a piece of theatre that is charged with political, social and philosophical messages;

Man 1: I went to where our house had been ... in Elmslie Street. I walked on there ...and there were tears. I couldn't talk. Just get me out of this. It's too hard. Too many memories. It's like walkin' on peoples' graves. They ripped part of me away too. I know how the Aborigines feel ...

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 63)

In this one excerpt, images such as 'walking on people's graves' and references to the experiences of Australian Aborigines in their cultural displacement, set up strong emotional messages to and for the audience. The text is heavily encoded with the human ramifications of state-instituted loss and displacement. These themes are not unexplored in the context of Australian dramatic writing, but what sets *Cribbie* apart is that it is quintessentially developed

from the testimonies and oral histories of a distinct group of Queenslanders who have felt a great injustice has been done to them and their community;

MARGERY: That burnt itself into my brain, that these things really happened to these people.

MICHAEL: That's how they remember it, that's what they feel that an injustice was done.

MARGERY: I couldn't forget that, there was so much anger in it, in the people.

(Interview 5, June 2010, Lines 21-26)

Cultural and political messages took on a strong personal and affective dimension for the Fordes and this guided the way the narrative unfolded;

Woman 1: *We tried to fight it. We went to court. Sent petitions to the Prime Minister. Wrote letters to the newspapers .*

Woman 2: *[To the Sunday Mail .] Cribb Island has no golden beach. No surfing. No coral reefs,. No bikini-clad girl. No life-savers. No fabulous motels. No modern brick mansions. But we do have gorgeous sea breezes, and exquisite sunsets as beautiful as anywhere in the world. And we have Moreton Bay. And dear old Moreton Island out there – doing its utmost to protect us. We, Cribb Islanders, are one big family. And this spot we call Cribbie is the dearest, happiest, kindest, most beautiful, homely, beloved little place this side of the black stump. Please don't take it away from us.*

Man 1: *We never won a single round. Never got support from anyone outside the community. That hurt me. It still hurts me. They said they had to take the place to make a runway for the airport – but I didn't buy it. I still don't buy it. I think we were an embarrassment to the city of Brisbane. And they thought we were expendable*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.53)

These stories were uncensored by the Fordes allowing 'authentic' voices to emerge. Narratives, such as these, driven by remembered experience and lived emotions, are the most

powerful and important elements for performance ethnography artists. As Pollack (2006) argues, performance ethnography (and applied theatre) seeks to embody the lived experiences of others. For the Fordes, understanding the experiential and emotional realities behind the history and politics of a situation, leads to drama where the human context can be more fully unravelled and understood by the participants, the audience and the artists;

Reliving the Ghosts of the Past: Blurring Boundaries

Woman 1: *She was in her eighties. A funny woman. Very refined and very resourceful. On the day we had to move her – we had a little V-Dub. We crammed as much into it as we could. (To Woman 2) The car's all packed.*

Woman 2: *I still don't understand it. They can afford to spend one hundred and seventy million on an airport ... why couldn't they have spent a little bit of money to keep us all together. Why couldn't they have set up a little retirement village for us at Nudgee – or somewhere.*

Woman 1: *Nobody thought of that.*

Woman 2: *No, of course they didn't. We're not worth thinking about. They've always slated Cribbie. Now they're taking it away.*

Pause

Woman 1: *It's time to go.*

Woman 2: *The sea looks so beautiful. It's sparkling.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.56)

Contained in this excerpt above, is potentially one of the most emotionally charged moments in the script of *Cribbie*. This particular piece of dialogue occurs late in the second act of the play and is symbolic of the last stages of residents being moved off Cribb Island. As is evident from the dialogue, this scene is saturated with feelings of loss, abandonment, displacement, apathy, sadness and anger. As the play evolves towards its conclusion, these feelings become more charged in the text of the play. It is this gradual increase in the

emotional texture of the play that gives *Cribbie* a distinct impetus when considering embodiment and catharsis. The audience is drawn in, almost unable to ignore or detach, by a textual weaving of grief and loss by a number of actors who interchange characters throughout the play.

As a dialogic exchange, where participants are invited to share their stories, memories and experiences, *Cribbie* from its outset, becomes an agency whereby a community can collectively grieve, mourn and relay the experiences in an attempt to help others understand the 'human' phenomena of a historical event. It provides the impetus for one community to share painful and traumatic experiences as well as humorous or anecdotal ones. It becomes an event that transcends and exceeds the traditional barriers of theatre to be a kind of communicative and empathic exchange of memories, experiences, ideas and emotions that allow people to laugh and to cry together, encouraging communal affirmation, empathy and change.

As Kuppers (2007) asserts, the theatre can be an event of 'political labour, changing ourselves and the world' (p.36) and enables a kind of 'ideological transaction.' (in Kuppers and Robertson, 2007) *Cribbie* is enlivened by people being able to tell their story in a way where the playwrights cast no judgement, criticism or censorship and which is highly emancipatory and affirming. This story is then re-imagined by the Fordes, who in turn come to their own emotional understanding about the shared event. It is in this way that the theatrical aesthetic which operates in *Cribbie* can be viewed as a communal dialogue of speaking, listening, hearing and telling which animates powerful possibilities for communities and audiences to come together to remember and to feel. Kuppers (2007) reminds us that in this type of theatre 'aesthetic', we are abandoned to 'the distance between

the story and ourselves as we lean in, move our heads into the circle, hovering between the space between the I and the communal story' (p.36)

This thesis argues that *Cribbie* can be regarded as a cathartic work of theatre, both textually and in the scope of a shared community performance. Some of the main feelings that arise from the play are negative ones of sadness, loss and anger. The Fordes' themselves comment that the play is an event that invites communal healing and allows some of the pent up suffering and pain of participants (and their communities) to be released and acknowledged;

MICHAEL: Theatre is, you know, one of the few places that can, that people can commune. Commune connects with the ancient art of storytelling.

MARGERY: There's a sort of catharsis, it's a group thing that happens on stage.

MICHAEL: Yeah, it's an event, the people [the participants of "Cribbie"] they get to have feedback to their stories. It's very affirming.

MARGERY: There is healing, catharsis, things can change for people and for us too. There's caring and there's communication. It means we have to be careful, it's an extra responsibility but something very special can happen.

(Interview 4, March 11, 2010. Lines 3-10)

The Fordes viewed *Cribbie* specifically, as the kind of theatre that can engage and involve audiences in ways outside and beyond the traditional or normal theatre paradigm. For them, this performance was important, because this was the first time and in some cases the only time, that the participants had been able to tell their stories. It served as a vital dialogical event for the Cribbie community. Furthermore, this play can be characterized similarly to their earlier work in *Snapshots from home* (1996) as a play that is about a historical event that relates the experiences and memories of peoples gathered from verbatim testimony. In this

way, the play does not subscribe to definitions of a historical drama, but is in essence, a form of a scholarly historical product that arrives from a research process. As well as oral testimony, *Cribbie* uses archival photography, newspaper evidence and period music. This in turn serves to give it a historical and scholarly robustness.

Cribbie operates on a number of levels, as history, both documentary and personal, as a form of remembrance and of communal storytelling and dialogue. The excerpt below is a powerful example of memory, ownership and identity;

Man 1: *Dad, you're in the wrong van.*

Man 2: *Eh?*

Man 1: *You're in the wrong bloody van.*

Man 2: *What are you talking about?*

Man 1: *It's not your van, dad.*

Man 2: *Bullshit it's not my van! They kicked me out of bloody Cribb Island! They're not kicking out of my own bloody van!*

Man 1: *They've got the coppers here, dad.*

Man 2: *Stuff the coppers!*

Man 1: *Look in the cupboard.*

Man 2: *What?*

Man 1: *Look in the cupboard! Are they your clothes?*

Dad goes and looks in the cupboard.

Man 2: *Oops.*

Dad comes out of the van.

Man 2: *Sorry about that. (Referring to the caravan) A case of mistaken identity.*

Man 1: *Next day it was business as usual.*

Dad is singing as he gets ready to go to the pub

SONG: *Heaven is My Woman's Love (Reprise)*

(He sings) As long as she's with me I'll find Heaven every day I live

Man 1: *Wanderin' up the road to the pub. We'd call out to him ...
(to his Dad) "G'day Goldilocks! Who's been sleeping in my
caravan?"*

Dad smiles and waves to his son

Man 2: *See ya later Sherriff!*

Man 1: *See ya , dad.*

Dad stops to roll a cigarette

Man 1: *Six months later – he's killed stone dead. Wanderin' across
the road. Thought he was still back in Cribbie. I put a cross
out where it happened. I still blame it on the bloody
relocation.*

Light slowly fades on dad as he is rolling his cigarette

Man 1: *He was best cigarette roller I'd ever seen, my old man. Could
do it with one hand and drive. He was unbelievable. Just pull
out the tobacco. Into the paper. Whooshka! He was a legend
at it. (Brief pause) He was my hero, my old man. You never
heard the pain.*

Light out on Dad.

SFX: *The sound of a plane coming in to land. The sound becomes
deafening.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.61-62)

Again, in this excerpt, the cross-over between the personal and political can be explicitly seen. Also similarly, this next excerpt as with much of the second half of the play contains feelings of loss, anger, displacement and confusion. Here we see an evolution of those feelings, linking the feelings to the developing narrative as it continues from an earlier scene;

Man 1: *My brother and me buried her underneath the rose bush in our
yard in Elmslie Street. It was a beautiful rose bush. That's
where she'd always wanted her ashes.*

Man 1 *(the son)* moves to Man 2 *(his dad)* who is sitting on the steps of the house

Man 1: *Then I go down to see the old man. And he's sitting on the bloody step, on his own.*

Man 2 becomes "the old man"

Man 1: *He was real down in the dumps, the old fella.*

Man 2: *(Dad) Mum's dead under the rose bush. Cribbie's goin'. What's left? Nothin'.*

Man 1: *It'll be alright, dad*

Man 2: *(Dad) When the bastards chase us out of Cribbie ... we're not leaving mum under that rose tree. If they're building a bloody airport, I'm not leaving her on her ownunder the bloody tarmac.*

Man 1: *Don't worry, mate. When the time comes, we'll move her.*

Light down on father and son

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 55)

Emotions of the retold stories are allowed to develop over the course of the play and are placed in a narrative structure, making them more meaningful and more easily understood by the audience. This is a precise example of how the Fordes work – both at an artistic and ethnographic level. The collage of thoughts and literary images are woven together like a tapestry, rich with important moments of the participants' lives and saturated with elements of emotional connectivity to place and time. Placing these remembered events with their strong emotional themes in a narrative structure serves to heighten their cathartic effect as the play progresses on a 'journey'. This seems to serve as a more effective structural and stylistic device for the Fordes than straight verbatim reportage style performances as it invites the audience into the unfolding drama and seeks to heighten the developing emotional themes. Through crossing verbatim testimony with established theatrical constructs such as the use of narrative structures, *Cribbie* is enabled to continually function and communicate across varying levels of text and subtext. This approach also allows the telling of a story from

multiple perspectives and brings into focus, multiple and complex themes of the personal, the political, the historical and the societal.

Another interesting aspect about the way in which the Fordes choose to shape and structure the narrative in *Cribbie* is through the use of Brechtian style song, music, dance, movement and other theatrical techniques. As mentioned briefly in the former chapter, where the Fordes differ from a pure Brechtian approach that works to interrupt emotional catharsis or to disrupt the emotional content of a particular scene or segment, their own approach is used to heighten the emotional dimensions of particular moments in the play. In this way, they invite the audience and their participants into a fully three dimensional scope of remembrance, heightened and punctuated with music and song. For example, in the following scene, music (performed live on stage by the cast), lighting changes and visual images are used to intensify the emotional content and serve to provide a fuller and more whole-sensory remembrance for all concerned;

Woman 1: *These people have been dispossessed. And they have grief. Real grief.*

Man 2: *(Cutting across her and turning to the camera) Well, thank you sister. Today the ramshackle hamlet of Cribb Island is little more than a shattered ruin. And soon ... mercifully ... it will vanish all together – buried under the tarmac of the new airport - to be built for the burgeoning city of Brisbane.*

Woman 1: *I looked at him, and I thought holy smoke. You couldn't give a stuff. You couldn't care less.*

Man 2: *And cut!*

He turns to her

Man 2: *(Patronising) Thank you so much, Sister. Fantastic. And you're doing a very worthy job. Keep up the good work. (Aside to crew) That's a wrap.*

The reporter gets ready to leave

Woman 1: *(Nun) I could have punched his face in. I felt like telling him to ... (Yells after him) Get*

Man 2: *(Turning back) What was that, Sister?*

Woman 1: *(Nun) Get ...home safe and sound now. God bless.*

Reporter exits

The nun walks to a slab that had been someone's home

Woman 1: *After the bulldozers had gone ... I stood at the edge of a slab that had been Margaret's home. (Brief pause) That slab seemed so small. It was the first time I realised that houses don't take up a great deal of space, usually. But it was more than that. It was like ... this site is a huge part of this woman's life. And it just doesn't exist anymore. What seemed so permanent was wiped out in a moment.*

SONG: IN THE EARLY MORNING RAIN

*In the early morning rain, with a dollar in my hand
And an achin' in my heart and my pocket full of sand
I'm a long way from home and I miss my loved ones so
In the early morning rain, with no place to go .*

*This old airport's got me down – it's no earthly good to me
'cause I'm stuck here on the ground - cold and drunk as I can be
You can't jump a jet plane like you can a freight train
So I'd best be on my way - In the early morning rain.
So I'd best be on my way – in the early morning rain.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, pp.58-59)

This scene is very visually striking and intense for participants and the audience. The stage is virtually blacked out except for a spotlight on the “nun” who is front stage centre and there is minimal lighting on the two cast members who sing softly in the rear, almost off-stage. While the song is sung, the nun character stands in front of a large projector screen on which is displayed archival images of the destroyed buildings, houses and architecture of Cribb Island. During this scene, the character does not move and openly weeps. In this way, the emotional core of this particular story is teased out not just by the writing but by their staging and

lighting design choices as well as the use of song and on-stage music. The mood of this particular scene is one of intense grief, dispossession and loss which is made not only explicit, but heightened and highlighted by the use of other medias.

The use of other media also adds a fuller and perhaps more authentic representation to the stories. The Fordes use a variety of techniques to re-imagine worlds of the past and to create vivid memories by including multiple sensory materials. This is evident throughout much of *Cribbie* where the cast will re-enact [READ: re-live] particular events, behaviours, experiences and phenomena from the oral testimonies that forms the script. This means the performance operates in a way beyond being exclusively documentary text or language based, inviting and facilitating different modes and ways of feeling and being. The ‘memories’, take on a living essence as they are literally or close to literally “replayed”. An example of this can be seen in the following story (and memory) about dance classes on Cribb Island;

AV: *Quote “I loved the dancing*”

*In the following, Man 1, Man 2 and Woman 1 are the
dance students. Woman 2 is the teacher.*

Woman 2: *(Teacher) I taught the Cribbie kids to dance – in the
little hall behind the kiosk. Tap, ballet and acrobats
..*

Woman 1: *We rehearsed all year and we put on little shows.*

Woman 2: *Stamp shuffles. Ready? And!*

The class do the steps as the teacher plays

SONG: HEART OF MY HEART (Music only)

Heart of My Heart, I love that melody

Music stops

Man 1: *The mums made the costumes.*

Woman 2: *Everybody had a job to do.*

Man 2: *The whole island would turn up. The place was packed.*

Teacher: *Throw-aways. Ready? And!*
(Music only) Heart of my Heart brings back a memory
Music stops

Man 2: *I loved the dancing. Loved it! I watched all the old movies ... Donald O'Connor, Gene Kelly, Fred and Gingerand I'd practise doing their steps.*

Teacher: *Heel heel - back back - stamp shuffle together. Ready? And!*

The kids dance
(Music only) When we were kids on the corner of the street
Music stops

Man 2: *I loved the music. Loved the shows. Mum used to bring us up to the Cremorne to see the Panties. And we went to see Seagulls Over Sorrento at Her Majesty's. Mum and dad took us to that.*

Teacher: *Ready? And!*
The kids dance the next step (Heel heel back back – stamp shuffle across tap.)

(Music only) We were rough and ready guys – but oh how we could harmonize

Teacher: *Well done, class. See you next week.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, pp. 39-40)

The performance of *Cribbie* operates very explicitly in the two overlapping spheres of personal stories and political phenomena. It serves the dual function of being personal remembrances and individuals' stories of their community but also as a historical document. What is privileged in *Cribbie* are people's individual and communal recollections of these

historical events and phenomena and their feelings and perceptions of these events and circumstances. Another Brechtian alienation technique used by the Fordes is the consistent changing between the characters or ‘voices’ which works to disrupt the fourth wall between audience and actors. There is always a sense for the audience that they are being directly spoken to, actively invited to dialogue in an invisible conversation with the players on stage.

Cribbie explicitly changes between explanatory ‘storytelling’ style narration and dialogue, and this is a trait to be found in many of the Fordes’ ethnographic community narratives. There are both monologues and dialogues in the performance and the actors constantly transition between talking to each other in role and talking to the audience. While the ‘voices’ tend to remain attached to a role of some kind, the lack of obvious and distinct characterization achieves a kind of ‘everyman’ aesthetic as each performer becomes an adjunct storyteller. Stories are told in a multitude of ways, occasionally directly to the audience, in dialogue to other characters, and also in dialogue with other characters;

Man 2 continues his story

Man 2: *Anyway, I joined the Merchant Marines. That ship was the closest thing I had to Cribb Island. At sea, our lives depended on each other. If the blokes in the engine room yell fire – you’ve all got to go and stop it. So for me it was an easy transfer from one to the other. A few years later – I come home.*

Man 1 enrolls as Pluto.

Man 2: *There was one bloke ... he thought he was king of the island. And he was still runnin’ ‘round the place. Pickin’ on people half his size. He was a real tough nut. He’d frighten you just to look at him. Massive. About six foot two ... and a rough head. Like Arnold Schwarzenegger. And his voice alone would scare ya ..*

Man 1: *(Pluto, scary voice) Ah, go on ya mug! ‘ave a go!*

Man 2: *Nobody could handle him. Not even the local copper. He had to put a baton to him half the time. And if you hit him with the*

baton, he just went mad. So you just got out of his way. But one night ... we clashed.

They meet on the footpath

Man 1: *(Pluto) Hey, it's the Merchant Marines! Where's your spinach, Popeye?*

Man 2: *Would you like to get out of my way?*

Man 1: *(Pluto) Would you like a sock 'round the lugs?*

Man 2: *I always knew it had to happen one day*

A punch.

Man 2: *I'd been away and I'd learned to fight.*

A punch

Man 2: *I was only ten and a half stone, but I give him the worst towelling you've ever seen.*

Another punch

Man 2: *He never laid a glove on me.*

A knockout punch. The "king of the island" is defeated

Man 2: *There were blues on Cribbie. Plenty of `em. But if you knocked another bloke down you'd say ... poor bugger. Come on. Get up. Your shout. Give them a hand to do something the next day. But there was no fair go with this fella. (To Man 1) You've been throwing your weight around for too long, sport.*

We were under a streetlight. And from outside this circle of light, I hear ...

The cop walks into the circle of light. He is applauding

Woman 1: *(The cop) Good stuff, son. He's had that comin' to him for years.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, pp. 46-47)

This is a good example of the way in which the actors address the audience to function as storytellers but also interact inside the action of the play both with each other. The audience is literally told this story as well as shown it. Participants' testimonies are woven into narration and expository or explanatory dialogue that forms both monologues, asides and other direct audience address and also exposition in conversation on stage.

Below is another example in which the fluidity of narration allows a story to be told in a variety of ways, both to the audience directly through the fourth wall and then, seamlessly and at the same time, through a more naturalistic frame in dialogue and the interactions on stage. The Fordes employ a variety of structural and narrative techniques, mixing and matching, having the performers communicate in a variety of modes in ways that makes explicit the agency of participant storytelling from which the play is composed, but is also recognizable theatrically as both monologue and dialogue. The overall narrative essence is heightened by the use of a variety of tools. They believe that they are able to tell fuller stories from different points of view and angles of perception;

Two Cribbie women are waiting at the bus stop

Woman 1: *You'd wait beside the fountain in Eagle Street for the bus to bring you home. The Sandgate bus always came first - before the Cribbie bus.*

Woman 2: *So the Sandgate people always had pride of place at the front of the queue. And the moment they saw you weren't going to Sandgate*

Woman 1: *That you were going to Cribbie ... you were just dirt.*

Woman 2: *So at the bus stop - we'd sing a little song we made up.*

Both: *Come to Cribbie and be happy
Stay away and you'll be sad.*

Woman 1: *We'd sing it louder and louder ... to annoy Sandgate.*

They board the Cribbie bus for home

Both: *(Louder) You'll be met with many a smile ... you'll be happy all the while*

On that island by the blue Pacific shore.

They are on the bus

Woman 1: *It always felt good to be going home on the old Cribbie bus.*

Woman 2: *I was cleaning for a woman at Clayfield. I'd worked there for months. And oh, we got on just lovely, you know? She was real nice. She'd have morning tea and everything all out for me. And one day something come up, and I said ... I come from Cribb Island. And it was just ... (she clicks her fingers). She clicked off like that. Altogether different. No more morning tea. I thought ... after this I'm going to tell everybody I come from Cribbie soon as I walk in. And if they don't like it, I'm going to bloody well walk out.*

Woman 1: *I'm watching my son play football at Nundah. And mothers passed me this thing about a Tupperware party. And she said – "Where do you live?" I said – "Cribb Island." She said – "Oh! That dump of a place!" And I said – "Have you been there?" And she said – "No! And I don't intend to go there." She said – "Only no hoppers down there." I said – "I beg your pardon! I've lived on Cribb Island since I was eight years old and I don't class myself as a no hoper.*

Woman 2: *Good on you!*

Woman 1: *And my son was saying – "Don't get yourself upset, mum." And I said – "No, I hate people talking about Cribb Island when they haven't been there." "That dump!" My son said – "Don't make a show, mum." I said ... no, I don't like people slinging off at Cribbie.*

Woman 2: *On the bus coming home – we'd sing all the way.*

Both: *Come to Cribbie and be happy*

Stay away and you'll be sad.

You'll be met with many a smile – you'll be happy all the while

On that island by the blue Pacific shore

Come to Cribbie and be happy

Stay away and you'll be sad.

*You'll be met with many a smile – you'll be happy all
the while*

On that island by the blue Pacific shore!

Blackout - INTERVAL

Telling Stories that are Personal and Political: The Themes of *Cribbie*

This section focuses on exploring the themes and ideological underpinning the writing of *Cribbie* as well as a discussion of some of the structural and aesthetic elements that make up the final theatrical product. It deals with the way the Fordes work and how they thematically animate the text to give it connectivity and resonance with those whose stories they are telling and those to whom the stories are being told. This discussion works to address a number of sub questions in this thesis that pertain to how the Fordes structure their plays and the underpinning themes and tenets that drive their focus on community narratives.

Cribbie was designed for an ensemble cast of four actors, two male and two female. Because of the use of other medias such as music, song and dance, it was required that the cast also be able to perform one or more of these other art-forms. Similar to other Fordes' plays (and briefly noted earlier) such as *Snapshots from home*, *Way out west*, *Skating on Sandgate Road* and *Behind the Cane*, there are no set 'characters' in the play. Instead, there are a number of 'voices' ranging from multiple participant testimonies and other evidence sources, as well as some extrapolated and imagined voices which are used to give narrative context and meaning to the main story and dialogue. A timeless design was employed to clad the male cast members in slacks, a vest and white shirts while the female cast had simple white tops and white or beige long skirts. In many scenes, the cast would don additional costumes and

clothing to represent specific characters or identities within the play. Occasionally a full costume change totally morphs the actor into a specific identity.



Image from JTV Video Brisbane, 2012, <http://www.youtube.com/user/JtvVideoBrisbane>

With Louise Brehmer, Sandro Colarelli, Kevin Hides and Erin Murphy

Structurally, *Cribbie* is similar to the Fordes' work mentioned above. The play is structured around a chronological style narrative arc with the action of the play progressing forward in time. This narrative charts a rough history of Cribb Island from its early inhabitation, memories of participants' experiences living on the island, their removal by authorities, the destruction of the township and its aftermath as the finale.

The production originally premiered in the *Sue Benner Theatre* at Metro Arts Brisbane in 2010 and returned to the *Redcliffe Cultural Centre* in 2011. The set design, as is iconic in the Fordes' work, is minimalistic and able to be easily manipulated while the show is running to convey different areas and settings. The Fordes deliberately keep the set simple and unobtrusive so the narrative is privileged at all times. In *Cribbie*, timber-slat style walls convey not only the essence of what was much of the architecture of Cribb Island but also serve to be a lightweight, elegant and simple material that are used to portray a variety of

indoor and outdoor locations. In contrast to the minimalist set and costume design, the lighting and stage direction is quite complex with a number of sophisticated lighting changes and shifts. An added complexity to the design is the use of on-stage live music, another iconic Forde feature that has the soundtrack of the play performed live by the cast on stage. The themes of the play are enlivened by these theatrical choices and are made explicit through dialogue and movement. Themes of remembrances, family, displacement, history and belonging are paramount in this performance.

Remembrance

Possibly the most important central theme of *Cribbie* is that of remembrance and memory. The play's opening and closing dialogue is powerfully charged with an impetus that this play is about memories of the past. The opening words 'I'm just trying to fit it in your mind that's all' (Forde & Forde 2009, p.1) creates an instant dialogic opportunity between themselves, the participants, the artists on stage and the audience to enter into the private lives of a specific sub-group of people. From the outset, it is being made explicitly clear that this play is inviting people to collectively remember and to share in the joy and grief of the residents. The first scene creates a strong agenda of remembering and also positions the "real" origins and nature of the story;

Man 2: *We were just part of the sea.*
Man 1: *Everything's gone now. The streets. The shops.*
Woman 1: *The houses ... the gardens.*
Man 2: *The bathing boxes The old kiosk by the beach.*
Man 1: *The shell grit factory .*
Woman 1: *The churches on Elmslie Street.*
Man 2: *The school. The Bayview Theatre on Cribb Parade ...*
Man 1: *Cribbie's vanished completely.*

Music stops

Woman 1: *But all of us who lived there ... we know it by heart.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 2)

The Fordes reflected on the powerful agency of remembering and memory that their work was charged with;

MICHAEL: On opening night, there was like this collective remembering.

MARGERY: Right from the start, yeah, it started with

MICHAEL: "Do you remember how to get to Cribb Island"

MARGERY: And all these voices in the front row went "yeeeeeeeeaaaaaap" {Laughs as she impersonates the voices}

MICHAEL: They all knew it.

MARGERY: And Matisse, who became 'Spike' was in the front row with tears rolling down his face the whole show, it was a very powerful thing for him.

(Interview 5, June 2010, Lines 70-77)

Cribbie's content that privileges things that have happened in the past, particularly objects, places and people of bygone eras, gives it a powerful urgency to have these memories represented and displayed. It is the impetus and the goal of *Cribbie* to bring these stories and memories into the public sphere and to the attention of the audience. It operates a kind of anti-Orwellian agenda, inviting people to collectively remember their community, its destruction and their experiences surrounding it. It also exists as a work of personal history and the history of a community, displaying and presenting stories, experiences and memories instead of hiding them; the lives and histories of a community go remembered instead of forgotten.

Community and Family

There are very strong and very direct themes and references to a specific time and place in *Cribbie*. Similar to *Skating on Sandgate Road* the play, by its very title, is automatically given a strong sense of spacial and communal specificity and is deliberately and explicitly encoded with strong notions of being about a particular place, time and group of people. As Kuppers (2007) reminded earlier, ‘storytelling, sharing language and myth making are the offerings that allow the horizon of community to appear’ (p.36) and as the stories of a specific group of community are retold, a strong ‘community’ narrative essence asserts itself. As such, particular themes of belonging, identity, family and community pervade the action and dialogue of the play. Notions of the community, familial and fraternal relationships juxtaposed. One of the most immediate examples of this is the exploration of common reference points that establish a community narrative and encode the work with the sense of specificity of space, time and reference to a particular community group;

Man 1: *It’s not a fair dinkum island though, is it. Not in the true sense of the word.*

AV: *PHOTO OF THE ISLAND AT HIGH TIDE*

Man 2: *(Jackson) Can be, with a big enough tide. See, you’ve got the Serpentine Creek up that end - and Jackson’s Creek, named after yours truly, up this end. We get a big tide – the creeks flood the mud flats and we’re cut off.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.3)

This is an early example in the play of common or communal reference points being established that serve to make the play explicitly and directly linked to a specified group that is different in many ways to what were the mainland communities. There are many such instances where the theme of community is explored through narration and dialogue:

Man 1: *The same things were there. The bathing sheds. The kiosk. The mangoes were still on the tree to pinch. But Cribbie had*

started to fade away. It felt like a perpetual Sunday afternoon in a haze.

Woman 1: *A lot of people got their money and shifted away. Some of them were happy. They had proper plumbing for the first time.*

Man 1: *Typical government. They decide they'll extend the airport. Buy up all the houses. Wait years before doing anything. So they rent all the bloody houses until they're ready to start.*

Woman 1: *New people moved in for the cheap rental. You didn't know those people like you knew the old ones.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.54)

In this way, the Fordes weave a play that has explicit dialogue that is encoded with participant memories that are recognizable to other members of the community. The language, in excerpts such as these, is deliberately shaped around an insider's perspective. Family is also a consistent theme as many of the stories are particular reminiscences of family, fraternal and romantic relationships. Family knowledge and feelings of familial identity and belonging are common ideas and notions that form the essence of the play. In one of the central narratives of the play, a character recalls his father in the following conversations;

Man 1: *My brother and me buried her underneath the rose bush in our yard in Elmslie Street. It was a beautiful rose bush. That's where she'd always wanted her ashes.*

Man 1 (the son) moves to Man 2 (his dad) who is sitting on the steps of the house

Man 1: *Then I go down to see the old man. And he's sitting on the bloody step, on his own.*

Man 2 becomes "the old man"

Man 1: *He was real down in the dumps, the old fella.*

Man 2: *(Dad) Mum's dead under the rose bush. Cribbie's goin'. What's left? Nothin'.*

Man 1: *It'll be alright, dad*

Man 2: *(Dad) When the bastards chase us out of Cribbie ... we're not leaving mum under that rose tree. If they're building a bloody airport, I'm not leaving her on her ownunder the bloody tarmac.*

Don't worry, mate. When the time comes, we'll move her.

Light down on father and son

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.55)

Similarly to the theme of community, these notions of family are a consistent and reoccurring feature of the narrative of *Cribbie*, and, as this excerpt illustrated, often the strength of community and family is juxtaposed against the destruction and displacement of the community and family.

Displacement and Marginalization

As explored earlier, themes of displacement correspond quite closely with those of community and family and serve to polarize those ideas whilst also acting as a thematic anti-thesis. The ideas of destruction, displacement, fracturing of community and family and a deep sense of grief, loss and injustice, serve for most of the emotional impetus of the play and also operate as a social agency, offering emancipation, healing and the chance for recognition, affirmation and justice through the dialogic nature of the theatre.

What is explored in the play as a concurrent theme to the notion of displacement, is also that of marginalization. The voices of *Cribbie* perceive that a deep wrong doing has been perpetuated against them and that the inevitable destruction of Cribb Island has its roots in a long-standing animosity and apathy towards the inhabitants from both government and mainland residents;

Man 1: *(His story continues) I used to like George Wallace. Friday night, on the television. Theatre Royal. Never missed it. And I turned the tele on this night, and George is on, playing the part of the judge. He's behind this bench. And he's got the wig on and everything. And he bangs his gavel ...*

Man 2 becomes George Wallace as the Judge. Woman 1 is the clerk of the court. Man 1 is the accused

Judge bangs his gavel

Man 2: *(Judge to clerk) So what's this bloke done?*

Woman 1: *(The clerk) Some terrible crimes he's done, Your Honour. He's been drunk and disorderly. He's robbed eighty seven banks and he's murdered six people on seven different occasions.*

Man 2: *(Judge) You! Haven't I seen you in this court before?*

Man 1: *(Accused) Yes, Your Honour.*

Man 2: *(Judge) And didn't I tell you I never wanted to see you in here again?*

Man 1: *(Accused) Yes, Your Honour. And that's what I told the bloody police officer. But he made me come anyway.*

Judge bangs his gavel

Man 2: *(Judge) How dare you swear before this Court!*

Man 1: *(Accused) Sorry, Your Honour. I didn't know it was your turn.*

Jude bangs his gavel

Man 2: *(Judge) You're the most horrific criminal I've ever laid eyes on! I've got to think of some suitable punishment for you. Jail's too good for ya! Hangin's is too good for ya! I've got to think of somethin' horrible enough to fit the crime. Got it!*

The judge slams down the gavel

Man 2: *(Judge) Banished to Cribb Island for the term of your natural life! Take him away!*

Lighting change

Man 1: *"Banished to Cribb Island." I never forgave George Wallace for that. I said ... you rotten mongrel! How dare you! And he used to be my favourite comedian. I said ... you know who you insulted? You insulted my mother, my father, my brothers, my cousins "Banished to Cribb Island." You bludger! But that was the perception of people had. It was*

specified as shit down there at Cribbie. And if you came from Cribbie, you were classified as shit. Dead set.

Man 2: *These were good people. Give you the shirts of their backs. There was real ... comrade-sort-of-ship on Cribbie. I just loved the place. Truly. It's still my home and my heart.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, pp. 35-36)

This excerpt is one of the most dramatic and explicit examples of a common theme in *Cribbie* that many of the participants felt they were a maligned, misunderstood or despised group in the greater community. There is a palatable sense that the final destruction of Cribb Island is justified by entities outside the community by the long standing marginalization and derision towards the island and its community;

Woman 1: *She was in her eighties. A funny woman. Very refined and very resourceful. On the day we had to move her – we had a little V-Dub. We crammed as much into it as we could. (To Woman 2) The car's all packed.*

Woman 2: *I still don't understand it. They can afford to spend one hundred and seventy million on an airport ... why couldn't they have spent a little bit of money to keep us all together. Why couldn't they have set up a little retirement village for us at Nudgee – or somewhere.*

Woman 1: *Nobody thought of that.*

Woman 2: *No, of course they didn't. We're not worth thinking about. They've always slated Cribbie. Now they're taking it away.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 56)

The latter parts of *Cribbie* are consistently and explicitly concerned with these kinds of feelings and the Fordes capture this in dialogue that is both authentic and raw and feelings of loss, and grief saturated the text;

SCENE: GOING BACK

Woman 2: *I put mum's ashes where our house had been. There's a lot of security you have to go through now ... to go back there. You have to have your security tag on. It's strange to have to go through security – to get to the place that used to be home.*

Man 2: *We got permission from the Brisbane Airport to take dad back. Dad used to drive the Cribbie buses – so we scattered his ashes where the bus depot had been ... in Cribb Parade.*

Lighting change.

AV: *Quote “Both of `em went back to Cribbie*

Man 1: *I went to where our house had been ... in Elmslie Street. I walked on there and there were tears. I couldn't talk. Just get me out of this. It's too hard. Too many memories. It's like walkin' on peoples' graves. They ripped part of me away too. I know how the Aborigines feel ...*

Woman 1: *At the top end of Cribbie there was big seaweed banks that went out. And sandhills, twelve feet high. I used to slide down them. Well all that went. The airport authority took all those sandhills. There was trucks going night and day ... carting all those hills away. And then all the seaweed ... where we used to get the Cribb Island worms.*

Man 2: *It was so damn small. The whole area. So tiny. The main road ... it seemed so narrow. A narrow bit of bitumen.*

Man 1: *It was just like a track.*

Man 2: *It was wider than that wasn't it?*

Man 1: *Oh! You could have landed a plane on it.*

Man 2: *And finally they did.*

AV: *PHOTO OF THE FOUNDATION OF THE OLD BATHING BOX*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, 62-63)

The narrative focus in this excerpt is on the deeply personal sense of loss and grief as what is a communal experience is articulated as an individual emotional sensation. The emancipatory essence of the play is revealed as a participant's personal and individual story of loss and

injustice is told in a very forthright and honest way, allowing for possibilities of healing, reconciliation and affirmation.

Summary and Conclusions from *Cribbie*

Cribbie is arguably the most political of all of the Fordes' theatrical works and it is charged with a political potency in its explicit and consistent exploration of the experience, memories and remembrances of a displaced group of people. A sense of anger, injustice and deep grief permeates the work and many parts of the play are scathing critiques on the treatment received by the participants and the wider community of Cribb Island. There is a definite essence of the play being deeply personal, despite its political themes and messages and the nature of the play as both a political and personal piece, is explicit. The narrative of the play constantly straddles and moves between the realms of the personal and the political and both intersect, inform and influence each other.

The play is structured in such a way where the Brechtian technique of alienation is fused with multi-media to heighten, highlight and more fully represent the emotional content of the play. The Fordes use all of the theatrical tools at their disposal to create a fully dimensioned work with text and speaking, as well as sound, music and visuals. This is very much their modus operandi. In this way, a more integrated sensory experience of memories and stories is executed as the multiple facets of the world of the play is created. *Cribbie* is an example of powerfully dialogic theatre, or as Kershaw (2007) states 'an ideological transaction'. The play is deeply encoded with community memories alongside an overwhelming shared despair that a specific place and time that has been destroyed and irrevocably fractured. Community and the anti-thesis of community are both strong elements of the play that create the central tension of the play as people remember both the strength and beauty of their place, its time

and relationships to them but also their memories of the destruction and deep hurt. It operates in an emancipatory, *Theatre of the Oppressed* aesthetic where people are empowered to remember and present history in their own way, without judgment, critique or censorship. *Cribbie* straddles an interesting conceptual divide between being a historical document in its own right, a dialogic exchange of people sharing and telling their stories and a chance for those people to collaboratively and communally engage in healing through the medium of theatre. At the time of the writing of this thesis (2012), *Cribbie* has just been published and is also available as a manuscript by special request from the State Library of Queensland. Since its limited return season to the *Redcliffe Cultural Centre* in 2011, there have been no additional performances. Through plays like *Cribbie*, the Fordes allow history to both be created and re-created, to be remembered, imagined and re-imagined.

The next section of this chapter, entitled *Behind the Cane* (2011) explores another theatrical works of the Fordes, in what can only be described as one of their most ambitious pieces of community playwriting. This play is included here because of its aesthetic, thematic and contextual similarity to *Cribbie* and although it is quite different in structure and style, there are multiple differences in how the play was created and finally staged. It is a particularly interesting creative piece because of the quintessential collaboration that pulled this play together and the fact that the final performance was performed by many community members who were not actors but whose stories lay at the heart of a major production. It was such a massive undertaking for the Fordes that is given in own section within this analysis chapter.

Part Two
Behind the Cane

In 2010, Margery and Michael Forde were approached by the organisers of the Queensland Music Festival to undertake a project that would be an ethnographic-inspired musical theatre project involving the communities of the South Sea Islander peoples and the broader community of Bowen in far north Queensland. The impetus and the idea for the project would be to collect as many oral histories as possible of those who were descendants of the indentured labourers, commonly known as “Kanakas”, black-birded to Australia in the latter half of the nineteenth century to cut sugar cane and other hard labour. The project was broad in scope, seeking to involve a specific community in a large-scale musical-theatrical production, culminating in an outdoor community performance at the ‘Sound Stage’ on Bowen’s seaside shore. It was a huge project. Historically, there are very little specific records pertaining to the South Sea Islander ‘kanakas’, their experiences and those of their subsequent communities and descendants.

The ‘South Sea Islander’ project which would come to be known as the play *Behind the Cane*, (2011) functioned in a very similar way both aesthetically, theatrically, politically and structurally to *Cribbie*. Both share elements of being distinct kinds of re-imagined historical documents. In *Behind the Cane*, the testimonies, stories and related experiences of people whose lives once again have been marginalized, ignored or overlooked by popular or documented history were highlighted and given a privileged hearing within a performance mode. In looking back at the project, the resulting performance resonates significantly with Boal’s earlier definition of applied theatre as a medium for oppressed and marginalized

people to collaboratively deconstruct and re-construct their political and personal realities toward emancipation. (in Kuppers & Robertson, 2007)

This project presented challenges to the Fordes in two particular aspects. It was their first experience in working with a different culture other than their own. Until *Behind the Cane*, their works had been predominately and in most cases exclusively based in white Anglo Australian communities. As *Behind the Cane* addresses a specific historical experiences of the South Sea Islander community of far north Queensland, it presented cultural and social challenges unencountered previously by them. Cultural protocols, issues of trust and the essentiality of retelling stories of great cultural and familial sensitivity were obstacles that required mediation, dialogue and respect. The second challenge was the play's structure. While the Fordes are familiar with working with music in their plays, (particularly the latter two *Skating on Sandgate Road* and *Cribbie*) the idea for *Behind the Cane* was that it would contain an original musical score arranged by a composer with songs requiring original lyrics (drawn from interviews) written by the Fordes. It was a daunting task but one the Fordes viewed to be a worthwhile and exciting one awarding a chance to tell stories in a new mode overlaid with specific cultural musical elements and style.

Due to the period in which this play was developed (mid/late 2010- mid 2011) I was not able to follow the Fordes' creative process as closely as I was able to with *Skating on Sandgate Road* and *Cribbie* because much of their work was conducted while my data collection phase with them had concluded and my thesis moved into a new period. Furthermore, much of the Fordes' development and work occurred in far north Queensland, making it almost impossible for me to be privy to any of their interactions or discussions with participants at that time. However, I flew to Bowen to attend the premiere of the play and witnessed

firsthand the energy and power the performance brought to the small seaside town with two hotels and a scattering of residents. It seemed as if the town had exploded with people high on the prospect of witnessing the silent' stories of the past.

For *Behind the Cane*, the scope of the Fordes' creative contribution was essentially as ethnographers; finding, collecting, analysing and transcribing participants' stories through stories and testimonies gathered through interviews. They worked as the key writers (both of text and lyrics) with some input on the final creative and aesthetic design of the show. They did not work as directors or facilitators of the staging as they had in *Cribbie* and *Skating on Sandgate Road* but the stories that were brought to life behind the ocean over two outstanding nights were quintessentially their own.

Going To Bowen

ACT ONE: BLACKBIRDED

SCENE 1:1 LITANY OF NAMES

Woman 1: These are Queensland stories. They are our stories ... and until now, they haven't been told. From 1863 until 1901 tens of thousands of South Sea Islanders were brought to Queensland to work in the sugar plantations. We are going to tell you the stories of some of those people and their descendants here in Bowen. These are their names.

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p. 1)

As is explicit in this opening excerpt of the play and from the outset of the project, the Fordes' aesthetic goal was to present a reality-play based on the experiences of these South Sea Islander peoples. As mentioned, they were 'black-birded' from the islands of the South Pacific, and brought to Queensland on ships to work on sugar cane plantations. They also

worked in other capacities, specifically manual labour, to assist in building the infrastructure of the developing state of Queensland. It was arduous work;

Narrator: *My father was just one of sixty two thousand South Sea Islanders brought here during the forty years of the labour trade. They cleared the land. Cut down trees ... dug `em up with mattocks. Never had tractors or ploughs in them days. Then they planted and harvested the sugar. They pioneered the sugar industry in Queensland, eh. But in 1901 – the new federal government decided to chuck `em out. That's when the White Australia Policy come in.*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.9)

Excerpts such as this, garnered from the oral histories and testimonies of the participants, paint a vivid, emotive image of oppression, marginalization and injustice against the participants, their communities and their ancestors. But the Fordes were also clear that the stories needed to have balance, to be evocative, provocative and sometimes even joyous:

MICHAEL: We don't want to make a sob story, or a woe is me, or lay blame on anyone. MARGERY: No, that is not our goal. but there are some negative feelings. Some bad things were done, there's no avoiding that. We have to be truthful...to do that in a truthful way. It's hard.

(Interview 9, October, 2010, Lines 32-35)

The work of the Fordes, as it was in *Cribbie*, was to strive for as accurate representation of experiences, feelings and perceptions as possible while still remaining authentic to the feelings and ideas that were conveyed by the participants. The addition of original songs was an added element through which they were able to communicate some of the feelings of oppression a way that was powerfully authentic and rich with lyricism and power and tapped into the Island culture. Songs as the following, serve to tap into the natural musical nature of the Islanders and to bring their stories to life in ways that were inherent in their own expression and deeply satisfying as a mode of artistic storytelling;

We are the sound of the chop of the cane knife

We are the flash of the sun on the steel

We are the cut and the curve of the blade

We are the juice that is crushed in the mill.

And we are the mills from Mossman to Tweed

We are molasses - blacker than pitch

We are the steam risin' up from the boilers

We're the black bodies that made white men rich.

(Forde & Forde, 2011, pp. 8)

The manifesto of the project was broad, to involve large portions of the community. As Margery Forde explained, *there's going to be a lot of the community involved, from high school students to elders.* (Margery Forde. Interview 9, October 12, 2010. Lines 25-26). This served to create an aesthetic scope which gave the *Behind the Cane* project heightened communal and dialogical impetus, being not only a theatrical performance but a chance for a community dialogue through the venue of the theatre. It was a play of identity as much as it was of oppression, sadness and disempowerment.

A New Culture And A New Style: First Time Phenomena For The Fordes

The Fordes' earlier plays occasionally mention cultures other than white Australian Anglo society, but until *Behind the Cane* other cultural and ethnic stories had not been the primary focus for any of their theatrical works. Working with a culture that was different from their own, presented the Fordes with special constraints not previously faced, particularly in terms of ethical access and cultural specific guidelines for talking to members of the community about certain issues. The 'appropriateness' of dialogue was also an important consideration:

MICHAEL: There are a lot of ethical issues with this. We have to work through a cultural consultant and the elders. It's a very Christian, community-oriented – community. We have to be aware of that.

(Interview 9, October, 2010. Lines 31-35)

This arguably, was one of the greatest challenges that they faced in developing *Behind the Cane*, particularly as they were considered cultural ‘outsiders,’ coming from the culture of the ‘colonizer’ or the ‘oppressor’ and this created difficulties in terms of how the material was gathered, handled and theatrically represented. As is the case in all of their plays, the Fordes strove for an honest and authentic portrayal of the participants and their culture as it was told to them. They were at pains to set their own Anglo Saxon culture aside and hear the nuances inside the stories of the South Sea Islanders that had been entrusted them to. These were tales of their lives – tales that were deeply personal. This was exciting and empowering for the Fordes as the dialogue was beautiful in its simplicity and natural rhythm;

Narr: I'll tell you somethin' about all them old South Seas people ... they were all religious. They all went to church.

(Light up on his old Dad reading his bible. This old man is the narrator's father – the boy kidnapped from the beach.)

Narr: Yeah, my old Dad, he never faltered. Sunday morning, he'd leave home ... it'd still be dark ... wearin' his white coat and the old straw hat. He ended up ... he become upper class then ... he got a felt hat. (Pause) And at night I used to hear him ... readin' his bible in his Island language. The old hurricane lamp beside his bed. Last time I saw that bible, it was fallin' to pieces. The leaves were yellow. I should have kept it, eh.

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.23)

The script above is a very good example of the cultivation by the Fordes of the oral history and testimonies of the participants and the verbatim language of the community is an

important characteristic of the play. By using the same kind of character-monologue relating the story as it was told to them, they created a palatable authenticity of images that are culturally distinct. This is further exemplified in the following scene that addresses South Sea Islander belief in folklore and ‘mystic legend,’ an idea that is very different to the Fordes’ own culture;

(A haunting night sound – a curlew, a night owl – created through music)

Narr: *And puri puri*

(More haunting nights sounds ...)

Old SSI: *Sshhhh.*

(Another haunting night bird call ...)

Old SSI: *Hear that? That might be that fella.*

(More eerie sounds of night birds ...)

Old SSI: *That might be that mussing, eh. That kleva from Melaukula.
Turned himself into a bird.*

(The boy sits entranced)

Narr: *I never got tired of listenin’ to their stories.*

*(The sounds of bat wings in the night. Islander music continues under
as the old South Sea Islander tells and re-enacts the story of the bat.
The boy listens mesmerised.)*

Old SSI: *And this one time, they come home from church, and the
mother looked at her dress. And she had a piece of cloth cut
out of it. About that big it was. And one of the boys ... he
was an old medicine man ... he said ... “Oh yeah ... I know the
man who did that. He tried to catch your mother there. You
go home. Close all the house up ...” ... a grass house them
days, eh. And he said - “Leave the window open next to the
fire place. And just on dark ... a bat will fly in there. You
lock the windows. Knock the bat down so your mother stay
alive.” So they closed the windows ... and they got all
brooms and stuff - waitin’ for the bat. And when the bat
come through the window – they knocked it down! And when
the bat hit the ground ... it was a piece of cloth.*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, pp. 21-22)

The Fordes endeavoured to weave a creative portrait that is both truthful and authentic to the participant that would also be both educative and transformative for the audience. The agency by which it was received, creates something that is also aesthetically meaningful and theatrical for performance. It was a giving up of what the Fordes had always 'known' about their own culture and allowing the 'other' to have voice;

MICHAEL: It's to do with listening and putting yourself aside. Putting aside your own biases... and trying to listen honestly to their stories.

(Interview 9, October 2010, Lines 20-21)

This is distinctly reminiscent of Kuppers (2007) earlier assertions, that when working in the community theatre dimension, the 'story' and stories of others become more important than any individual ego or political motivation. One of the other distinct differences to the Fordes' other projects is that *Behind the Cane* was performed predominately by members of the South Sea Islander communities of Bowen. There were some professional actors included in the cast, but overall the acting ensemble was comprised of members of the community and in some cases, some participants were cast as retelling their actual stories in the final production. The Fordes' plays are usually performed by professional actors but in another exception, *Skating on Sandgate Road*, the actors were advanced level university drama students. In *Behind the Cane*, they were even more removed from their theatrical product because they were not actively or directly involved in the direction, acting coaching or choreography of the performance. Many of the participants had never done any acting or drama work before. This gave it a true community flavour and was a new direction for the work of the Fordes.

The very process involved with this production, aligns it strongly with community theatre theories (such as Erven, 2000 and Kuppers 2007) in that it specifically utilised community

members rather than professional actors in the final theatrical product. It is this facet that gives *Behind the Cane* more dialogical and communal impetus in that the community is, in essence, speaking for itself through the venue of theatre. As Erven (2000) earlier reminded us, community theatre is ‘an important device for communities to collectively share stories’.

(p.2) The dialogue and content of *Behind the Cane* is often specific or explicit in the kind of communal-reference language that it uses, with multiple inclusions or words like “our” and “we” from character-narrators which specifically addressed the community from which they are belong. The following is one of the most explicit instances in the script of this kind of dialogue;

Young woman: *In a country that didn’t want them ... our ancestors survived. They worked hard at whatever jobs they could get – and they survived. They made their settlements on the fringes – along rivers and creeks. They planted their gardens ... and they survived. At places like Farleigh, Josceleigh, Kanaka Town, Plantation Creek, Halifax Gardens ... and in Bell’s Gully here in Bowen. They survived. And right down the generations ... their children worked hard. And they survived.*

(Forde & Forde, 2011 p.13)

This feature of using theatre to create dialogue and share stories and experiences from the community, is also realized through the re-telling of personal stories. Through participants’ related experiences and feelings, *Behind the Cane* becomes a conduit through which one community can remember and apply its own history and share in that history through their stories. The spirit of their predecessors and elders becomes alive;

Woman 1: *When I was a little girl, I used to listen to people talking*

(Upstage, light up on two men and two women. They are sharing their stories of trying to reclaim their ancestry. These speeches could flow into each other)

Man 1: *I've been tryin' to find out what happened to my great-grandfather. But it's hard. So many were buried without names ...*

Woman 2: *(Older woman) My grandmother was working in a paddock when she died. She's buried there in that paddock, with a baby. A road's gone over the top of her now ... and the baby ...*

Woman 3: *I don't know what my great-grandmother's real name was. They only just called her by the name of Louise. There's no record of her birth or her death ...*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.34)

In the final production, this dialogue was read on stage by the participant who told the story to the Fordes. The participant, acting as 'self' in the space of the play, tells their own story, and creates a vivid, poignant dialogical essence that speaks to the whole community inviting engagement and trust. The third distinct difference of *Behind the Cane* from the Fordes' previous works is the song-writing and original score. While their other plays are highly musical with song, music and dance forming a normal part of their aesthetic, structural and stylistic choices, the Fordes had never before worked with a play that comprised an original score or where they were tasked as lyricists and songwriters. Even more important, many of the lyrics came from the interviews themselves. They reflected,

MICHAEL: Well, as you know, Margery is really the musical one.

MARGERY: I've got all the music, I work with the composer. It is a difficult challenge.

MICHAEL: I couldn't do it, but she finds a way, it's process. Exhausting!

MARGERY: Some of the stories are in the songs too.

(Interview 9, October 2010, Lines 44-48)

This incorporated transforming verbatim testimony and participants' narratives into song lyrics and was a completely new element in the Fordes' creative approach. It is quite an unusual and rare incarnation of the kind of creative/performance ethnography that their work usually inhabits as a style, and the closest similarity that this research identified is that to ethnographic-poetry as outlined by Brady (2005), Stewart (2005) and Richardson (1995). Brady (2005) reminds us that poetry (in this case, song lyrics) can tap into an emotive and sensory dimension of understanding that normal-style textual language cannot. For Richardson (1995) poetry (or lyrics with music), can honour and represent the speaker more accurately and fully than verbatim text as it gives the opportunity to represent the emotional tones in which stories are told. Through the use of lyrics/poetry in *Behind the Cane*, the Fordes wove a deeply emotive tale, not just with the happenings of remembrances, but through the use of lyrics and music, the emotional themes and images as well. One such instance of a participant's story interpreted and crafted into song lyrics is the reminiscence of a leisure excursion to a location referred to as "Bob Moses Creek";

*Well we rose up early and bright
Got up way before the sun
But today there'll be no harvest
There's no workin' to be done
No more grubbin', and no more chippin'
Pickin's over for the week
We're gonna some freedom
Down at old Bob Moses Creek*

Chorus: *Yeah, we're walking to Bob Moses
In the mornin' warm and fine
We're walkin' to Bob Moses*

*I got my Granddad's hand in mine
And all my friends are comin' with us
What a great day it's gonna be
When we're walkin' to where Bob Moses
Flows away out to the sea*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.15)

“Bob Moses Creek” is an extended song that included virtually the whole ensemble of the production and large amounts of primary school children who acted as a chorus. The story/song is shared among the community performers in a way which is reminiscent of the kind of collaborative and communal theatre styles of the Ancient Greeks and is arguably the busiest and biggest moment on stage in the show. Another strong example of the images and themes of the play which arrived through the use of participants’ stories can be seen in the song “Salt Pan Man”;

Narr: *After the war, I went back to doin' whatever I could get.
Shovellin' salt ... that was a terrible job. I was hurtin' eh.
But at least your kids never starved. The only shade was from
the electric light poles. And everybody's lined up like a mob
of soldiers ...*

*(All the workers line up line soldiers in the shade of the light
post. They are waiting for the skips to come down. Then they
start work...)*

SONG: *SALT PAN MAN (Islanders – with white workers joining in
the chorus)*

Workin' in the salt pan tryin' to earn a quid

Doin' what I can to keep my family fed

If shovellin' salt is what it takes

Then I'll be shovellin' salt till this old back breaks

Feelin' weighed down with worry and dread

If a man can't make a livin' then he's better off dead
I gotta keep workin', gotta have my pride
The day that I stop will be the day that I die
Salt pan man, salt on your skin
Can slice like a knife, it can burn like sin
You got salt in your tears, salt in your blood
Salt in your sweat soakin' down in the mud.

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.24)

In this segment, there is a direct flow from the spoken-in-dialogue script retelling and relating the experience and memory, to the song which serves the same purpose. This is a common device throughout *Behind the Cane* which links narrative spoken-word dialogue to songs that re-iterate or emphasize the story or embellish the imagery and/or the emotional essence of the particular story or segment of the play. Although using the participants' verbatim dialogue in the songs and original music and songs is new for the Fordes, the use of music and song has recognizable connections to the Fordes' earlier works, particularly *Skating on Sandgate Road* and *Cribbie*. In both *Skating on Sandgate Road* and *Cribbie*, songs and music (usually period) are used to heighten and embellish the emotional essence of the stories being told at that particular moment in the play and to provide, not just linkage between scenes, but a kind of overall theatrical, dramatic and contextual meaningfulness to the individual scenes and the overall play itself. The Fordes use music to highlight the moods, images and ideas of the story or the particular phase of the play. Whilst this is the same technique used in *Behind the Cane*, the difference is that the songs and music are original compositions.

Identity and Belonging: The themes and structure of *Behind the Cane*

Similar to *Skating on Sandgate Road* and *Cribbie*, the script of *Behind the Cane* is structured in a kind of chronological narrative arc. This arc follows the experiences of the South Sea Islander peoples of far north Queensland, their communities and ancestors from ‘black-birding’, through to Federation, the Second World War and to the current day. This fact puts it alongside *Cribbie* and *Way out West* as one of the Fordes’ broadest scope historical plays. Also similarly to other their other work, there are no set characters or direct naturalistic characterization. Instead there are a series of character-narrators and ‘voices’ which communicate the various stories and dialogue of the play.

Most of the dialogue is executed through the recognizable character-monologue being explicitly like story-telling in both structure and style as narrators (both in and out of character, and in the blurring of both) talking directly to the audience whilst inside the narrative space of the play. There are some on stage dialogue conversations as well as on-stage action which re-imagines the various experiences and phenomena as retold in the stories. Also on stage, there was a live orchestra that was seated in a rear-stage area obscured from direct view of the audience but still noticeable. The ensemble were dressed in a variety of costumes, departing from the Fordes’ usual style of an ‘everyman’ aesthetic. Costumes included long skirts or dresses for female members and shorts and Hawaiian/island shirts for men. The play was performed the outdoors in the venue known as the *Sound Shell Stage* on Bowen’s seashore. This proved to be an excellent venue for gathering a large crowd in that the event was conducted free of charge to the audience and a large crowd of hundreds, perhaps thousands, arrived at the Sound Shell Stage to witness the production. This should speak to the wide ranging communal and community appeal of the production.



(Photos taken on Opening night of *Behind the Cane* , July 2011)

Some emergent and consistent themes, ideas and images can be garnered from a thorough reading of the script of *Behind the Cane*. Some are familiar themes previously explored in the Fordes' other work, while some are new and unique to this particular play.

Identity

For my initial exploration into the themes of *Behind the Cane*, I asked Margery and Michael Forde to comment on some of their reflections and considerations of the main ideas of the play. Identity seems to be an overarching element of all their work,

MICHAEL: One thing that has emerged from this is how important family is and the family name. There has been a lot of talking about how important the name is, how important my name and your name is.

BRENT: Like Arthur Miller's "The Crucible"?

MARGERY: Absolutely, yeah! It's all about this sense of "this is my name"! It's so important, the sense of your name and of your family name- it's all to do with who you are and where you come from.

(Interview 9, October 2010. p.38-42)

The Fordees suggested that a sense of identity and self-hood was one of the most powerful images of *Behind the Cane*. This sense of identity is not limited to self-identity but also encompasses the communal and shared identity of the South Sea Islander communities of far north Queensland. Much of the play's dialogue is explicit in its relation and treatment of themes of self-identity and communal identity and how and where these identities intertwine. There are explicit references in the opening moments of the play that relate to the names of people and of places;

Woman 1: *These are Queensland stories. They are our stories ... and until now, they haven't been told. From 1863 until 1901 tens of thousands of South Sea Islanders were brought to Queensland to work in the sugar plantations. We are going to tell you the stories of some of those people and their descendants here in Bowen. These are their names.*

LITANY OF NAMES (Choir)

*Yasso ... Merrypor ... Corowa ... Power
Watego ... Willie ... Neehow ... Neyow
Parter ... Wommel ... Youse ... Paul
Lorrull ... Batalabasi ... Falinga ... Cora
Bickie .. Miller ... Querro ... Upkett
Kai Kai ... Bobbert ... Geesu ... Kyliff
Dreammoss ... Barramanus ... Killier ... Moses
Yowyeh ... Hansen ... Wanem.*

(Music continues under the following)

Woman 1: *Our people came from the Islands of Melanesia. Many of them were blackbirded. Kidnapped.*

Voice 1: *My great-grandfather was blackbirded from Tanna. He was in the very first lot that came over ..*

Voice 2: *My great-grandmother came from the New Hebrides – or Vanuatu as it's known now, eh.*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.1)

This opening excerpt not only established the importance of name and identity as one of the core themes of the play but also immediately establishes the sense of fractured identity associated with the displacement from home-country. These are two conflicting ideas; the strong sense of place, personhood and community and the threat to that by displacement and separation. This sense of identity and the search for it despite dislocation is captured poignantly in the song “Somewhere listening for my name,” one of the central songs of the play that links the notion of identity to that of spirituality;

SONG: SOMEWHERE LISTENING FOR MY NAME/ ISLAND MUSIC

When the Savior calls

I will answer

When He calls for me - I will hear

When the Savior calls I will answer

I'll somewhere listening for my name

I'll be somewhere listening

(Chorus)

I'll be somewhere listening

I'll be somewhere listening

I'll be somewhere listening for name

I'll be somewhere listening

I'll be somewhere listening

I'll be somewhere listening for my name.

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.20)

This song is reprised later in the play, set in the present to frame participants' search for their histories and by association, their cultural identities. The link between knowing the name and the sense of empowerment and cultural belonging and identity that comes along with that knowledge is illustrated in the reprise of the song and the following dialogue;

Choir: *I'll be somewhere listening, I'll be somewhere listening, I'll be somewhere listening for my name*

I'll be somewhere listening, I'll be somewhere listening, I'll be somewhere listening for my name

(During the song, a woman and a little girl walk onto a beach in Bowen. They stand some distance from each other – both looking out to sea. The little girl is the woman's younger self. Their father - the narrator from the first scene - sits on the sand – watching the little girl.)

Woman 1: *When I was a little girl, I used to listen to people talking*

(Upstage, light up on two men and two women. They are sharing their stories of trying to reclaim their ancestry. These speeches could flow into each other)

Man 1: *I've been tryin' to find out what happened to my great-grandfather. But it's hard. So many were buried without names ...*

Woman 2: *(Older woman) My grandmother was working in a paddock when she died. She's buried there in that paddock, with a baby. A road's gone over the top of her now ... and the baby ...*

Woman 3: *I don't know what my great-grandmother's real name was. They only just called her by the name of Louise. There's no record of her birth or her death ...*

Man 1: *A lot of people don't know their kastom name. You ask them ... what's your kastom name? They don't know. You lose a lot when you lose your name.*

(They listen to this elder with deep respect.)

Man 2: *(Fiercely proud older man) I'd spent my life cuttin' cane in Ayr and workin' on the wharf here in Bowen. When I was seventy - I went to my father's place in Tanna. He was Paramount Chief - and when I went there, they made me Paramount Chief. I stayed for twenty years. (Pause) They all know the name Corowa – all over Tanna. It's an old Kastom name – given my God. Not by man – by God. Handed down from generation to generation. God and kastom! Bloodline of the Corowas! Every fella knew me in Tanna ...my name.*

(Lights down on group)

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.34)

The quest for healing and the revelation that comes with the knowledge and understanding of name and identity is the central point that drives *Behind the Cane* particularly toward its conclusion. At its conclusion, the play becomes a celebration of the remembrances of identity as the names are literally remembered and recalled both by and to the community on stage and in the audience.

In the final exchange of the play, the ensemble 'de-role' from the narrative of the text and become 'themselves' connected to the present but cognisant of the past. This is an interesting thematic device as the ensemble players are, in many cases, the participants whose testimonies were used to create the text. This adds a further signature and essence of the reality-agency of the play as the ensemble tell the audience directly that these stories are both real and theirs. This direct 'telling' serves for a powerful conclusion that solidifies, poetically and powerfully the sense of identity which runs through the play;

FINALE:

(Some of our cast identify themselves – and their relationships to the people in the stories. NB: This is to be written from the cast list. But some examples below)

Aicey: *My name is Aicey Zaro. I am a descendant of the boy on the beach.*

Simone: *My name is Simone Stacey. The boy on the beach is my Great-great grandfather.*

Marcus: *My name is Marcus Corowa. My Great-grandfather returned to Tanna at the age of seventy to become Paramount Chief. Everybody knew him in Tanna. His name.*

(Lighting change)

(South Sea Island dancers. All participate in the singing, dancing and celebration)

SONG: WE WILL REMEMBER YOUR NAME

We won't forget you – we will remember your name

Corowa – Yasso – Willie – Merrypor – Parter – Watego

Neehow - Power

Your stories will live on – burning as bright as a flame

Batalabasi - Wommel – Paul – Youse – Falinga – Neyhow - Lorrull

We won't forget you – we will remember your name

Your stories will live on – burning as bright as a flame

We won't forget you – we will remember your name

Cora – Bickie – Querro - Wanem – Upkett – Kai Kai

Miller – Hansen

Your stories will live on – burning as bright as a flame

Kyliff - Bobbert – Barramanus – Yowye – Killier – Geesu – Moses

Dream Moss

We won't forget you

We will remember your name

No we won't forget you

We will remember your name

No we won't forget you

We will remember your name

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.38)

At this close, the whole ensemble assembles on stage, symbolic of unity and of the collective and communal remembering that is taking place. It deliberately echoes the opening dialogue except that in this vision of the ending, some of the fracture of identity and communality has been healed through remembrances. The Fordes however, do not paint a portrait of 'all being right' but instead portray the strength, empowerment, emancipation and revelation that comes through the knowledge and remembrances of given names. As they reflected, the sense of identity and of 'name' was of paramount importance to many of the participants who gave their oral histories and testimonies to the text. The play itself becomes an extension of these peoples' and their communities' needs to remember and say their own names and identities. It is the central ideological impetus of *Behind the Cane* and the central cathartic journey.

History

Similar to the Fordes' earlier plays, particularly *Skating on Sandgate Road* and *Cribbie*, *Behind the Cane* has a strong historical component. This historical thrust operates in much the same way as their earlier plays in that it privileges the oral-history and their own particular view and experience of history and of broader world history events.

Furthermore, like the former plays, *Behind the Cane* arrives from a qualitative-style research process. This gives it a certain historical credence, being definable as a primary source document and can be understood and viewed as a historical text as well as a piece of performance art. As is a consistent *modus operandi* for the Fordes, the text of *Behind the Cane* uncovers history and/or a view of history that has previously been overlooked and

marginalized by popular historical discourse. The play opens with the dialogue 'These are Queensland stories. They are our stories ... and until now, they haven't been told'. (Forde & Forde, 2011, p.1). These words deliberately and explicitly foreground the notion of 'untold' stories and previously unexplored or unknown history and historical views. This defines part of the Fordes' central storytelling and theatrical agenda and aesthetic and has become the way they desire to work. They want the audience to know that the stories are admissible as historical artefacts and that the stories have been previously untold. They are not flights of fantasy or embellishment, but raw, organic and disturbingly real. The stories are being told and passed along from one generation to the next being openly disseminated in and among the community themselves. They are also, for the first time, being shared with the 'other' that has not been privy to the anguish of the community and the deeply embedded plight of cultural and social disenfranchisement and loss.

It is virtually impossible to concisely and exactly explore or specify each period and the historical events and experiences of peoples in those times to the scale of the final production of *Behind the Cane*, so many of the time periods are not shown in explicit detail. This serves to place the 'time' of the play in a kind of non-specific 'twentieth century'. There are some instances however, where specific historical events are mentioned and the perceptions and experiences of the participants during those times are explored, allowing for a different view of history as the one that is popularly recorded.

In the instance of historical events that happened before the participants were born (for example; the 'black-birding'), the Fordes used related participant testimony of what they knew about the phenomena/events and some archival and historical evidence to create realistic imaginings of the historical events and context of the play. They do a great deal of research in

order to understand and contextualise the stories they have responsible for but it is a great joy and passion for them to do this. In the following excerpt the event of ‘black-birding’ is recreated using a combination of participant testimony and created dialogue (in song) to create a realistic imagining;

Narrator: *Dad was ten years old.*
(Drumming The drumming builds to a crescendo. Fathoms of red calico cascade over the side of the ship. The boy is ensnared by the calico. He is dragged aboard. Drumming stops. We see the mother)

Narrator: *By the time his mother got down to the beach – the ship was startin’ to move. Dad could see her ... runnin’ along the beach, yellin’ at him to jump off. But they told him he’d get shot if he jumped.*
(The distraught mother collapses to her knees and wails her grief)

Mother: *Boe blong me!*

Narrator: *My father was put in the hold of the ship with other Islanders. The voyage to Queensland took seven weeks.*

Intro to the song “For the Greater Good” begins ...

(A tempest at sea. The boy and the other terrified Islanders are illuminated by a wildly swinging lamp. The Recruiter appears holding a gun.

Sailor: *Youfella – settle down! You listen to big fella captain!*

(The Recruiter sings – partly in broken Pidgin)

SONG: FOR THE GREATER GOOD *(The Recruiter)*

*Yu fella go katem sugaken long Kwinsland
 Yu fella wok for very nice waetman
 Yu laki tumas, so be happy, yes you should
 What mefela do is for the greater good*

*Plenty kind boss man to take care of you
 Plenty nice kai kai under sky of blue
 Yu fella work in sun like no white fella could
 So what you do – you’ll do for the greater good*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.3)

This historical phenomena and the experience that was related to the Fordes through testimony is re-imagined using both the verbatim testimony and imagery-filled song that accords with Brady's (2005) earlier assertion about the use of poetry (lyrics) in ethnographic-derived performances. Brady argues that the use of lyrics in poetry or in this case, song, conveys deep emotional and sensory essence in a way that normal text cannot. The example of the black-birder, the actuality of his testimony being excluded from the text because he is has passed, is recreated and re-imagined from the testimony of those who knew what had happened. Historically and contextually, appropriate language (the pidgin) is used to add realism to this character and the song serves to elucidate the emotional images and themes that are made apparent in the dialogue. Feelings of hostility, fear, palatable danger, violence and oppression, are recounted in both the testimony and the song to recreate the phenomena in both a believable and emotionally truthful way.

The Fordes structured the script in such a way as to not only present the participants' views and experiences of history over the popularly or known recorded history but also further gave weight to the emotional experiences, feelings and sensations of those historical events. The following excerpt shows how the script highlights not only the personal-participant centric re-telling of history, but also animates the emotional essence of the story. This scene recalls the time of Federation and the deportation of the indentured South Sea Islander labourers and their families;

*Let us clarify our motives
Lest they should be misconstrued
We're deporting coloured labour
All for the greater good.*

*Kanaka trafficking is odious
It reeks of slavery
The trade's degrading to Australia
Land of the fair and free!*

(Mournful sound of a ship's horn ... created through musical sound. Brass band sound changes to the Deportation Theme.)

MUSIC: *DEPORTATION THEME (throughout the following)*

(A family group, about to be deported – mother, father and children. The man is in a suit, the woman is a long dress with a hat, the children are also well dressed. A moment of profound dignity.)

Woman Narr: *They got dolled up, eh ... the women in long dresses – and the men in suits. (Brief pause) They reckon they were cryin', some of `em, as the ships pulled out. The men and women ... and the kids. Nobody waved.*

(Deportation Theme is continuing as the family walk away towards their destiny)

Woman Narr: *A lot of them never got back to the Islands they come from. They just dumped `em off anywhere. Took `em out ... dropped `em at Cape me were dropped off at Torres Strait. And New Guinea. They would have been killed. (Pause) When Deportation come in - the Islanders fought real hard to get exemptions. The government allowed fifteen hundred to stay. Another thousand went bush and hid.*

(Deportation Theme ends: They're gone)

(Forde & Forde, 2011. p.10)

There is clear juxtaposition in this theme, from the raucous celebratory tone of the “Federation” song in the beginning performed by a character enrolled as a white politician complete with brass band, and the sobering and deeply affecting sadness of dialogue relating the experiences of the South Sea Islander peoples who were affected by the deportation. The music also changes to suit the polarizing moods, from celebratory and brash, to melodies that become sombre and dejected as the stories unfold. A tangible sense of the political statement of the participants speaking through the text can be detected in this scene. As the white

majority and government are symbolized by the politician and the rejoicing brass band revel in their quest for nationhood and ethnic purity, they are oblivious to the suffering and tragic plight of those affected by their choices. It is in this way, like *Cribbie*, that *Behind the Cane* operates not only a historical agenda, but a political one as well.

Taking Boal's (in Kuppers 2007) assertions about the agency of theatre to empower people to present their views of the world and their place in it, *Behind the Cane* is as inescapably political as it is historical, in much the same way *Cribbie* is. Participants can share their experiences of historical events and in the case of the above extract, highlight the ways their lives have been changed by political decisions and socio cultural change. As was the case in *Cribbie* and indeed all of the Fordes' more recent works, such points of view seem to dominate the narrative and highlight the conflict inherent in the play in one way or the other.

As history, *Behind the Cane* has multiple levels of meaning inside the text that work on a much broader scale than simple theatrical storytelling. The following is an excerpt of a participant testimony related to a broader world history event;

Narr: *Dad had worked hard ... with his blood and sweat and everythin' – to give his kids a better life. So you worked hard for your family. It come from that history – of havin' to slog away at whatever you could get. Cuttin' cane. Doin' farm work. Workin' on stations. On the railroads. (Brief pause) And soldierin'.*

(Lighting change).

ACT THREE: AUSTRALIAN SOUTH SEA ISLANDERS

SCENE 3:1 SALT PAN MAN

Music: *Salt Pan Man Music starts under following.*

(Man 1 puts on a brown slouch hat. During the following, other soldiers, black and white, emerge from the cane field to join Man 1)

Narr: *I was in New Guinea durin' the war. And Indonesia. In the army, we were all like brothers. You had friendship there that you'd never see anywhere else.*

(A flash of intensely bright light. During the following – the narrator takes off his shirt and puts it on the ground. The white men follow suit ... taking off their shirts and adding them to the pile for the Japanese children.)

Narr: *After the war, we were among first Australian soldiers into Japan. We were from here to Proserpine away from where the bomb had been dropped. Hiroshima was just all ruins. They were starvin', the poor little kids. And it was freezin' cold. Snow. So we gave them our spare uniforms. (Brief pause) Yeah, we felt sorry for them kids.*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, pp. 23-24)

And in another excerpt, we see the unfolding racism of another era communicated through participant testimony and story re-telling;

Mill Boss: *(To baker) What's that black woman doin' at the table? I'm not eatin' lunch with a black woman.*

(A pause. Then the baker walks over to the woman – it's as if he is going to ask her to leave the table.)

Woman: *I'm not shiftin'*

(The baker turns to the mill owner.)

Baker: *There's a pub up the road. If you want to have a meal – go and have it up there. She sits with me at my table.*

(The baker sits down beside the woman. The Mill Boss leaves).

Baker: *(To girl) I've been meanin' to tell you ... you're a real hard worker. Best I ever had. So I'm givin' you a raise.*

(Lights down on baker as he continues his lunch.)

Girl: *He was a good boss, that baker, eh. He was a real good fella*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.28)

This is another example of an enduring element in the way the Fordes deal with history – at both a personal and everyday level and in the scope of larger historical and world events. The testimonies are dramatized allowing the memory to be re-imagined and re-enacted bringing the essence of the story to life.

Belonging: Community and Culture

Quite similar to the theme of identity, there are strong images and feelings communicated in the text of the play that convey a sense of belonging to a community and a culture. The way in which self is understood in *Behind the Cane* is connected to the individual's relation and place belonging in their community and culture. Like the theme of identity, the image of community belonging and belonging to a culture is one of the most recurrently powerful ideas in the play. It is also the source of much of the ideological tension as, similar to the dilemma of name and identity being fractured by the loss of home, so is the same true of the sense of belonging and community and cultural membership.

This fracture is described in some of the earliest segments of the play as a participant tells the story of his father who was black-birded as a small child from the South Sea Islands. This uses the traditional language of the people to establish a strong sense of cultural specificity and context to the unfolding action on stage. The boy, taken away from his mother and his

home, displaced and lonely, finds a sense of familiarity in hearing his native language and seeing a familiar cultural object in this excerpt;

(The mill owner moves away. The Islander sits beside the boy)

Islander: *Hey, yu pikinini blong Banks, eh. (Brief pause) Yu sad tumas.*

(The South Sea Islander man gently places a bible in the boy's hands).

Islander: *Dispela Baebol. Mi givim long yu, eh.*

(The boy recognises the bible. It is written in Mota, the language of the Banks. It is something recognizable in this strange place.)

Narrator: *My old Dad had a bible, written in Island language. At night I used to hear him readin' it - the old hurricane lamp beside his bed.*

Miller: *(Bellows) Alright! That's it! Start walkin'!*

Islander: *Yumi mas go nao. Yumi go algeta.*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p. 7)

Both the character of the boy ('real' in a sense being based on participant testimony but also symbolic of all the displaced South Sea Islanders) and the audience are exposed to the very strong sense of belonging. The boy is lost, confused, displaced and yet experiences some sense of relief in the familiar sounds of his native language and the Bible that is written in it. The words convey vivid images of the cultural nuances of the people whom this play is about and the importance of their place. The re-iteration by the participant that his father still had the Bible serves as a further poignant signifier of the importance of ancestral ties, family and community and spirituality.

Symbols and images of belonging are punctuated throughout the script of *Behind the Cane*. From the earlier scenes that highlight native language and objects, the setting of the stories, the essentiality of belonging, changes in incarnation through the arc of the story. Belonging is found in the settings of family and embraced Christian spirituality as these following excerpts record;

Young man: *Our old house was corrugated iron ... the window held open with a big stick. Hessian sacks covered the ground ... and the walls were lined with paper to cover up the cracks. But everythin' was spotless. I'd live in it today ... the way my Mum kept it. We never had nothin' – but what we had, she made it a home.*

(House interior – early morning. The family are setting the table for breakfast.)

Young woman: *It was a big family, eh. As well as us kids – there was Mum and Dad ... and Granddad ... and Grandma ...*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p. 18)

Using their recognizable character-monologue, the Fordes are able to communicate the palatable essence of belonging, familial attachment and a sense of home as it is experienced by the participant and was conveyed to them. Similar techniques are used to expound the sense of belonging and cultural membership in discussing spirituality;

Narr: *I'll tell you somethin' about all them old South Seas people ... they were all religious. They all went to church.*

(Light up on his old Dad reading his bible. This old man is the narrator's father – the boy kidnapped from the beach.)

Narr: *Yeah, my old Dad, he never faltered. Sunday morning, he'd leave home ... it'd still be dark ... wearin' his white coat and the old straw hat. He ended up ... he become upper class then ... he got a felt hat. (Pause) And at night I used to hear him ... readin' his bible in his Island language. The old hurricane lamp beside his bed. Last time I saw that bible, it was fallin' to pieces. The leaves were yellow. I should have kept it, eh.*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p. 23)

The Bible mentioned in this excerpt is the same from the earlier segment. The narrative and cathartic arc of the play and its exploration of belonging, cultural membership and the ongoing healing goes full circle. In the final main scene/story segment of *Behind the Cane* the granddaughter of the abducted boy travels to the beach where he was taken in the opening scene of the play. The scene of 'full-circle' is arguable the most moving, powerful and poetic of the play. The actor playing the granddaughter narrates the story of her arrival on the beach, the narrator further elucidates the story (from his own verbatim testimony) as the character representing his granddaughter and the character of the mother from the opening dialogue share the same space (the beach) on stage. The dialogue poetically and powerfully illustrates an almost sacred realization and revelation;

Lights down on Narrator and the little girl.

Woman 1: *When a child goes missing, we panic, eh. We all panic for our children. And when we're sittin' around together relaxin' – we look out for each other's children. It may not be your child but you know that that's so and so's child. And someone will say – “Oh, where's that child?” or “Where's that boy? Where's my precious son gone to?” We're all like that. (Brief pause) And if you take a woman's child ... that's kidnapping, eh. That's a crime.*

SCENE 3.5 THE GRANDDAUGHTER'S SONG

Woman 1: *I tried for years to locate my Grandfather's village ... but all my searching came to nothing. It was as if it didn't exist. (Brief pause) I even wrote a letter to the government in Vanuatu. It took four years ... but I finally got a reply. They said ... there is a village called Quisue. It's on the eastern side of Vanua Lava in the Banks.*

(Melanesian music to underscore)

(Light up on narrator)

Narrator: *My daughter and her husband went to Vanua Lava. And the people there ... they gave `em a big welcome. They treated them like royalty. And they wanted her to stay. They told my son-in-law ... "You can go home." (He laughs) He's a white fella, eh. "You can go back to Australia." But they said to my daughter ... "You woman blong Banks. You stop here."*

(Melanesian continues under ...)

They took them to Quisue ... the village where my old bloke come from. Only the foundation was left. The people who used to live there had all moved inland a long time ago on account of the ships raidin' the place, you know ... and takin' all the young people away.

(Light up on Woman 1. She is on the white sand beach)

Not far from the village was a white sand beach. And my daughter stood on that beach ... and looked out. And she could see three other Islands. She knew all of it, eh. Every detail. It was just as my old dad had told it to me. That's not written history. That's oral history. Yeah. That's the true story. (Pause) My daughter stood on that white sand, eh. Where her great-grandmother saw her son for the last time ...

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.35-36)

This is the final moment of the play. Visually striking, the character-granddaughter and character-great-grandmother occupy the same space and time on stage, as the grand-daughter heals the fractured sense of belonging by returning to the place which it occurred. There is a stillness and aptness that demonstrates a powerful sense of 'homecoming' and of belonging, community and kinship of the peoples of the play and how important these things are. This emotionally charged scene culminates in a song sung back and forward through time between the grieving mother who has lost her son and the great-grand-daughter who has returned home in his place;

Woman 1: *I feel you here*

Mother: *Now as you dream ...*

Woman 1: *Now as you dream ...*

Mother: *The breeze will bring your voice again to me*

Woman 1: *The breeze it brings your voice again to me*

Mother: *The waves will wash your breath to me*

Woman 1: *The waves will wash your breath to me*

Mother: *At night, the sea will sigh my messages to you*

Woman 1: *At night, the sea will sigh your messages to me*

I am here ... and he lives on in me

Mother &
Chorus: *Boe blong me. No forgetem nem blong yu.*

*(The little boy appears on the beach – as in the opening scene.
He runs to his mother. It is as if the Woman has brought the
boy home – and reunited him with his mother)*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.37)

The lyrics of the song, coupled with the earlier dialogue of the scene with the stark and emotive staging and visual imagery, all work together to create the central meaning and essence of the play about destruction and restoration. Again, the play operates as its own agent of emancipation and its own venue of healing and catharsis for the participants and their communities. The little boy, in actuality, was never returned to his mother as we are well aware, but the strong metaphoric, emotive and symbolic imagery of the scene suggest and imply that the ‘home-coming’ returns what was lost to these people; their names are restored, their families are re-united, their connection to their culture, land and communities are re-discovered and their sense of belonging is revealed and re-affirmed. Through this, the play becomes the kind of ‘labour’ that Kupperts (2007) envisages where the participants, the audience, the creators and the community, are all changed in some way. The play is the change being enacted, healing rituals being performed, remembrances being celebrated and identities and feelings of belonging, community and kinship being affirmed.

Language

As with all of the Fordes' plays, language is of penultimate interest for them *Behind the Cane* is arguably their most explicit exploration and depiction of a unique way of speaking, talking and telling that is authentic to a specific cultural group and was quite different to their own idiom. For the Fordes, and in the case of *Behind the Cane* in particular, the use of authentic language that is verbatim, does not just serve to make explicit the reality agency by which the stories arrived. Nor does it simply act as a conduit by which to accurately and honestly represent a specific displaced people but indeed, it also serves to help create the 'world' of the production, giving it context and meaning. The use of authentic language literally creates the entire habitat of the performance, the space, time and culture of the group. The theme of 'belonging' is very strongly linked to the way in which language forms the text and dialogue of *Behind the Cane* in that through the use of the participant's authentic language and unique ways of speaking, talking and telling, the play is given a discernible sense of belonging or ownership to the participants and to the community which it is about. The audience is drawn in to a new idiom, a new perspective and a dynamic relationship of loss, despair, joy and love.

I noted in Downes, (2008) theatrical work that had a strong community-centric impetus or aesthetic or work that was most attractive interest to specific communities or groups, was essentially defined by a its language structure and use. The play that is most attractive to a community audience or dictated by its community aesthetic, is the play that uses the speech, voices and languages of the members of that community. Plays that contain the idioms, maxims, images, jargon, slang, ideology and other discourse of the community groups they pertain to, tend to be the strongest (and most popular) examples of community-centric playwriting in Queensland.

In *Behind the Cane*, this is achieved expediently by mirroring the participant's verbatim testimony, mirroring and recreating their mode of speaking, talking and telling and the way they use language;

And old Bob Moses. You know Bob Moses Creek out here? It's named it after him. He used to do a lot of fishin'. He's buried just up the road here ... but there's no headstone on there, eh.

And my friend Jimmy Dream Moss. Yeah. I used to go and have a bit of a talk to him before I'd go to school. And I went over there this mornin' ... and old Mossy was sittin' there ... on the ground. And I said ... "G'day Mossy!" And he never answered or nothin'. And I'm lookin'. So I called the old Bob Moses - and I said "Old Mossy's dead!" And he come over then ... and I took off. Ran away to school. (Pause) At big lunch, my mate Reggie - he had a crab sandwich. And I couldn't eat that crab sandwich. Yeah, I couldn't eat the crab sandwich, eh.

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p.22)

While for a modern white, metropolitan Australian English speaker, this passage may be somewhat difficult to comprehend, it is easy on the ear of the community it hails from. The dialogue is both understandable and instantly recognizable. Even for the uninitiated reader or listener, the feature of authentic participant community/cultural specific language being used to tell a story and relate experience in a way that is emotionally and conceptually truthful, is evident.

Further inclusion of particular language of the communities to which *Behind the Cane* pertains is explored through the inclusion of native languages (other than English) in the text. These South Sea Islander languages form an integral part in adding cultural context to the performance and seek to further give the work its sense of time and of place. Many of the instances of including these native languages as well as the pidgin dialects commonly used by the participants in their own story-telling narratives, are incorporated into the song pieces of the play. In this "The Mothers Song" the native language is used to create a realistic portrayal

of the character and her experience as well as to link her sung dialogue (in English) to a chorus singing the equivalent dialogue in the native language;

Chorus: *Bae wan smol win i karem*
Mother: The waves will wash your breath to me
Chorus: *Bae ol wev oli tok tok smol*
Mother: *At night, the sea will sigh my messages to you*
Chorus: *Wan mesej blong mi – igo long yu*
Mother: *My son, I won't forget your name*
Chorus: *Boe blong mi – no forgetem nem blong yu*

(Forde & Forde, 2011, p. 8)

Language is used in this song serves a number of narrative and structural purposes. It creates a link between the 'past' of the play's time and the 'present,' and serves to create a realistic impression of the character, her experiences and situation. Combining the native language with English not only highlights the beauty and complexity of the native language but makes the text understandable to a non-initiated audience. To an initiated audience however, the language also serves a kind of cultural capital establishing a point of cultural connection with the story.

The Fordes have a commitment to ensuring the language of the participants they work with are given privilege in the play writing – the authentic language is everything to them as it gives the text relevance, power, connectivity and rawness. It serves a purpose of making the text culturally and communally more truthful and appealing to the audience, most of whom are members of a culture or specific group. It helps to create the world of the play, to represent the participants fully; honouring their way of speaking and of telling their stories.

Language use helps enrich and solidify notions of communality, cultural belonging and identity both personal and communal and it serves as important cultural and communal markers.

Reflections on *Behind the Cane*

Behind the Cane premiered at the Sound Shell Stage in July 2011. During its short run, there was an estimated audience turn out for the run of approximately six thousand. The immense audience attendance and overwhelming support should speak to the success and viability of this show. *Behind the Cane* is arguably the most dialogic and community theatre (in line with Erven's 2000 definition) of all of the Fordes' recent plays. In 2012, it was nominated for an Australian Writers Guild Industry Excellence (AWGIE) Award. While it did not finally win the award, it was highly commended and praised by creative and theatre industry professionals for its innovation and cultural and community outreach. It was a powerful and moving testimony to those who forged the way, under appalling circumstances, for the South Pacific Island communities that now punctuate the North Queensland region. It was a story that needed to be told and a story that Michael and Margery Forde view as one of their finest pieces of performance ethnographic work.

The next chapter, "Going Skating on Sandgate Road" explores the Fordes' theatrical process in the writing and producing of the play of the same name. A performance ethnographic collaboration between them, the Australian Catholic University in Queensland and a Seniors' community centre "The Great Age Centre," the play is comprised of the oral histories and testimonies of seventeen 'elders' from the Brisbane northside suburb of Nundah. This chapter differs from the former, in that *Skating on Sandgate Road* allowed a direct and focused research lens on the way the Fordes worked over a period of three months. For this

reason, this is an important chapter for this thesis. It provides a first- hand analysis at the way the Fordes approach community narrative writing and how they unpack the process with those involved in both the story gathering and the subsequent acting out of the stories on stage.

I was able to follow this project from its inception, to the interviews with participants, through data transcription and weeks of laborious writing. I was able to observe and analyse the way the Fordes brought the play literally from life, to page, to stage. Through field notes and extensive interviews with them, this chapter unravels the story of *Skating on Sandgate Road*, the mode through which the stories were collected, how the script was formed and how it became a stellar hugely successful community performance. It will include extensive testimony from the Fordes to give a clear and comprehensive overview of their particular ‘method’ of working, as well as garner their impressions, philosophies and experiences of working on the community narrative of *Skating on Sandgate Road*.

From life to Page to Stage

Going Skating on Sandgate Road

“Nundah has always been our place”

{Scene opens on a bright sunny day in Brisbane Queensland, in the early autumn of 2009. Three people sit at a table in a busy café area sipping cups of coffee and sharing sandwiches. BRENT has been talking to MICHAEL FORDE about the process by which actors can assimilate experiences and emotions that are not real and make them real. MARGERY FORDE joins in the conversation}

BRENT: You were talking about assuming a role, you assume the role of a director of a teacher. Is it an act? This thing you are doing? How much of it is an act how much is authentic?

MICHAEL: We hope its authentic. You have to, you have to {pause} be as authentic as possible. Because. Because Human Beings are so good at picking up lies or disinterest or feigned interest.

MARGERY: Feigned interest, yes.

MICHAEL: Faked interest, yes. And I guess if there is any acting is that you have to really motivate yourself and its sort of true acting, you know? You have to motivate yourself into real interest into whatever the topic is.

MARGERY: But then it becomes genuine, it always becomes genuine. It always starts that we're doing this, an interview, we're asking people about their lives we don't always believe that's it going to become intimate but it always becomes interesting, it always does, there's never anything I never have to feign interest in what people are telling me, I never have to.

BRENT: Did you find that coming into this, you thought there was anything you would have to do? Before you started what did you think you would have to do? Did you think you would have to feign interest because you were worried about how people might perceive you?

MARGERY: When Tracey said this aspect of what we were doing, where we going out and talking to people , I'm always thrilled with that. Whenever anyone asks us to do anything that involves gathering real stories I feel really excited. Because I know it's something I really enjoy and I love writing .

(Interview 1, April 3, 2009. Lines 1-31)

This chapter begins the analysis of the Fordes' work in two ways. Firstly the process of *Skating on Sandgate Road* is traced through the theatrical journey that I documented over three months. The Fordes' approach is unpacked through data collected through structured interviews and informal discussions with them and through ongoing field observations. This is also achieved by sectioning the discussion into various focus points that allow a more comprehensive understanding of the process. Second, my personal research journey is captured through a more intimate ethnographic 'lens' using my own observational notes and analytic memos that give breadth and depth to the case study. This provides a more personal narrative that complements that provided by Margery and Michael Forde.

In the sleepy Northside Brisbane suburb of Nundah, just across from the train line is *The Great Age Centre*, a rare institution serving a very important purpose. It is a community centre particularly designed for the older members of the community but it is not part of a respite community or nursing home. It is a social centre catering to elders of the district of Nundah, many of whom have lived in the area for their whole lives. It is a hub that provides a place where they can meet, socialize, play card games, bingo or pool, take aerobics classes, go shopping, do arts and crafts, dance, attend prayer and worship sessions or just chat. *The Great Age Centre*, as Manager Doug describes it, was formed when, 'There was an awareness that young people could go to the beach but the older people didn't have much. It was for the older people.' (Interview 1, September, 2009. Lines 87-89). It was Doug who approached the State Government for an *Oral Histories Project Grant* with a hope they could do something that highlighted the history of the seniors who used the centre. He didn't want 'a grey tome to sit on the shelf' (Interview 1, September 14, 2009. Line 27) but instead "a natural look [at the life and times of the people] and [an acknowledgement that;] that there is lots and lots of history that's oral -in their minds." (Interview 1, September, 2009. Lines 5-6)

Doug stressed ‘I wanted to do more than a research project, it becomes dry, it wouldn’t be a terribly exciting product.’ (Interview. July 19, 2009. Lines 15-16) He wanted something dynamic, something alive and he wanted to involve younger people. When the centre received the funding it needed, Doug wrote to some of the universities and larger high schools in Brisbane about doing some kind of project that would gather the stories of the patrons of *The Great Age Centre* and offer something that had a living energy and could affirm and celebrate older people in a way that a historical or archival project couldn’t. He found a willing university lecturer Dr. Tracey Sanders who knew Marge and Mike Forde and loved their community theatre and performance ethnography. “The project” which would come to be known as the play *Skating on Sandgate Road* involved a class of ‘Australian Drama’ students working in collaboration with the Fordes to collect the oral histories of seventeen elders who were patrons of *The Great Age Centre*. From these stories, the Fordes would write a play which would be performed by the students at the centre, the very space where the stories were first told, and to an audience of people whose stories formed it, their families, friends and the wider community.

Beginnings – Finding Meaning in a Brick Building in Nundah

It began one grey morning in 2009. Gathered in a small room, a willing group of ethnographers, playwrights, students and their drama lecturer crammed around each other ready to embark on a very special and unique journey. Whilst the students are not given specific focus in this case study as such, they are an integral part of the process as they were the actors that would bring the Fordes’ play to life;

“Are you taking notes?” Tracey whispers and gestures for me to go to the desk and sit in the back of the drama studio. I set out my papers, feeling strange to be on this end of the events in the small, dark drama studio, about two years ago I sat where the students do now in “Australian drama”. I look around and notice that there are at least double the numbers of female students to male students. Margery and Michael are calm, enthusiastic, obviously excited to meet the students, Tracey addresses both of the groups familiarly.

Michael begins to reiterate what their feelings on the project so far are, he quips “We don’t know what is going to happen”. Margery and Michael allow the students (some of whom haven’t arrived yet) to ask any questions about them they like. This is how the Fordes begin, allowing themselves to open to the stories unfolding in the community. The words ‘We don’t know what is going to happen’ is typically Fordesque as many times they simply let the process reveal itself before they embark on the harder ‘stuff’, the writing, the forming, the acting and the performance.

Margery describes that much of their work, Snapshots from home, Way out west and Cribbie are developed from interacting with people and bringing their stories to the stage. She also talks about how X-Stacy was developed from her observations of underground rave clubs. She tells the students: “What’s really important is that everything you write has its own tribal language”. “Writing, you find that there (people talk) are different lexicons.” It’s clear that Margery is intensely interested in using different voices and languages and that it is the dialogue that privileges the work. She talks about the current project and tells the students “We will be using the language for what we’re writing”.

(From Field Log 1, March 2009. Lines 1-29)

Margery Forde’s comment on the use of participant language was to be the all important ‘bonding’ element for the process of the work. For the performance ethnographer, understanding, recording, documenting, translating and then relaying language, is key to the process by which performance ethnography happens. As Pelias (2007) notes, ‘performance ethnography relies on the embodiment of cultural others’ and practitioners ‘strive to represent their cultural findings through the enactment of cultural others’. (p.1) Ideas of embodiment and enactment are at the core of the aesthetic behind the Fordes’ ethnographic and theatrical practice, because in their words, ‘you have to be as authentic as possible.’ (Interview 1, February 2009. Line 4). Peacock (1986) reminds us that ‘to comprehend meaning, one must see the world as others see it, [in order] to experience the other’s frame of reference’. (p.99) Similarly, Donelan (2005) explains that ‘for ethnographers, the meaning of human activities and events are embedded in their social and cultural context’. (p.19) Human beings create and understand their universe through language and the performance ethnographer needs to clearly understand this. In other words, ethnographers must come to an understanding of the

language of ‘the other’ in order to understand how that other shapes, contextualises and realises their existence. This is well illustrated in the following words of Margery Forde during one of the early preparation sessions of the workshop process for *Skating on Sandgate Road*;

A voice pipes up “What is the favourite of your plays?” Margery thinks for a moment and holds up “Snapshots from Home” she talks about the experience of being able to write people’s life experiences. She says that she loves to hear people tell their stories and finds that people tell the most amazing stories conversationally and without meaning to. She tells the student actors that it is really amazing to listen to other people speak and she loves the way that they speak about their lives. And this is what they will be doing – making meaning in a place owned by an elderly group of people who may not have had their stories heard for some time. It would be the language of stories that would drive the play.

(Field Log 1, April 2009. Lines 32-38)

In theatre, language is also central to how meaning is established and verified. Language is one of the central elements of drama since it is inextricably linked with the notion of human behaviours and experiences which dramatic form seeks to represent. Donelan (2005) earlier reminded us that ‘a participant in drama and an ethnographic researcher can be regarded as sharing a common state of mind’. (p. 78). From the very beginning of the process in *Skating on Sandgate Road*, Margery Forde strove to elicit an understanding in the student actors about the language of ‘the other,’ to encourage them to share a common state of mind with herself and Michael and also with the elders. Margery Forde stressed to the students that the material for the play would be derived directly from the authentic language of the participants and that the stories they would tell would inform the performance ‘telling’ of those stories. She stressed that it would be ‘within’ the language that they would find the aesthetic materials for their theatrical product.

For Margery Forde, this is central to how drama operates. As noted earlier, she believes that ‘everything you write has its own tribal language’. This idea of a “tribal language” is deeply connected to the notion of particular social and cultural discourses that are uncovered by ethnographers. The challenge for the Fordes as playwrights, is how to best capture, gather and then reinterpret the language of stories in a way that is authentic but still entertaining to the audience and authentically represents the point of view of the participants. As Donelan (2005) observes,

Ethnography, like drama is based on a capacity to identify with another’s point of view; just as participants in drama draw on empathy and imagination to identify with the roles of the characters, so ethnographers try to empathise with the perspectives and experiences of those they study (p.77)

For the Fordes, the line between ethnographer and dramatist is blurred as the synergy of being immersed in the participant’s reality and the artistry of drama, is a very unique kind of theatre execution;

MICHAEL: As you know we’re really stuck on this thing about gathering stories from people and researching and finding things out from “out there” {gestures to the space around him}. That’s ‘our bag’ rather than being this writer that writes from in here. {gestures towards himself}

(Interview 2, February 2009. Lines 121-224)

Michael Forde reflected, ‘The natural poetry people use is really extraordinary. We have never met someone without a story’. (Field notes 1, Lines 136-137). The “natural poetry” he is talking about is akin to Richardson’s (2005) description of cultural poetry. Michael Forde finds that this kind of poetry uncovers itself through dialogue which naturally aligns with Lynn’s (2008) descriptions of culture as, ‘a flowing stream of meaning, dialogue that may be understood as expression, as event, as experience, as learning, or as a way of being. (p. 13)

What became clear through these early discussions with the Fordes is that it is through the natural exchanges of dialogue, they find “poetry” that becomes a story; a theatrical work. But it was also clear that there were anxieties that the language would be blocked by awkwardness, by distrust, by malaise or by a generation gap too big to bridge;

{Later the trio is reflecting on the interviews, they are joined by TRACEY and the discussion continues about finding the voices of the older people from “The Great Age Centre”}

TRACEY: I was quite worried at first, I thought we might have some resistance, when you look at the show ‘Grumpy old men’ and ‘Grumpy old women’ on the TV I thought well maybe they’ll be resistant like them. Maybe life will have become boring and staid. Because they’re afraid and they can’t be bothered. But in fact they wrote the play for us, didn’t they?

MARGERY: Well, Brent just brought up a really interesting thing that Mike was just saying we tried in one of the drafts to put the student voice in more often and have the student saying things and we tried that and it really didn’t work. Because it is the voice of the elders that is important. And we’ve put at the beginning of the play what Joel said in class, he says “I don’t know where to start” and then the elder said “ask me where I was born” which is exactly what happened.

BRENT: That’s authentic to what happened in the interview.

TRACEY: It did! It’s exactly what happened. Naturally.

(Interview 1, April 2009. Lines 290-303)

Tracey found, as did the Fordes, that the stories came tumbling out so profusely, it was hard to keep up. The student actors, initially scared that ‘nothing’ would happen, began to understand that the stories were there for the taking if they only listened. This capturing of stories was the initial driving force behind this project and watching the way the Fordes gathered them was intriguing. In an analytic memo, I mused on this point, noting the enormous power of the stories and the almost overwhelming ‘spilling’ of data that the elders provided. I include it here to exemplify the way I was stuck by the wisdom of the participants and the way I, as researcher, was moved by what I was hearing;

*So many days,
years worth of them,
stacked end to end like books on a shelf
their thick spines covered with the ageless dust
of innumerable moments remembered, unremembered,
lost & found.*

*They stand speechless from their speaking,
dumbstruck from their knowing,
their voices speak volumes
contained here in the page,
captured so it may be set free
to soar beyond the golden gates of eternity.*

*Ah,
so many days
years worth of them
spoken
so willingly by grey hairs & wrinkled faces
such is the rhythm, the beat, the callback, the response, the voice, the verve, the
mirror,
the rolling stone,
the everything of everything.*

(Analytic Memo in Poetry, March 2009)

I identified that the Fordes' writing is a complexity of keen listening and extracting the 'natural poetry' from the stories told to them whilst employing some poetic license of extrapolating, embellishing and adding extra detail where needed. They attribute much of this intuition to their feelings that people/participants are indeed their own storytellers;

For us the secrets do exist out there in the world, in the words, stories and histories of people. They are there if we just listen openly and with some humility. And be ready for the explosion. It's to do with listening and putting yourself aside, putting aside your own biases... and trying to listen honestly to their stories. Trying to come to the truth of what it means to be human through listening for the effortless poetry in people's stories. Are we our stories do you think? Do we construct the story of our life as we go along. Is this one of the major ways we make meaning?

(The Fordes' Reflective Memo Lines. April 2009. 41-49 & 55-56)

Most importantly, it is empowering the participants to tell the stories in their own way that gives the final performance the empathic connective power so important in community narratives.

Talking, Telling, Performing Stories

The Fordes clearly advocate a process (Focus Question 2) that allows participants and collaborators to speak to each other insisting on constant dialogue between the writers, the actors and the participants. As Donelan (2005) earlier explained, dramatists and ethnographers share a similar mindset. They believe that in the paradigm of a dialogic theatre practice, social barriers can be actively critiqued and dismantled by participants through the talking, telling and story-sharing process. They spoke about *Skating on Sandgate Road* and the breaking down of conversational barriers;

BRENT: Do you think you knocked down the generation barrier a bit, or contributed to it?

MARGERY: Between?

BRENT: Between the elders and the students?

MARGERY: I'm not sure about that. I mean some of those students came in and there was no generation barrier. Like Karina with Yulienka and Yegor, she just goes "G'day!" I think it's a personality thing. And, you know, young Marco who's not with us anymore?

BRENT: I'm not sure.

MARGERY: He was lovely. He just goes, you know, "oh good on you mate. "Some of them just sort of completely forgot, there was no generation barrier

MICHAEL: The gap's only there because of access really isn't it. It's because their worlds don't intersect too much, unless you're got a grandparent or something like that you know.

BRENT: There are misconceptions on both sides as well.

MICHAEL: Yes, that's right. But it just becomes person and person.

MARGERY: And there were things that surprised me, like Rachel. Someone was talking about, oh that story about he had to ask my father for my hand..... And I said that's so lovely and old fashioned. And she said well I'd expect whoever I was marrying to ask my father for my hand. And I was really surprised that a lot of the things that I thought were generational actually weren't. You know, a lot of values remain the same. That surprised me.

BRENT: A lot of mores like that are passed down generationally anyway. I think the idea, especially asking somebody's father for somebody's marriage, is generationally passed down...

MARGERY : I think they did, I think they got a sense, a lot of them, of being in the shoes of an elderly person and what that felt like.

BRENT: Doug used the word understanding their 'psyche'.

MARGERY : Oh absolutely.

MICHAEL: Yes, well that's what at least happened. They literally were standing in their shoes...

MARGERY: Friedrik was just, you know, Friedrik is playing Boris. And when he, you know, as he was coming down off the stage and Boris went over and hugged him, It was just like these two souls together. And Karina had that experience too with...

MICHAEL : And the way it was written too, we gave them their lives.

MARGERY: And they'd been there at the morning teas and they've got the transcripts. And they sort of understood it on a very deep level all the way through.

BRENT: I told Doug this, and he confirmed it as well, that the students really took an ownership of the elders.

MARGERY: They did.

BRENT: All you had to do was listen to them for ten minutes and they would refer to them as their elder, your elder, my elder, our elder. And there was all those personal pronouns used. This is my elder, your elder, our elder.

MICHAEL: And they always, I thought, because we hadn't done this before and that we might have trouble getting some sense of respect...

MARGERY :Not at all.

MICHAEL: No, not respect for the elders, respect for the story.

MARGERY: That was never ever...

MICHAEL : No, never a problem. They got that really well. Almost from the word go, you know...

MARGERY : And none of us expected just how much it would come to mean to the students. It always surprises me the effect that it actually has when it happens, and who knows what will happen but when you seem real communication happening, that's a very special thing

MICHAEL : The effect of the performance.

MARGERY: And who knows, and this whole experience, like you were saying you can't prove anything. But who knows what effect that would have on those students and the elders, that none of us know about.

BRENT: Yeah, it's impossible to prove or measure...

MARGERY : You can't articulate that, no.

(Interview 2, April 2009. Lines 778- 855)

Their work is best described, as a complexity of *talking* and *telling*. My research found that they conceptualize theatre as a venue that is governed by human beings inclination to tell stories and to talk to each other. (Focus Question 3) Theatre acts as an important portal for communication and dialogue. The fact that their work arrives through the agency of people talking and telling their stories, gives further emphasis to a manifestation of their theatrical product as deeply communicative. Further to this, is the premise that theatre is a place where stories and voices can be heard and applied in an open and egalitarian way rather like that the idea of Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed' where the oppressed could be empowered through dramatic action. (in Kuppers & Robertson 2007) There is an invitation to dialogue in an organic and ever changing way. The following interview brings this point together;

BRENT: What was it like being the mediators of a discussion, a dialogue between people of such extreme age differences? You had seniors in their eighties, some nineties...

MICHAEL: I think it was a lot easier than I thought it would be. You know, when we first went in we thought this would be a major problem. We thought this would be something that we would have to really work at, but in fact it wasn't.

MARGERY: We actually did ... we were very clear in the beginning, we went through this whole discussion about we'll stay out of it, we'll just let them do it. Because if we don't stay out of it's, you know, it has to be their questions and we're just going to sit

back and... we weren't even going to be there. You know, it was just going to be the students...

MICHAEL: That's right.

MARGERY : And then it was going to be us wandering around. And then finally I think we have to be there and this was an incredible sense of relief when we made that decision. An incredible sense of relief that we knew that no matter what happens with the questions.

MICHAEL: We could have given them a bit more space (unclear) but we didn't.

MARGERY: But the students actually asked some really good questions. When they did ask the questions they really wanted to know the answer, so it wasn't just token.

MICHAEL: But many of them related really well to the elders, didn't they?

MARGERY: There was a wonderful discussion between Marco and Sveta. Right at the end of one of the interviews. And I don't know how we get it into the play, but it was Matt and Sveta talking about how she does ceramic paintings. And then Matt said 'oh did you see what they found in the temple at Luxor, they found ochre on the walls where they started and they were going to do hieroglyphics?' And then it was all about how long things last and, you know, some things last forever. And if, you know, in thousands of years time you'll find sharks at your place. It was the most beautiful thing, this lovely metaphorical thing they had between Sveta and Marco. And I don't know how we put it in but at times we were just there, not having to worry about doing too much facilitating.

(Interview 1, March 2009, Lines 255-299)

Situated at the heart of the Fordes' playwriting aesthetic and method is an ideal/idea of their finished 'product.' Notions of product and of process are inextricably linked and blur into one another. This relationship between the *aesthetics of process* and the *aesthetics of product* is something that I uncovered in an interview;

BRENT: So is the product is the play or the product is the performance? Can you tell me about the whole process and how it relates to the product? Which is more important, how do they relate. So I'm asking about from your initial involvement, the interviews and the whole workshopping process to finally putting it on. And the product is the written play.

MARGERY: It's always working towards the project.

MICHAEL: Yeah, it is. The process is really important and the process has to be right. The actors have to be in the right head space, you know. Like they need to consider it, otherwise the product won't be any good.

MARGERY: But a lot of people say I love rehearsals and I love the process but then I lose interest.

BRENT: Did it take you a while to find the right head space? Or did you sort of come in and you were there and...

MICHAEL: Well there was that sort of initial teething phase.

BRENT: I guess what I'm asking is how long did it take you to find your feet? Did you walk in on stable ground or were you unsure?

MARGERY: I think we felt, you know, in those initial weeks when we were doing drama exercises and because we were writing the play and we were just longing to get into it but the play wasn't there. And so there was sort of a frustration I think. I loved it because you were doing some wonderful drama stuff with them. But there was always that feeling of, you know, we're here to actually do this play and there was quite a lot of lead-up time before we actually had a play to do what we were here to do.

MICHAEL: But what we were learning in that was what the student actors could do too. You know, they were given improvisations from the transcripts and things like that. So, you know, it was part of a learning experience.

MARGERY: That's right, they started doing that pretty early on.

BRENT: So it was a symbiotic relationship, you were testing their limits and they were testing...

MARGERY: That's true. Yeah, we were giving them little scenes to do and encouraging them to ask questions and pose things of their own.

MICHAEL: I mean that was good. And, yeah, we were learning about each other. But yes, I think that we are, because we're theatre makers we are directed towards the product. We want the product...

BRENT: That's the goal.

MICHAEL: Yes, and we want that product to be as good as it can be.

BRENT: And you want it to reflect the process, reflect the project?

MICHAEL: Well yeah, be true. Be absolutely true to the whole project and the people we've interviewed and all of that.

MARGERY: But finally...

MICHAEL: But the product is really based on having a really, as sound a process as you can have, isn't it.

MARGERY: But I always said, you know, when something like that goes on and everything goes beautifully and you just think, you look back to where it came from and it's, you know, the blood, sweat and tears and all of that. And you can't see it, otherwise it hasn't worked. What you've got to see is something where the audience just get totally lost in it and you can't see the work. Otherwise it's failed.

(Interview 2, April 2009. Lines 1208- 1257)

Instead of approaching their art as 'experts', they see it instead as a collaborative and communal 'learning' process. This crystallizes into the final product. The 'learning' that they undertake with their collaborators and participants is akin to Kuppers (2007) description of *reimagining*, as they actively engage in reshaping, reimagining and reliving the worlds of the participant and their own worlds. What their method is indicative of is an aesthetic of 'no certainty' and 'no assurances.' They often assert that they neither know (or can expect) what they will encounter in their dialogue, what the product will look, feel and sound like, and what overarching themes and points of connection, embodiment and empathy will become explicit.

In *Skating on Sandgate Road*, part of this process was interacting with the student actors as well as the elder participants. They had already had extensive experience from working with aged participants in *Snapshots from home* but working with university students was a new venture for them and expanded on their experiences of collaboration. Collaboration is the central component of their playwriting aesthetic and without the willingness of participants to share their stories and the willingness of collaborators (in this case. actors) to be more than complicit with the stories, the product, the final goal, comes to naught.

This is the central element that can be described as *viability*. Aesthetically and artistically, viable theatre product is more than just entertainment for the Fordes but is *an active, living*

reflection of the active and living process of theatre making: a complexity of storytelling that needs to be authentic. In a captivating piece of dialogue, Michael reiterated the enormity of the balancing act that exists between authenticity and artistry and the overwhelming scope of the *Skating on Sandgate Road* experience;

As the session concludes it will be the last time the group is in this space, from next week, the ensemble moves to "The Great Age Centre" where the staging will happen and the process moves into production mode and the theatre is 'bumped in' to the space. Michael shares his thoughts with the students. "Your line is someone's whole life, their relationship with their children, it's in your hands. There's a point of interest that you are young people are telling these stories. You know that time that Marge was crying? Well, she was crying because you, because it was you telling the stories: young people telling the stories of these old people. It wouldn't work with older actors, it's for you, it's for younger people.

Younger people telling the stories of these older people and it just rips us apart. When people come to see our plays they don't think Margery and Michael, they think about you, the actors and it's as if you have heard these stories and you have such respect for them; you're living them. I want to throw it to you now, I want you to feel the play, I'm not going to say a thing. You have gone to a full run in less than a week. A new play, a new play with changes happening around you and you manage to stagger through a run and I think it's bloody brilliant. It's an enormous headspace for you guys, enormous. Your posture is you're dying to get on stage, we're telling this story and it's your turn and you're going to kick arse! You can't laugh and enjoy the play for yourselves, you are the crew and the captains, you have to take charge and guide it. Grab the focus and take it. It's yours! "

(Field Log, March 2009. Lines 53-71)

Gathering Community Tales

Reflecting back on their work, the notion of gathering the 'tales' from the community is always foremost and the process of the Fordes' work. Discussions with them confirmed this observation. For them, it *must* be an evolving process for all concerned. The plays are never made in a vacuum. At all times, the community must share the ownership of the final product. In essence, they see themselves as gatherers and nurturers of the stories who shape the theatrical product for the stage. They told me a year after collecting the elders' stories,

‘this is just what we do now, we go and gather the stories’. (Interview 4, October 2009, Lines 34-36).

These ethnographic style plays, driven by storytelling and derived from real people, experiences and languages, are the only work that the Fordes are now interested in creating. They, the artist storytellers, have become the gatherers and the nurturers of community stories steeped in history, tradition and glorious life. The artistry has become a shared experience. For them, there are two distinct goals at work when they approach a project such as *Skating on Sandgate Road*. The first is to uncover the untold stories that lay within the normal and everyday lives, the natural poetry and untold histories. The second is to discover the points of connection that are revealed when more universal (their emphasis) and existential themes reveal themselves which then can strengthen the connections between people regardless of age, culture or background. For them, this is the pinnacle achievement of any theatrical or literary piece and it is something they strive to do consistently in their work.

The boundary between fact and fiction is blurred and the venue of theatre becomes akin to Erven’s (2000) visualisation as ‘an important device for communities to collectively share stories, to participate in political dialogue, and to break down the increasing exclusion of marginalized groups’. (p.2) Much more than this aspect of community, is the discovery of elements of ‘community’ in the human experience uncovered by and through their ethno-drama style as it unfolds. During the interviews with the elders, I realised however that there was much more at work than just notions of community and something much deeper and almost spiritual process was taking place. I noted in a workshop session shortly after the first interviews;

Tracey selects a small group of students to go through a scene that Margery has written. Margery reads from the transcript which inspired the mini-drama she has

created. Michael reads through the technical, lighting and stage directions as the students play out the scene. They are deeply moved by the work. They are almost stunned silent by the power of the words, the depth of the characterisation of real people they have met and shared lunch with. Afterwards the students are quite impressed with this, one saying, "I can envisage it, it's kind of surreal". Another says "I'm amazed you've got that already!" Michael talks about how linguistic trends in modern speech are evidence of "people becoming their own playwrights." The actors huddled in the studio talk amongst themselves about the work. They are connected and immersed in the form.

(Field Log 2, March 2009. Lines 96-104)

This exchange helped the students to crystallize the notion of the participants' stories becoming both the structure and the filling for the theatrical product they were going to be producing. For the students, even these small snippets which were mostly verbatim and unstructured, sounded and felt like theatrical dialogue. Once they began to work inside the script, with the words, the characters were animated and enlivened.

At one of the interviews, I asked the Fordes what was happening whilst they gathered the stories from the community and what kind of art they thought they were really creating;

MICHAEL: I think there's something really great about the specificity [of the play] when you do say "Sandgate Road", you place it in a very specific place. Somehow, sort of, for me, those stories that have that specific placement, you sort of allow the universal to come out of it, you know?

MARGERY: I love that quote, that Willie Russell quote that 'If you can write well about your own backyard, you're writing about everybody's backyard. And I think we were just talking about that on the way here, you know. I love Allen Bennet's writing because it's just so grounded in something I know about real working class beginnings. His experiences are very different from mine.

MICHAEL: He's from Yorkshire and all that.

MARGERY: But there's still a universality when you're writing about it.

MICHAEL: He's so specific, you know? His characters are set in that sort of lower middle class Yorkshire place. But you've seen the "Talking Heads"? It's very specific about that part of England, but it's about life and death and relationships.

(Field Log 2, March 2009. Lines 116-140)

In this exchange, the Fordes are beginning to consider how personal and individual stories contain themes and ideas that can appeal to more global audiences. They expound that it is through the specific languages and experience that more universal themes can be expounded. They continue;

MARGERY: I think we're asked a lot of times to write stories that are particularly [about] Queensland. Like we're working on Cribbie at the moment and you couldn't get any more specific than being about a particular place then what we're doing at the moment.

BRENT: And it's certainly the case in 'Sandgate Road'.

MARGERY: Yeah!

BRENT: As Mike just said you can't get more specific than naming a play after this place.

MARGERY: That's right!

MICHAEL: And there's also this thing too where Australians in general and Queenslander's specifically devalue their own experience...

BRENT: Massively so.

MICHAEL: They devalue the fact that their own experiences are universal, are worthwhile, are a way of exploring the universal themes.

BRENT: It's a very difficult thing to find in Australian literature, this sense of 'selfness' that we are here and we are in this place and it's inherently valuable. In European literature, it's extraordinarily common and there are great novels and plays about people who just write about their childhood or their family and there's a problem that it's not so much in Australia.

MARGERY: David Malouf was one of the first to really do that. With Johnno and Edmunstan Street.

MICHAEL: He does that beautiful description of that old Queensland house.

MARGERY: And it was literary and it was about us. But when I was growing up there were no stories about "US" it was all English stories- your identity comes from England

MICHAEL: And then later America. But it's important and valuable that people should know [about themselves] and that's what happens when you go see 'Sandgate Road' and they saw when you put their lives on stage you do sort of rise it into that universal area, don't you? And they get value out of saying well "yes, Our life, Our experience, here in Queensland, in Nundah"

MARGERY: {continues the sentence} In this street.

MICHAEL: Is as valuable as anything else.

BRENT: Yeah, I mean you look at something on the surface that's quite ordinary. I mean you look at people who have lived in the same suburb all their lives in most cases, in a lot of cases. But out of it comes these rich stories and I keep thinking about Marcel Proust, that on the surface it's about this weird kid, but underneath is this really rich tapestry of almost intoxicating proportions.

(Interview 2. June2009. Lines 23-26)

Here, they begin to evaluate their work in the context of personal or specific stories that have far reaching appeal and acclaim, for how they represent larger existential, experiential, emotional or social phenomena and ideas. They begin to discuss their work which is rooted in specificity as having many similarities to similar classic literary works, such as Proust's *In remembrance of time's past*. Ideas of an individual's specific experience or remembering, recollecting and remembering their lives and experiences becomes of paramount interest to them. Similar to Proust and to notions of performance ethnography, their work seeks to elucidate, celebrate and present the embodied experiences of people and participants as it is remembered and retold to them;

MARGERY: {Laughing} I think I should read five pages a day, it's difficult, it's really difficult, "The remembrance of things past" but I love that, that absolute "God of small things".

BRENT: There's such a similarity between 'Sandgate Road' and what Proust is doing, it's almost back breakingly mundane

MARGERY: YEAH!

BRENT: But there's this intoxicating beauty just underneath it.

MARGERY: Absolutely, absolutely!

BRENT: It's fighting to come out. And if you persist with it, it just knocks you completely!

MARGERY: Did you know we're battling that with the Cribb Island project at the moment, you have this real ordinary, working class, no money. They were worm diggers, shell grit diggers and fishermen. And you're just going {emphasises frustration} And then suddenly! You just go "OH!" {exclaims} this is what it's about!

BRENT: There's a huge thing.

MARGERY: It is the ordinariness of it.

MICHAEL: You've got to accept that, you know. You have to accept it for what it is and you can't actually force it to be something else.

MARGERY: But then that's the beauty of it. I so agree with that, it just comes out of writing, it's the detail, you know, the old 'holding the mirror up' thing

(Interview 2, June 2009. Lines 26-107)

As this interview data reveals, what the Fordes were searching for, wasn't only just elements that Erven (2000) would recognise as elements of community theatre, but something much more akin to Alexander's (2008) realisation that performance ethnography is, 'in a literal sense of the aphorism "walking a mile in someone else's" shoes.' (p.77) What they see themselves doing is seeking the revelation that Proust has with the Madeleine in *The way by Swann's* (p.49) where a great surge of memory, a rich tapestry of detail, reveals that the universality and the beauty of human existence, is found in something so small and seemingly every day and mundane.

What they essentially search for, is the underlying meanings and themes which are consistent with the realities experienced by all human beings. Their search for the stories and natural poetry within language is at the same time a search for points of empathic connection and

meaningful communication between people on themes that can be seen as fundamental truths of the human existence. Often these occur in stories that were told in the most ‘off the cuff’ way, often recounting seemingly very mundane events and experiences. This recollects a famous romantic poem by Anna Barbauld which illustrates that divine and sublime truths, can be found in the most ordinary places and from recollecting in the most natural ways;

*At intervals my mother's voice was heard,
Urging dispatch; briskly the work went on,
All hands employed to wash, to rinse, to wring,
To fold, and starch, and clap, and iron, and plait.*

*Then would I sit me down, and ponder much
Why washings were. Sometimes thro' hollow bowl
Of pipe amused we blew, and sent aloft
The floating bubbles, little dreaming then
To see, Mongolfier, thy silken ball
Ride buoyant through the clouds—so near approach
The sports of children and the toils of men.
Earth, air, and sky, and ocean, hath its bubbles,
And verse is one of them—this most of all.*

(Barbauld, 1797, p.452)

Like Proust demonstrates and Barbauld reflects in her poem, Margery and Michael Forde ascertain that both the beauty and revelations about the human experience that exist within art, exist within an attention to the details of specific times, places and events. As an added dimension, the subject matter is exclusively real and they strongly assert that they don't invent or imagine anything that wasn't said by the person they talked to. Instead they look for clues within the dialogue that they form with the person, they seek to find common themes

and search them for the deeper meanings they contain. This process proved uncomplicated in the *Skating on Sandgate Road* project as the participants told their stories with little prompting from the Fordes or the students. As Schweitzer (2006) realised and as the Fordes keenly pointed out, most of the stories were told in a kind of auto-narrative with dialogue as the main instrument through which the participant communicated. I observed this first hand;

Freda recounts long distance train trips, bus trips, her anxiety about “going underground” in Coober Pedy and her first glance of snow. “I said ;“It’s white! And cold! What is it? It’s snow?!” It is with this kind of anecdotal and conversational based storytelling that Freda discourses her travel experiences. This reminds me of a statement Michael made in discussion with the students of “people becoming their own playwrights” through this kind of “telling” language which directly recounts speeches or parts of speech as they occurred from the participant’s point of view. Freda is particularly indicative of this anecdotal and conversational kind of storytelling, using “snapshots” and “parts of speech” to tell her story.

(Field Log, February 2009. Lines 375-383)

I argue that this kind of narrative gives an almost rhythmic script for the Fordes to work with. The language is extraordinarily similar to poetry and translates well to theatrical form with little extrapolation or changing. I continued to notice other examples of this kind of auto-narrative with Freda;

Prompted by Tracey and Margery, the participant begins to tell of her life at school and as a child. Freda talks extensively about Brisbane now and contrasts it to her past, all the stories she tells of school, friends, nicknames, her house and the development of the local area are all told in her anecdotal, conversational style, with small “snapshots”, “snippets” and parts of speeches forming the basis of her narrative.

(Field Log, February 2009. Lines 417-421)

I reflected,

One thing remains with me about this interview, is how indicative it was of the kind of “self-writing” that Michael told the students about, through anecdotes, conversations, parts of speeches, snapshots of larger stories, Freda offered glimpses of her life which she had shaped into her own dramatic narrative. The power and the poetry of the words are already there. She is writing the play about herself!

(Field Log, February 2009. Lines 428-431)

The way that the participants told their stories offered the Fordes an insight into the experiences of their lives which would later serve as the action of the play. I argue that understanding both these facets is key to performance ethnography and applied theatre and crucial to the work of the Fordes who are interested in both presenting real life stories on stage but also uncovering the universal experiences of human beings. It is crucial to understand at a deep level the culture/group you are ‘performing’ and representing through dramatic action. Without this, the performance lacks authenticity and an organic foundation.

What becomes evident is that the key elements in the stories that are told by the participants are also the same key elements that exist in any form of theatre. Characters, moods, tensions, relationships and symbols, all exist within the participants’ narratives and these form the core of the theatrical experience. Informal conversations with the participants over cups of tea also revealed much about their lives. Often the participant would become acutely aware of the stories they were sharing and their stake in the work was paramount;

One of the students asks about the participant’s hardships. She talks about the building of her house as well as her husband passing away, she jokes, surprised at her own frankness “The secrets are tumbling out of me!” and everyone laughs more. She seemed surprised by her own candour.

(Field Log, February 2009. Lines 147-149)

Stella similarly quipped ‘I talk a penny off an iron pot!’ (Field Log, February 2009. Line 277).

By the end of the first day I noted some of the similar comments of the last participant;

It is now late in the afternoon and Yetta is getting ready to leave saying “Sorry to be talking so much, it’s nice to be talking without other people being bored”, the others in the group assure Yetta that she hasn’t bored them as she leaves.

She departs with a comment that I feel describes the main theme and also my interpretation as an outside observer of all of the conversations of the first day.

“It’s surprising what comes out.”

(Field Log, February 2009. Lines 588-594)

It is in this unconscious, self revelatory and revealing dialogue that the Fordes find most beguiling as ethnographer/playwrights. It is the surprisingly ‘ordinary’ which sometimes give the richest, most engaging of theatre scripts. One of the participants, Sveta, was especially conversational with Margery and Michael and often made reference to the interview situation that she was in;

She laughs and points to the recorder and exclaims “All this is going to be repeated!” From this point, she talks unashamedly about social mores of her era concerning men and women going out and sex. She reveals herself again to be quite outspoken and unashamed of her colourful personality. She seems to thrive on the ‘telling’.

(Field Log. March 2009. Lines 622-625)

She seemed to savour the fact that her story would be told to hundreds of other people and her stream of consciousness, even when sometimes shocking, was given free reign by the Fordes with a respectful honouring that the story was hers and hers alone.

“The Secrets are Tumbling out of Me”: Capturing Memories

Most of the participants in the *Skating on Sandgate Road* project had lived in the north side Brisbane suburb of Nundah their whole lives and ranged in age from the late seventies to the mid nineties. In a workshop session later in the process, Michael Forde would joke to the students that they were nicknaming their project “the thousand year play” because if you added the participants’ ages up it would total a thousand years. (Field Log 2, October 2009, Lines 50-60) This also acted as a reminder to those involved in the process that the myriad of memories and moments that became frozen in time through the narrative, would develop a timeless quality.

On the morning it all began, I arrived at *The Great Age Centre* early with some anticipation. I noted in my reflective narrative “Getting the Stories,” how daunting the process seemed at first;

It’s early, 8.22 am when the first participant arrives into the room that has been set up to do the interviews. Tea, coffee and biscuits are over on a table in the corner and I can’t help smiling to myself regarding them, Margery and Michael sit at the table with the students but they all rise when the first participant arrives. This is so much the way the Fordes work, a great welcoming respect for those they are about to work with, an affirmation of their worth, a celebration of their ‘being’. Greta is an eighty-four year old woman who leans quite heavily on her walking stick. She is greeted cordially by the Fordes as well as the student actors. Greta boldly and proudly remarks on her involvement in the project stating vigorously “It’s a privilege! It affects everything! This seems to set the tone for what is to come”

(Field Log 1, February 2009. Lines 102-108)

From this early point, I endeavoured to record as much of the participants’ language as I could and somehow relate it to the overall goals of the project. This would be how the research would unfold, a gathering of thoughts and conversations both informal and formal, taking place in a context ‘claimed’ by those much older and wiser than myself. From the

outset, it became clear to me that each participant was extraordinarily willing to share their stories and was not afraid to do so. It was not as hard to gather data as I had thought it would be;

When asked if she has any anecdotes the participant remarks “I’m a living, walking, talking one!” It’s clear that this participant is very aware that she has a story to tell and can’t wait to tell it.

(Field Log 1, February 2009. Lines 119-120)

This observation aligned with what the manager of the centre Doug would tell me much later about the patrons of *The Great Age Centre*, ‘There’s a real tendency in the oldies to reminisce” he observed, ‘It’s something we need to do [encourage] it’s something we do to an extent.’ (Interview 1, September 14, Lines 8-9) He stressed how important it was to encourage and facilitate older people’s inclination to actively remember their own experiences and then to share them. This was certainly confirmed by Participant One and it would go on to be a reoccurring theme throughout the interviews. The essentiality of remembering, reminiscence, as a basis for narrative, was something that started to form in my mind and later I would share this observation with the Fordes. I told them that it seemed to me that they tended to concentrate on plays that deal with older people and their experience and memories. Michael agreed remarking, “that’s where the stories are.” (Interview 3, October 2009. Lines1-11)

Pam Schweitzer (2007) picks up this point in *Reminiscence theatre: Making theatre from memories*,

I noticed that they [older people] were telling a lot of their memories in the form of dialogue, and almost performing their stories as though they were

happening in the present. It was obvious that this material, collected and edited, could form the basis for a piece of theatre in a style of its own, mirroring the way in which the original speakers remembered the past.

(p. 24)

For the Fordes, this idea translates to the phenomena that older people's stories are already rich with experiences and natural theatrical and poetic dialogue. This links with Lynne's (2008) assertions that dialogue is a tool by which meaning is made and realised, and hence paramount to the effort of performance ethnography to authentically embody and re-enact cultured others. Schweitzer (2007) explains that older people involved in oral history and theatrical projects often relish the opportunity to tell their stories to an unbiased and attentive audience. It seemed that language was one of the most important things that the elders had left – they loved to talk and to remember how it used to be and this seemed to bring a great deal of comfort to them, affirming that once they had been just like the young people that would take their stories to the stage in a few short months.

German poet Rainer Maria Rilke wrote “for the creator [the artist] there is no poverty and no poor indifferent place” (p.17). Similarly for the Fordes, the seemingly mundane and ordinary, hold the stories of the most beauty and worth and such is evident in this transition between what occurred in an interview and what transpired in the script of *Skating on Sandgate Road*;

This participant reveals herself to be widely travelled and has been throughout most of Australia. She recounts long distance train trips, bus trips, her anxiety about “going underground” in Coober Pedy and her first glance of snow: “I said ; “It’s white! And cold! What is it? It’s snow?!”.

(Field Log, February 2009. Lines 374-377)

This seemingly simple exchange translated into the following sequence in *Skating on Sandgate Road* which endeavours to authentically convey the meaning and emotions and

experiences of the participant who shared the story. What she may have thought boring for us as listeners was, in fact, one exciting and organic part of the emerging script. Her memories were alive and stage worthy! On stage, it was both beautiful and powerful in its simplicity,

Woman: *We were going up from Launceston ... up this big hill. And as we were going up ... there were all these white things coming down – like feathers. And I said ... (To the driver) What’s that? What’s those white things coming down? It looks like chooks’ feathers.” And the bus driver started to laugh.*

Driver: *Haven’t you seen snow?*
Everyone on the bus is laughing

Woman: *And then everybody started to laugh. They were all Tasmanian people and they were laughing at me. I said ... No, I haven’t seen snow. I come from Nundah! It’s too hot for snow!*

They stop laughing

Woman: *And then the driver said ..*

Driver: *Do you want to go out and catch a snow flake?*

Woman: *And I said “Ooh yes!” And he stopped the bus.*

Bus stops

Woman: *He stopped the bus with everybody in it. And I got out and put my hand out to catch a snow flake.*

She gets out of the bus and puts her hand out to catch the snow

Woman: *Oh, it was gorgeous! It was soft. It was so soft and beautiful and cool. And I said “Oh gee, that’s lovely.” And then it just melted in my hand.*

And then I just got back in the bus. I said “Thanks very much” I said That was lovely.”

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 39)

This exchange is a poignant example of how a participant’s telling of their story in dialogue formed directly into theatrical, literary and poetic dialogue in script. The Fordes extrapolated the word-for-word dialogue and placed it inside a sequence of dramatic action. Furthermore,

they executed a transition between what was told to them “off the cuff” in an interview to a piece of poetic dialogue rich in metaphors and meanings. In this way, they strive to uncover language that is inherently poetic in the dialogue. Their search for stories that are rich and intensely metaphorical and symbolic is their trademark and their quest. They search for the natural drama of real life and the everyday. They commented “the plays we love most are those that reflect life with intensity, passion and integrity.” (Interview 3, July 2009, Lines 23-24).

‘Applying’ Stories – Text To Action

I would suggest that the Fordes’ work reflects Ackroyd’s (2000) idea that there needs to be an evaluation of applied theatre practices as well as an evaluation of the scope of writing in general. Work that is ‘applied theatre’ such as that created by the Fordes is as valid and important as more ‘mainstream’ theatre. In a sense, they are beginning to try and make sense of the notion of classic, canon, popular and/or award winning theatre versus theatre ‘with purpose’ and give it credence and worthiness. They do this with purpose and vision with their pivotal objective to always bring ‘life’ to the stage. Nobel Prize winning author Gao Xingjian (2004) captures this notion well in writing,

Reality exists only through experience, and it must be personal experience. However, once related even personal experience becomes a narrative. Reality can’t be verified and doesn’t need to be, that can be left for the “reality-of-life” experts to debate. What is important is life. (p.25)

This sense that there is no fixed boundary between experienced realities and those experiences related in a narrative, lies at the crux of the Fordes’ writing. It is also central to how performance ethnography is realised and links back to Donelan’s (2005) realisations about the common ground that is shared by dramatists and ethnographers. As a blend of both, the Fordes’ writing takes a shape in a way that essentially blurs the boundary between fact

and fiction. This is congruent with Denzin's (2003) earlier assertions about the aesthetics of ethnography:

The truth of a person's and a culture's ways are given in texts like these. Such works, when performed or read, become symbolic representations of what the culture and the person values. In their performances, performers embody these values. (p.472)

Furthermore I observed a strong connection with the Fordes' writing/performance process and Denzin's (2003) earlier definition,

Performances return to memory, not just lived experience, as the site of criticism, interpretation and action. It is understood that experience exists only in its representation; it does not stand outside memory or perception. The meanings of facts are always reconstituted in the telling as they are remembered and connected to other events. Hence the appeal of the performative text does not lie in its offer of the certainty of the factual. The appeal is more complicated than that. Working from the site of memory, the reflexive, performed text as readers as viewers (or co-performers) to relive the experience through the writer's or performer's eyes. Readers thus move through re-created experience with the performer. This allows them to relive the experience for themselves. (p.471)

The Fordes' writing is a matrix of dramatic devices used to contextualise and realise dialogue that formed part of a participant's related personal experience and how this experience can be translated *into text* and then *into action* so that it then in turn, returns to experience. As Denzin postulates, and Xingjian and Donelan further identify, this transitioning process seeks to move the individual narrative and experience into a communal narrative and experience. This process of taking story into text, then into performed action, allows communities and participants to *relive* these experiences. For the participant, this is akin to remembering or recollecting, for the artists and the wider audience, this process is best described as

embodiment where they can more fully understand the lived experiences, thoughts, behaviours and cultural practises in an actualised way;

MARGERY: One of the really challenging things for us that always makes me nervous. Is when you take something someone has told you and you put it into a little drama. For example, Wilma's story of what happened in Queen Street when her husband approached her and put things in like "I'll slap you" and "I'm going to Sydney". And then you go "OH!" {exclaims} You've got to extrapolate from what was told to you but not take it so far that it's out of the realms of possibility. But I was really nervous about that one.

MICHAEL: That was really nerve wracking that one. It had such deep resonances.

(Interview 2, February 2009. Lines 975-985)

For the Fordes, there is the careful balance between authenticity to the story as it was told and also executing a piece of theatre that was dramatically meaningful. The challenge they constantly face is to balance what the participant actually said with their attempt to create on on-stage drama, it is a constant balancing act between authenticity, testimony and poetic license and drama making. The overall chronological structure *Skating on Sandgate Road* gave it the beginnings of dramatic meaning and formed the foundation of the performance. Similar to the evolution of the play's structure, its style of narration began in the early phases of the project and evolved over time. The added challenge was to drop music and dance into the narrative that would complement rather than detract from the stories and give it a smooth through line. But before this was to happen, the 'how' needed to be unpacked more solidly with the student actors who found it difficult initially to understand where the Fordes were going with the snapshot stories formed from the dialogue;

About 20 minutes later Margery and Michael begin to describe the scope of the play with ideas for the form they expect it to take. Michael reassures the students "we want to engage in a real creative endeavour with you guys". Margery reiterates her feelings on the opportunity that the student actors are being presented with, she articulates "Students working with elders is a unique opportunity." Tracey adds, "The play is a living organic thing."

When Tracey, Margery and Michael begin to explain the style of the play (non-linear/non-natural characterization and narrative similar to “Snapshots from home” and “Way out west”) the students seem confused and unfamiliar with the form. They ask questions like “does that mean in one scene we are playing one character and in another one a different character?” They seem particularly confused about the idea of ‘no set characters’ and the use of ‘voices’. This is a new form for them.

Tracey hands out excerpts from “Snapshots from home”. Michael begins to explain non-naturalist and non-linear characterization and narratives, referring to the scripts. Slowly the students begin to understand what the anticipated structure of the play will be. Both Margery and Michael stress the importance of the use of “anonymous” stories and the participants assured confidentiality of their identity at all times. The Fordes place the emphasis on voices and dialogue as the ‘unfolding’ blueprint of the play stamps home their approach.

(Field Log 2, February 2009. Lines 99- 126)

Four weeks later, we would be discussing this very issue of how the play was going to be written again and how drama would be revealed through voices;

MARGERY: Some of them [students] have said “well, the play is written really, the play’s written” they have to understand you’re actually more free when you’re writing from imagination. It seems written but it is not there yet.

MICHAEL: we have to construct this thing, we have to break down all these interviews and have all these pieces like a jigsaw puzzle and we have to put it all into a jigsaw puzzle that doesn’t exist. And this is actually very hard and it’s actually easier in a way when you’re in control of the story and you say, you know, you know you put the characters in this position and you just know what they do. Where here you actually go, well listen, I’d like to do that but no-one’s said it.

TRACEY: As you were saying that I was thinking, you are researchers, you’re not just playwrights you are researchers, you’re a researcher. Because you’re taking what I call data, you’re looking for emergent themes, finding those themes and then you’re storytelling.

MARGERY: And you use your imagination in quite a lot of it, in some of the things you write. For example, at the dance where Yetta meets Levi and some of that, we don’t know if they said those things at that absolute moment, but you think he would have said “May I have this dance” or something like that, you have to extrapolate and we do that more as the play goes on, in the classroom scene; what did the kids actually say to the teacher? And you find as the play develops you’re able to just use your imagination to enhance the drama.

BRENT: Like crossing the ‘ts’ and dotting the ‘is’ but there lies the danger too – striking the balance.

MICHAEL: Yeah. We never really philosophically studied it, we just do it. We're not sure what research has come our way, but there's sort of a spectrum isn't there. There's some ethnodrama, where there are kind of monologues of actual verbatim.

MARGERY: Actual verbatim, yeah...

MARGERY: And we don't do actual verbatim theatre.

MICHAEL: We actually do a lot of construction in our theatre. I guess there's a whole spectrum of ways you can put this sort of thing together. From pure verbatim stuff where you make a philosophical point at the top that you're just going to use the whole story, you know and that's it or are you actually going to construct phrases and construct a different kind of piece of theatre.

(Interview 1, March 2009. Lines 383-427)

When looking at the development of performance ethnography and ethnographically composed performances, it is difficult to link the Fordes' process, product and philosophy with any established mode of performance ethnography currently in use. Their emphasis on heightened theatricality and artistry stands them apart from many works of performance ethnography which centre on 'verbatim' transcripts and a purer ethnographic research process. More precisely, they see their work as quintessentially theatrical; meaning that it still must operate in the modes and by the elements of theatre but the plays are comprised and devised using an ethnographic process. But I argue it stands as ethnographic theatre work in its own right with a honed attention to authenticity and aestheticism and contributes richly to the boarder paradigm of applied theatre. Despite their conscious efforts not to take any particular political or social stance, the testimonies of the participants often injects the plays with powerful empathic messages of time, place and ideology. The work is both entertaining but also inherently evocative and at times, provocative.

Constructing a play that was more than just verbatim is very important to them as they feel that it enhances the imaginative and creative dimensions of drama more than a straight retelling of the stories would. In essence, they attempt to replicate the way the stories were

told to them but they have to put it in such a form that it is able to be understood by an audience who did not hear the full interview. Having the structure of the play in phases and stages that corresponded to the chronology of a lifespan added significantly to the effort to contextualise and shape the drama. Adding further shape is the style of narration using different voices to convey “snippets”, “snapshots”, “phrases” and “dialogue” to correspond to the particular phase of the play. This means there were no “characters” but *voices* of the different participants. *Skating on Sandgate Road* was written in this deliberately ‘constructed’ way with voices weaving in and out of the timeline telling the stories the participants had given which related to that part. For the Fordes, it was important to them that people who saw the play went away feeling they had also seen a very good piece of theatre as well as something that harnessed stories from their community;

As you know we are not academics, we are practitioners, so a lot of what we do, comes from our experience in theatre and our empathy and our empathy with the people we talk to. We want to tell their stories in a way that will privilege them but also be theatrically enjoyable, emotionally satisfying, artistically excellent and truthful. (Reflective Memo Lines 21-24, 2010)

One point of interest pertains to how they choose parts of participant stories to incorporate into their artwork. It is an evolving sense of dramatic meets ethnographic intuition whereby they can, in some instances, know instinctively during the interview stage that certain things a participant says will be part of their play;

BRENT: Does it occur to you, when you hear a story such as “the clock story” from Sveta that is so rich in symbolism and metaphor, that it occurs right in that moment where you think “That story is going to be in our play!”

MARGERY: Often it does, as they’re saying and we’re listening they’ll say something and we’ll just know, I’ll just know instinctively

MICHAEL: Sometimes it is later, after we listen to the transcripts or we reflect on it,

or something we workshopped with the students and it came out that we should put that in, or the opposite, that we should take it out.

MARGERY: But in the case of the clock story, in a lot of the times....

BRENT: Which is more? It occurs during the interview, instantly? Or later, in reflection on listening to the transcripts?

MARGERY: A lot of it is instant, I just know.

BRENT: You just hear it and you think "that's it, your story is going in our play!"

MARGERY: Yeah, right away you know!

(Interview 5, March 2010. Lines 40-60)

This exchange related to a particular story that a participant had told which was incorporated into *Skating on Sandgate Road* forming one of the most symbolically rich and powerful moments of the play. Its genesis was in the following interview;

She talks about being an obstetrician and the challenging role of doctors involved in births but also juxtaposed with her role as a hospital chaplain where she was often working with the terminally ill and dying. She recounts the immense responsibility, privilege and twenty-four-commitment to these things.

Sveta talks extensively about her work both as a community doctor as well as a hospital chaplain, having to assist people in hospital and in the community through difficult periods of their life, seeing and treating whole families and even being present at some people's final moments. The notion of 'final moments' connected strongly with the age of the participants and communicated strong themes which many participants had spoken about.

(Field Log, March 2009. Lines 1311-1320)

This story came to fruition in the script of *Skating on Sandgate Road* in the following way;

Woman 2: (Doctor) I've been a medico for over fifty years. When somebody dies - I always think it's like a clock running down. Just breathe and breathe slower – and then just stop. To me, death is a sleep. That's actually a biblical term. That death is a sleep. And that's virtually what it amounts to. Slowly, slowly ...then just stop. And you think (awe of the moment)oh yes!

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 36)

“Coming To Terms”: Embodiment

One of the most significant realisations that Margery and Michael Forde came to very early, was that since the participants were all of a senior age, mortality was going to be a distinct theme within *Skating on Sandgate Road*. This created a very distinct context by which the stories were perceived. A feeling of high importance started to circulate around the stories as perceptions started to shape the notion that these stories belonging to people for whom mortality is an immediate issue, needed to be told with impetus and with honesty. Feelings that the stories “needed” to be told and that the stories given by the elders were quite possibly some of the last records to be made by and of them, started to pervade the thinking of the Fordes.

Michael Forde told the students soon after the first interviews were conducted that ‘this [the play] is not authored in the way a traditional theatrical script is authored. This is someone speaking from the heart. Someone speaking because they needed to speak.’ (Field Log 2, Lines 84-85). He would later go on to describe vividly some of the feelings that had started to pervade the construction of the play:

Michael talks about conflict, tension between protagonist and antagonist as well as ‘high stakes’. He argues that for the project “There is an urgency in the play. These people are old, in ten years or so most of them won’t be here. They need to get this story told.”

(Field Log 4, February 2009. Lines 33-35)

The feeling that these stories were “bequeathed”, developed elements of intensity and urgency in the writing, collecting and workshopping of interview data. The interview process

of *Skating on Sandgate Road* had stirred up some very deep emotions and provoked confronting questions about life, death and mortality. As I reflected,

Margery talks about the intense emotional core of the stories when she reveals to the students “I found myself writing some of this stuff and just weeping”. The dense emotional core of the subject is something that I myself noticed in the final interviews on Sunday, the participants gave us their voices and with the voices came a certain element of weight, things were revealed that are difficult to process emotionally and also sit with for long amounts of time. Stories of the participants’ deceased friends, relatives, loved ones, tales of hardship and suffering as well as the stark realities of ageing were presented to us vividly, lucidly and in real time. I muse that there are many deep emotions and also anxieties that are alive and at work at the core of this project.

(Field Log 3, March 2009. Lines 47 – 54)

During a particularly confronting interview with a participant who was also caring for her husband suffering from degenerative Alzheimer’s Disease, it became evident how this material was affecting the creative team and the weight of responsibility the ethnographer carries in dealing with such material;

The session ends with Margery telling Yulienka that “we could talk to you forever” but as she leaves I sense the dynamic in the room has changed. With her wisdom and profound strength and faith juxtaposed against Yegor’s frail mental and physical state, we are drained and emotionally sad. It is quite a difficult session, emotionally for the Fordes’ as well as the students. I do notice that Margery’s nerves are a little frayed at the end from not only encountering someone face-to-face who was suffering quite badly from watching a loved one failing from Alzheimer’s Disease, but who is trying to remain dignified at the same time. Yulienka who is able to not only see the despair both in her own life and at the core of human nature in the 21st century is also somehow able to transcend it. She seems neither weighed down nor melancholy by the burden she carries caring for her husband but also has an articulate understanding of human sadness. Instead she finds comfort and solace in her faith, in her intellect, in her family and in an immensely deep reservoir of personal strength. After the session, Margery and Michael debrief the student actors congratulating them on conducting themselves so well in what was quite an emotionally tough interview. The student actors themselves are quite affected by the suffering of Yegor and how it is juxtaposed with the strength of Yulienka. I notice that two of the students are quite close to tears and Margery also seems saddened, drained and quite frayed.

(Field Log. February 2009. Lines 34-46)

Such possible encounters were recognised at the beginning of the project by Michael Forde in the very first workshop session with the student actors,

Michael starts talking about the underlying motivations and “bigger questions” behind the play, and explains to the students in a serious tone; “We work because we believe we are artists, we work for the art, for the project, telling the story. We have to look for the big questions. Our aim is to write an important, moving and truthful script. We want to explore the stages of life of these people. What does it mean to go from birth to old age? That’s the question; it’s a bloody deep question, we’re going to gleam that question, we’re going to bring that to the play.”

Michael recounts his own life experiences and questions of life and death, in particular recent health concerns he has had. “It’s an important question for me, for all of us and I want answers”

(Field Log 2, April 2009. Lines 154 – 171)

This is an important moment in the project, as Michael Forde poses that the theatre they are creating must ask questions and strive to be truthful, challenging and invoke a change in the emotions and experiences of the creators and of the audience. In essence, he is posing that *Skating on Sandgate Road* must be ‘applied theatre’ in that it has a purpose that extends far beyond entertainment and is comprised of multiple social, cultural, political and existential questions woven through the participants’ stories. As Plotkin (in Ackroyd, 2000) theatre remarks, ‘theatre [should have] some other purpose overshadow[ing] the entertainment function.’ (p.3) For Margery and Michael Forde, the way in which this play was unfolding was driven by a need to be more than just entertainment. Indeed, the stories were embodied with life and death in such powerful ways that an audience cannot help but be moved in some empathic way.

As the play evolved and the stories gathered from the elderly participants became more and more indicative of themes involving ageing, life and death, the sense of how the stories were

perceived by the student actors became of paramount interest to the Fordes. As I had realised during the interview with Yulienka, it is quite easy to abstract the emotional realities of ageing and death. However an abstracted and intellectual approach is insufficient where performance ethnography is concerned where one must, as closely as they can, embody and replicate the existence and culture of the other.

As noted, this play was created using an ethnographic process drawn from lived experiences of ‘the other’ and provoked a shift thought and affect in the creator and the performers. This meant that the issues and experiences become more immediate and more real as the creators and performers sought to portray and perform living people over fictional characters. As Pollock (2006) earlier explained, ethnographic performances, “shift the relationship of the researcher [or performer] and the ostensibly ‘researched’ [or the subject of performance]. The relationship between subject and interpreter is irrevocably changed from a process of interpretation to one of transformation and embodiment, where one starts to become the other. (p.325) Denzin (2003) adds, ‘the truth of a person’s and a culture’s ways are given in texts like these. Such works, when performed or read, become symbolic representations of what the culture and the person values. In their performances, performers embody these values’ (p.472)

Weaving the Tapestry – Emergent Themes.

Having the play structured chronologically, gave an impetus to the writing process since it allowed the Fordes to categorise the stories in much the same elemental way that qualitative data is codified into emergent themes and elements. As per Gardner (in Ely 1991), these *emergent themes* provided a literary structure to the play but would also dictate the theatrical action with the themes acting as independent “segments” leading into each other. The play

starts with an impetus from the voice of “a student” which then uncovers a cacophony of voices in the first moments of the play. This was executed to give an organic representation of what the interview experiences were like. After these initial voices, each of them speaking about their births or early childhood experiences, the narrative structure of the play begins with each segment arising from the codified themes that emerged from the transcripts. These were a great many themes that gave the play structure,

- Skating on Sandgate Road (particular participant’s Early Childhood and setting the scene)
- Nundah has always been our place (Early childhood stories)
- The signalman (Particular participant’s early childhood story)
- The depression (Stories of the Great Depression and childhood during)
- School Days (School stories)
- Romeo and Juliet (Particular participant’s early adolescent romance story)
- The Nundah Parade (Anecdotal stories of particular event)
- The school at war (Second world war stories from child/young person point of view)
- Nundah at war (Second world war anecdotes and stories)
- The papers didn’t tell you (Reflective war stories)
- Peace declared (particular participant’s story of VP day)
- Hamburg (particular participant’s wartime story)
- Bill (particular participant’s romance story)
- The Dance (interwoven stories of romances)
- At the pictures (stories of adolescent romance)
- The proposal (a particular participant’s particular story of marriage proposal)
- Wedding photos/The honeymoon (interwoven stories of marriage and honeymoon)
- I’d like to slap you (particular participant’s story of separation)
- Married life and work (stories of daily life)
- Entertainment in the suburbs (stories of pastimes)
- Children (stories of children)
- Frog in the dunny (particular participant’s humorous anecdote about outdoor toilet)
- Grandkids (interwoven stories of grandchildren)
- He’s just live Merv (particular participant’s story of grandson)
- Losing your partner (stories of loss of loved ones)

- On my own (stories of elder isolation)
- The Snowflake (a particular participant's story of her first encounter with snow)
- Creatures great and small (stories of animals)
- At the doctors (stories of health care and medical problems)
- Memory (story of Alzheimer's Disease)
- The Spirit (interwoven stories of positivity)
- Something Good (Continued)
- We make believe (particular participant's 'elder' story, final catharsis)

In *Skating on Sandgate Road* ideas of family, space, place, time and of belonging, strongly pervaded the dialogues of the people who gave their stories. Most of the stories were family stories and as such the play became encoded with a strong sense of "place", to such an extent in fact, that as earlier discussed, the play was titled after the road, one of the main elders, had skated down as a child. The title itself embedded the play in a familiar locale saturating it immediately with a shared history and memory.

This notion of 'place' is inextricably important in the work of the Fordes and the following field log entry captures this;

Boris describes what it has been like living in the Nundah area his whole life "Nundah has always been our place." This is a poignant and articulate statement that sums up the emotional core of the dialogue so rich in local area history and is reminiscent to me of an almost tribal sense of belonging and strong sense of "place" on and in the land. Boris reveals he has been a member of many of the local community organizations throughout his life. Michael dubs him "pillar of the community" and his family agrees that this sums him up as a person. Dance is an activity that Boris much enjoyed in his younger years and that this love of dance transferred to his children and grandchildren. His family is able to fill in the details of a quite extensive family composed of children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

Talking about the local community of Nundah, Tracey expands on Boris' earlier point of "our place" describing it as "a strong, sacred place of memory". Again, I have the image of a tribal sense of belonging to a particular 'land' and the deep emotional and communal-cultural core that resonates from the environment connecting all the people who live there. I think to my earlier statement on "the heart of Queensland theatre" being the voices of the people, well now it seems the heart of those voices, those

people, is held within the heart, the core, the community and land of Queensland itself, Queensland's cultures and communities, like Nundah.

(Field Log 1, March 2009. Lines 1230- 1250)

As the interviews concluded, we all started to realize an emerging sense that a personal experience could be a shared experience and how theatre could be the mechanism to transmit messages of this commonality, community and empathy of experience. I became increasingly aware that there was much more at work in *Skating on Sandgate Road* than just theatrical devices. The Fordes has created strong opportunities for speaking and for listening, for community and for connection. And that their work was entrusted;

It's almost five o'clock on Sunday now, Linka shakes everyone's hand, including mine and I step for a moment out of my ethnographers role to shake her hand as she says to each of us that when the show plays we had "better come say hello" everyone assures her they will. She leaves saying "I'm looking forward to seeing what you put on for us".

(Field Log. March 2009. Lines 1330- 1333)

This immediately provoked a reaction from me when I realised the enormous responsibility the Fordes have in each and every one of the community plays they produce;

I find it powerful that the last participant of the day, [Participant Fifteen], a woman who can easily be described as at the centre of a community as a caregiver and healer, would say to us and to me in particular that we had "better come see her", not to forget and that she was looking forward to what we are doing for them. It's a heavy feeling that dawns here, the responsibility the Fordes have to honour the stories.

The elders are looking forward to what the students and Margery and Michael do for them, they have done their part, they have spoken, it is now the students' and artists' turn to speak. Like the ancient method of telling oral histories and song-making "call and response" we have heard the call, now it is up to us to respond. And the response? Our turn to speak? It must be a way that honours the elders, that fights against popular modes and methods of depicting them, of disqualifying and dishonouring their points of view, their experiences and their voices. It must be a voice that is as much theirs as it is ours, a shared voice, a unified voice, a voice without

contempt or stereotypes, a voice that doesn't forget where it came from – a voice that is the voice of the community.

(Analytic Memo, Field Log 1, March 2009. Lines 1360-1385)

In each of the participant's cases, the Fordes encountered somebody who gave their story freely and with minimal prompting. They totally trusted their stories to them. Each elder was happy to talk at length on the simplest and on the surface most trivial things, but uncovered was a wealth of lifetimes and fundamental experiences shared by all human beings. Selecting themes was complex because the Fordes did not want to leave anyone's stories out or devalue the importance of specific milestones or rites of passage for individual participants. The participants, ranging in age from the mid-70s through to the early 90s, were able to tell stories that encompassed the full spans of a lifetime of experiences. Many of their stories were directly related to relationships and marriage, family stories and experiences of growing old and facing mortality. Many of the themes emerging from the stories shared commonalities but it was the nuances of difference in the stories that gave the performance energy and depth.

These are mostly happy stories from participants and serve as insights into their personal experiences and lighten the mood of the play. Similar to the other themes of remembrance and history, these moments are presented with a variety of direct-in character narrations and monologues as well as re-imagined or re-creations of the events as they occurred. The following excerpt shows how multiple participants' stories with common themes are used to flavour the particular phase of the play, casting emphasis on relationships;

SCENE: THE DANCE

SONG: THE WAY YOU LOOK TONIGHT (Music only to underscore scene)

The dance continues with various partners telling their stories of romantic meetings

Woman 1: *I don't know what it was about him. He was just a hell of a nice person.*

Woman 2: *I went with him on a blind date. Six weeks later we were engaged.*

Woman 3: *He had a beautiful black curly head. I said to my friend, "Look at his head!" She said, "Oh, I've known him since he was two. He's always had it."*

Woman 4: *I was studying medicine. I graduated in 1944. He was a year behind me.*

Woman 5: *What did I love about him? His manners. His manners. He was always a gentleman.*

Woman 6: *I was thirty four when I met him. His first wife had died. We worked together in the taxation office. One day he asked me to an orchestral concert. That taxation office was the biggest gossip place in the world so we kept it a secret. A lot of people got a shock when I left to marry him.*

(Forde & Forde, 21-22)

This former excerpt straddles the space between some larger retellings of relationship experiences, with particular emphasis on first meetings, courting and proposals and it serves to contextualize and flavour the mood of the this particular phase. Familial themes and the nurturing of children, were chosen to create a fuller representation of life as is exemplified in the following excerpt;

SCENE: THE BATH

Mum: *Oh, and he hated having his hair washed – because once he'd got shampoo in his eyes. He'd see me go to collect the shampoo bottle ...Boy sees the shampoo bottle and takes off*

Mum: *and he'd up the side of the house.*

Boy: *Whaaaaaa!*

There's a big chase around the stage (and maybe into the auditorium)

Mum: *We had a bed of Arum lilies across under the front bedroom. And he'd head for there. I think he thought he was an ostrich ... because he'd dive his head in ... and of course his little bum would be sticking out. And he'd say ...*

Boy: *How did you know where I were?*

She grabs him and puts him on the iron board and tips him back over the laundry basin.

Mum: *The only way I could wash his hair so it wouldn't get on his face ... without absolutely strangling him and myself ... I used to put the ironing board up in the laundry – and I'd lie him on that – with his head back over the basin. But he still didn't like it.*

Boy: *Whaaaaaa!!!!*

Mum: *He's fifty now. I love telling those tales to his three boys.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.33)

This phase of *Skating on Sandgate Road* which explores family and children is full of similar anecdotes. As the play progresses towards the 'old age and facing mortality stories', the mood becomes increasingly sombre but the Fordes balanced this with optimism, positivity and self-realization which they identified to be one of the enduring themes and messages of the play;

SCENE: MEMORY

Light on the man and his wife

Man 1: *My memory is a shocker. A person's name - names and so forth. The number of people I know ... and I just have to say – what's their name? What's their name? I don't know. Sorry.*

Woman 1: *This has just happened in the last twelve months. It's a progression thing.*

Man 1: *And my hearing aids need a lot of attention. And apart from my hearing not being good, just excuse the fact that I can't remember. Sorry.*

Woman 1: *No need to apologise. He was always head of the family. He was good at discipline. Not in a rough sort of way – but in a gentlemanly sort of way. He's someone they feel they can always respect.*

Man 1: *Tell them about the lamp.*

SCENE: *THE SPIRIT*

Woman 1: *In the kitchen, I have a lamp that I light. It's part of our family. "Grandma?" "Yes." "Will you light the lamp for me?" "Mum. I've got a problem. Will you light the lamp?" That's what kept me going too. Oh, I've thrown my shoe at the wall – and I've said "God! What do you think you're doing now?" But I'm very grateful to my parents for the way they brought me up – to have hope. Because it must be dreadful, not to have hope.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.55)

In the latter poignant examples, the sombre themes of parenting, old age and mortality are balanced by a juxtaposition of other stories of positivity, spirituality and self realisation. In some ways, the structure and narrative of the play theatrically tracks people through stages of development from childhood to family, relationships and old age. It deliberately mirrors Jacamo's monologue from Shakespeare's *As you like it* that Michael Forde read to the students early in the workshop sessions. However, the dialogue and content of the play profess an argument against rigid demarcation of stages in participants' lives and seeks to draw out the complexity, beauty and poetic essences of each stage and the feelings, perceptions, memories and experiences that go along with them. There is joy balanced against despair and hardship.

One of the predominate foci of many of the testimonies that are explored in the script of *Skating on Sandgate Road* is that of the knowledge and history of the local area. The history of the place and how it has changed over time, the community, peoples and their relation to the place and certain historical events are all explicitly explored in the text. Part of the way the narrative flows in its chronological structure follows the changing landscape and community of place (Nundah and the surrounding Northern Brisbane suburbs) as well as

people's changing experience and relation to those places and the role those communities and places play in the broader world history. Particularly, there are the remembrances of participants of certain local-area knowledge, changes in technology or community demographics and broader historical events.

In this way, the script of *Skating on Sandgate Road* functions in much the same way as many of the other Fordes' works such as *Snapshots from Home*, *Cribbie* and *Behind the Cane* as a re-telling or re-imagining of history. It functions as a kind of historical document in the same way that the other works do, in that it records and relates evidence in the form of testimonies and experiences of historical people, places, periods and events. The following excerpt is an example of how the script functions both as local-history knowledge telling and as a historical document, privileging the participant's own testimonial retelling of historical events;

SCENE: THE NUNDAH PARADE

A drumming beat. Flute, tambourine etc

Girl 1: *We always had lots of parades in Nundah.*

Girl 2: *In 1938 we had a huge one!*

Boy 1: *All us kids from school marched.*

Girl 2: *The girls all wore little green satiny tunics and did eurhythmics!*

The girls dance a few moments of eurhythmics.

Boy 2: *And there was a T Model Ford with Jammy driving it.*

Jammy is driving and waving regally to the crowd

Boy 1: *And on the top of it was like ... a little truck.*

Boy 2: *And on the top of that was the big cardboard replica of a bottle of pickles.*

Jammy: *We're celebrating a landmark event in Nundah! Some German missionary families settled here in 1838 – making it the oldest suburb in Queensland! It used to be called*

German Station. Go `round to Nundah Cemetery ... you'll find plenty of German names there. Like Rode. Rode Road. Rode was German.

SCENE: THE SCHOOL AT WAR

The parade becomes a war march – it's ominous.

SONG: RUN ADOLF RUN

Run Adolf, Run Adolf, Run, Run, Run,

Now that the fun has begun, gun, gun;

P'raps you'll just allow us to explain,

What we did once, - we can do again.

We're making shells by the ton, ton, ton.

We've got the men and the mon, mon, mon.

Poor old soul, - you'll need a rabbit-hole, -

So, run Adolf, run Adolf, run, run, run.

Newspaper boy waving newspaper

Paper boy: *Paper Tele – City Final! Germany invades Poland! Read all about it! German troops storm across the Polish frontier!*

The schoolteacher is buying a paper from the paper boy

Girl 1: *I was twelve. The teacher rushed into our classroom. ...*

Teacher has the newspaper with banner headlines. She is holding it up to show her class.

Teacher: *Children! This is momentous news! Keep these newspapers! You are living through history!*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, pp. 10-11)

The former describes two historical events from the participant's testimonies. The first, 'the parade' is an example of the local-area history and knowledge that is remembered and recorded in the script. The second, memories of the Second World War, explicitly establishes the link between the participant's own memories and their personal and local community history and broader, historical world events. For much of the play and for many of the

participants, the Second World War was one of the defining events of their generation and the *Skating on Sandgate Road* offered them the opportunity to have their personal experiences and testimonies recorded, related and re-imagined in a creative but also historically robust way. In terms of historiography, the text of *Skating on Sandgate Road* (now kept in the Queensland State Library) and the accompanying personal transcripts from the interviews, can be regarded as primary historical sources in relation to these world events.

Usually, the dialogue in *Skating on Sandgate Road* highlights these historical events with a lens on more personal experiences of the interviewees;

SCENE: THE PAPERS DIDN'T TELL YOU

Woman 1: *You never actually knew what was happening. The papers didn't tell you. ...*

Woman 2: *My husband was in Burma and Borneo. He wouldn't talk about the bad things.*

Woman 1: *They said Darwin had been bombed twice. It was bombed over sixty times and hundreds of people killed.*

Woman 2: *My brother was a prisoner of war in Japan. When he came home, they had him in hospital to try to fatten him – but he wouldn't fatten. as just no good. He lived for two years.*

Man 1: *At Milne Bay, my uncle got shot through there – and out the back of his neck. When they picked up the wounded, they left him. They didn't get him until afterwards ... when they got the ones they reckoned were the saveables.*

Woman 1: *He'd gone over the Owen Stanley Range. But he never talked to me about it. Sometimes I'd overhear him talking to somebody else – a mate who'd been in the army.*

Man 2: *You find a hole and you get in it for the night. You wake up with the water up to your waist. If you put your head up – there's a bloody sniper. That's how they got Davo. He came out of the hole – and they shot him.*

Woman 1: *Three years he was in New Guinea – and he'd never ever tell me.*

Woman 3: *His last drop was into Arnhem at the end of the war.*

Man 3: *I'm the first out of my plane. I drop right on the edge of the forest. So I go in ... and the first thing I see is this Kraut*

officer ...dead. Yeah, pretty bloody ugly. I took his Luger. Souvenired it. He didn't need it anymore.

Woman 3: *He brought it back with him. The gun. I think his brain was affected. I think there was something wrong there then.*

Lighting change

(Forde & Forde, 2009, pp. 16-17)

In this excerpt, direct narration is used to relate the experiences of participants during the Second World War. It is almost eyewitness on stage. The participant describes the personal experience of the historical event as well as glimpses into their own experience. In one of the longest sustained monologues and possibly rawest and most poetic moments of the play, personal testimony, storytelling and history blend together to create a vivid portrait of historical times and places;

Woman: *I was a tailoress at the biggest tailor in Brisbane – G.R. Ryder in Queen Street. During the war, made officer's uniforms from dawn 'til dusk. By the time the war ended – I was worn out. I went on a holiday to visit my aunty in London. I sailed on the Oronsay – the second ship that left for England after the war. London was terrible. Smashed. It was rubble. Just terrible.*

I didn't have a holiday. Instead I applied to join the WVS - the Women's Voluntary Service. And then I was shipped off to Germany to look after the British troops.

I'll never forget Hamburg. Try to imagine – from the city to Nundah – just rubble. You just imagine. Terrible. Terrible. I'm ninety three – and I can still see it.

I was posted to Munzellagen - on a border between the British and Russian zone. It was edgy. Very edgy. The commander's order was – "Always carry your belt." Have you ever felt a soldier's belt buckle? If you've got that part of the belt wrapped 'round ...you've got a weapon.

Our building was within walking distance of the compound where they rounded up the worst ones ... the SS. They put them in there and told them to sit. If they didn't – if they stood up - they were shot.

I hate war. It makes me sick. I hope there's never going to be anything like it again. But we're still doing it. I think – what a waste of life. And the cruelty. I can't stand anything cruel. And people can be very cruel to each other. It's amazing how cruel they can be. (Pause) It changed me. A lot. I was never

very brave. But now, I'm not frightened of anything. If I hadn't done that - I'd never have come in to talk to you like this. Never. Never. (Pause) I met someone in Germany – and I would have stayed. But things didn't work out. When I said to him "I'm going home." He never even answered me.

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p.18)

This scene is starkly minimalistic, similar in design to a one of the themed scenes in *Cribbie*. The actor stands front stage, right, illuminated by a dull-spotlight and relates this story, in a character monologue. It is powerful in its stillness and history is woven with emotion, movement and lighting effects. On stage, it is confronting in its sadness.

The way the stories are told is a direct correlation to the way the Fordes see themselves in relation to the participants and to the stories. They neither downplay nor up-play their importance in the storytelling process and they are equal stakeholders and collaborators in the dialogue. They are also deliberators and mediators, stressing that there are extensive and purposeful decisions that have to be made in their writing process in which stories they tell, what parts of stories to tell, what to include as well as what to leave out. If they choose to extrapolate a single line from a participant's story they must deliberately orchestrate that it doesn't exist in a vacuum out of context and if they choose to embellish, garnish or add to a story they must keep it well within the realms of possibility and remain in balance to being authentic to the original storyteller at the same time.

This was earlier discussed by Donelan (2005) who suggests that dramatists/storytellers and ethnographers share a common frame of mind in embodying and understanding the subject of their performance. I found that one challenge that the Fordes face is that their work is not derived from fiction and as a result, issues of authenticity versus poetic license dominate their aesthetic ideology. Much of this process has become instinctive and intuitive for them. So

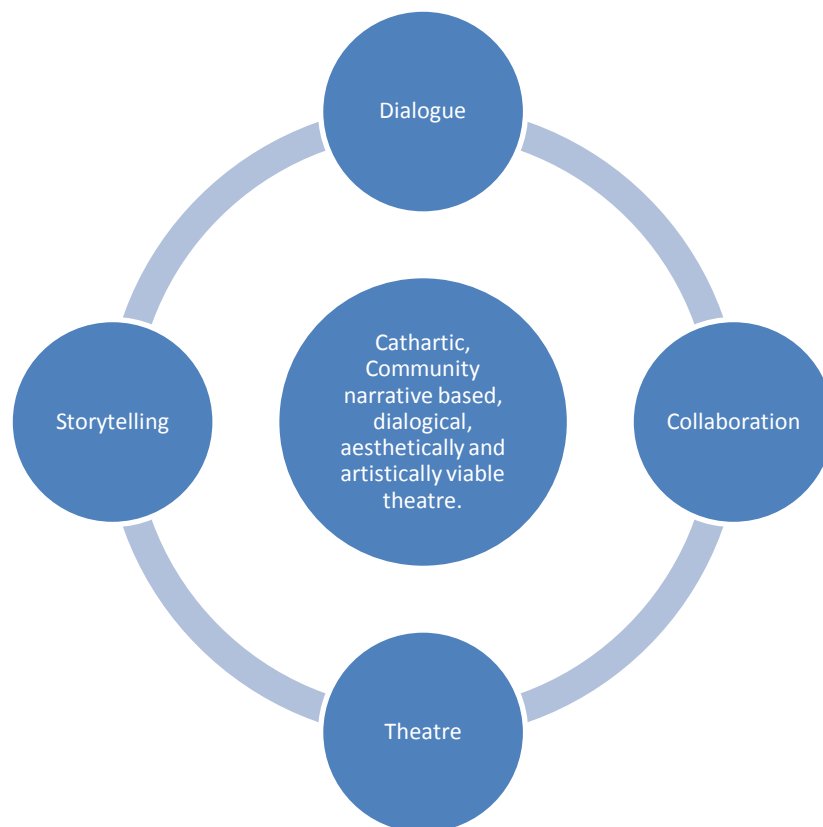
powerfully does this ‘instinctive’ writing occur for them that in *Skating on Sandgate Road*, many of the longest and most florid moments in the play are garnered from one or two specific participants’ stories. In fact the title of *Skating on Sandgate Road* was gathered from a particular participant whose story also formed many of the larger and more crucial parts of the script. His stories as the main elder became the ‘pivot’ for the play, the thrust and the impetus. It was not intentional but his stories were so alive and so dynamic that the ensemble was captivated by the sessions spent with him. Although the Fordes consider that all people are inherently their own storytellers, Michael Forde stresses often that there is a natural storyteller among them, which he gives the nickname of a ‘seanachie’; a traditional Irish storyteller of myth and folklore. I noted their encounter with one during the interview process;

Mika vividly retells stories of her family, particularly her parents’ death in a car accident as well as of her daughters and late husband. It seems that Mika is able to vividly recall these events in lucid detail, bringing the death of her husband very really into the conversation; her recollection is so immediately vivid to her that she weeps softly recounting the story of his passing. At about ten o’clock in the morning, the session is coming to an end; Michael dubs Mika a shanachie: a natural Irish storyteller for her ability to vividly and lucidly recall her life and make it emotionally present in the here and now; a coveted ability among storytellers.

(Field Log, March 2009. Lines 987-991 & Lines 1030-1034)

Encountering a ‘shanachie’ during their interview process is tantamount to striking gold for the Fordes, as the stories from a natural storyteller are often the most poetic and emotionally rich. In *Skating on Sandgate Road* several of the participants proved to be more eloquent storytellers and gifted in remembering and retelling the history of their lives than others. The Fordes have developed a metaphorical ‘nose for stories’ through their development of an instinctive and intuitive awareness of drama rich stories when they encounter them. Indeed Margery claims that often ‘As the stories are told to me, I will be imagining how the story is unfolding in my head.’ (Interview 5, September 2009, Line 39)

Further, they assert that every person *has* a story and *tells* a story, is quite central to a notion that life can be seen as both discourse and experience (Kuppers, 2007) and a complexity of subjective experiences, realities, narratives and languages. The following diagram (Downes 2012) is useful in visualising the way the Fordes mesh storytelling, theatre and the community and how they conceptualize the interplay between the most important elements of their process to gel together in order to strive to an aesthetic goal.



The Matter of Theatre

Discussing the Fordes' method of playwriting, it is sometimes easy to get caught up in talking about the dialogical, cathartic and community themes and benefits and neglect the theatrical components and elements. However, the use of characterisation, dialogue, language, staging, lighting, sound effects and music, have paramount importance in their work. They are highly invested and interested in making theatre that uses the full range of theatrical elements, techniques and technologies in a seamless way;

BRENT: When you develop a play, you obviously take a lot of time to develop all of the stylistic and technical elements, just the very basic guts of theatre; entrances and exits, lighting, that kind of stuff. Do you have anything that influences you there? Not the writing or aesthetics, but real guts of it. The business of theatre. The technical stylistic stuff.

MICHAEL: Simplicity. I mean... doing as much as possible with as little as you can.

BRENT: Minimalism.?

MICHAEL: Yeah, we're very taken with, you know, just making it as simple as possible for the audience. Using minimal props. Lighting is really important. We feel as though lighting is really crucial.

BRENT: And it was hugely effective in Sandgate Road. It was like the lighting was used to maximum effect

MARGERY: Fantastic!

MICHAEL : You know with lighting, you know, it sort of becomes equivalent to editing a film, lighting. Because you can throw the focus here or you can throw the focus there and you can change the mood and so on. So lighting is really important and to think about that when you're writing is very important.

MARGERY: Music is always important.

MICHAEL: Music. Marg is really, you know, the musician, the musical person.

BRENT: I noticed in Sandgate Road that was a cohesive device. The music really tied it all together and without it, it would have almost not flown. It would have just been a conjunctive sort of thing, clunky and disordered.

MARGERY: Well when you've got so many disparate stories, you know, you can just use lighting to fade in and out, but with music you also have that emotional element.

And for something like Sandgate Road, when you choose those songs and you know that people will love the songs, you're actually giving them the enjoyment factor...

BRENT: And it wasn't just that you played a soundtrack. One, it was live. It was live music. And the other thing was that I noticed that it wasn't just randomly selected. The songs were very specifically chosen for that scene and for that situation. I mean people's marriage

MARGERY: Yes, that takes consciousness to do that. You need to research into the music of the period. We asked a lot, what song did you listen to? What song did you play at your wedding?

BRENT: Yeah, there were very specific reasons why that song was there and without the whole thing would be, like you say, chaos.

MICHAEL: Well it's one of the factors that ties it through, and segues from one scene to the other.

MARGERY: I think the other thing that's important for us is those, what you were talking about, and this was a problem that I had before we actually knew which space Cribbie was going to be done in. I need to see the space.

BRENT: You need to see the stage.

MARGERY: I need to see it and we didn't know where it was going, and it could have gone on at some RSL club where the stage was huge. And then suddenly we know it's going on at the Sue Benner Theatre and I just went oh, thank goodness. You know, you see it. You see the stage. You see what can be done. You see the actors can move into the audience and how close the audience are. And that was the beauty of a lot of the work we did at La Boite, particularly the old Le Boite, you just knew that space and you knew what can be done in that space. I found that very hard, not knowing where it was going to happen, or even the configuration, you know.

MICHAEL: And doing this sort of theatre, as you were saying, you're jumping, there's lots of little scenes, statements, phrases, narrations. And you've got to try and tie that all together. And that's sort of fun, isn't it...

MARGERY: Yes, I love it.

MICHAEL: it's fun for the audience. It's fun for the audience and for the actors too. And it's fun to allow the audience that space to make the imaginative leap, this is now a lounge room and this is now, you know, someone skating along the road and this is now a dance. And, you know, with a minimal labelling.

MARGERY: And you are choosing with the music the soundtrack of people's lives, because you're very careful to choose music that they can relate to. You know, we look at the year when something happened, what were the songs of that era. What would they have been dancing to, what would have been the romantic songs? So you ask a lot of questions about, you know, what that song is actually saying and the mood it

creates. So that's hugely important, putting together something like this, where it's like a big eiderdown that sews in together with different coloured threads.

(Interview 2, September 2009. Lines 292-358)

From a purely technical point, I have identified three elements that characterise the plays of the Fordes, particularly in *Skating on Sandgate Road*. (Focus Question 1) The overarching ideal of 'simplicity' or 'doing the most with the least' is fundamental to the theatrical aesthetic. The main artistic thrust and principal aesthetic material (as per Erven 2000) is the stories themselves, thus the Fordes focus deeply on these and strive to facilitate a theatre and staging style that is conducive to these stories/voices being the focus of the audience's attention instead of elaborate stagecraft and technical wizardry. The first element of their theatre is *an attention to and understanding of staging and theatrical space and the application and uses of it*. Margery Forde asserts that she must have an understanding of the space that is to be used in order to properly execute the dramatic action. *Skating on Sandgate Road* used a hybrid between a thrust stage and theatre in the round. This design allows action and dialogue to take place in several different areas and dimensions. One of the strengths of this stage design is that it incorporates elements of theatre in the round, which facilitates a 'circle' of story sharing. It was a deliberate choice on the part of the Fordes.

One of the emphases in the use of this stage design was the full implementation of using dialogue for the theatre in the round. The thrust component allowed a space where actors could move and signify travel; many of the scenes that involved moving, walking or travelling utilised the thrust component of the stage. The rear stage housed the chorus, which comprised all the actors in a Greek/Brechtian style chorus. Each of the 'voices' would emerge from this central chorus point and engage in action in other parts of the stage, returning to this point when finished. The rear stage only had limited space for movement and

scenes that required more extensive movement, such as dancing, or multiple characters interacting in a small space, such as in a room, were located to the front 'round' stage. Another Brechtian attribute of this staging design is the onstage inclusion of the singer, piano and musician.

Thus the second element key distinguishing features of *Skating on Sandgate Road* is that it *used live music instead of recorded music*. The chorus would often harmonise with the singing as well as providing sound effects for scenes that involved ambient and environmental sounds. The following is an example of this;

SCENE: NUNDAH HAS ALWAYS BEEN OUR PLACE

Lighting change. A bright sunny day in the Nundah. The sound of the blacksmith's anvil. (Vocalised)

Girl 1: *We grew up on Rivington Street. We'd walk a mile to school every day. On our way home we'd sometimes stop at the old blacksmith's place at the foot of the hill and watch him work ...*

The blacksmith is working making horse shoes

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 3)

Instead of using pre-recorded electronic sound effects or pre-recorded music, the Fordes opted to use live music and sound effects. The sound effects were often embodied by the actors on stage so the effect was dynamic and powerful. This adds to the distinct *living* quality of their work, which part of their fundamental goal. Using live music adds immediacy to the play and allows the audience to react empathically and cathartically to live singing in a much more direct and immediate way than recorded music. At times, the audience feels they have been given permission to sing along, to be part of the moment they connect to in time and place. In *Skating on Sandgate Road* audience members sang along to the songs instantly immersed in the dramatic historical space constructed by the dialogue on stage.

Music is one of the core elements of the Fordes' playwriting and stagecraft. As they pointed out, music is one of the pivotal devices they use to both communicate emotional themes and information, as well as contextualise emotions and experiences in scenes joining and linking scenes together. The music chosen for *Skating on Sandgate Road* was more than just a 'soundtrack' and each song was deliberately chosen for the particular scene or phase that it related to. Combined with the effect of live music, music in the Fordes' work becomes a device to enhance the storytelling, another mode of language that conveys the same emotional, experiential and existential themes as the dialogue conveys. Such is evident in the following scene portraying experiences the participants related about The Great Depression;

SCENE: THE DEPRESSION

Girl 1: *I was born in 1929. Right on the Depression. We didn't have tuppence to jiggle on a tombstone.*

SONG: *BROTHER, CAN YOU SPARE A DIME? (Men sing)*

SONG: *Once I built a railroad, made it run, made it race against time
Once I built a railroad, now it's done
Brother can you spare a dime?*

Girl 2: *There were six in our family. The only job dad could get was as a fettler on the railway. He'd milk the cows before he went to work ...*

Mum enters. She is separating the cream and putting it in a treacle tin.

Girl 1: *and mum would separate the cream. Then she'd put it in a and shake it.*

Girl 2: *That's how she made butter.*

Girl 1: *One day, the lid flew off and the cream went everywhere.*

Mum: *Confound it!*

They try to clean up the mess

Girl 1: *It was an awful job to clean it up ...*

Girl 2: *The cream was this thick.*

Girl 1: *And that's all she said ...*

Mum: *Confound it!*

Girl 1: *(Woman now) She'd have a fit if she could hear what I say sometimes.*

Men: *(Sing) Once I built a tower to the sun*
Brick and rivet and lime
Once I built a tower, now it's done
Brother can you spare a dime?
A swaggie enters. He knocks.

Swaggie: *Got any jobs, missus?*

Girl 2: *These swaggies used to come knocking on our door - humping their blueys. We were as poor as church mice ...*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, pp. 6-7)

This song serves the tri-fold purpose of being a cohesive device that literally ‘holds’ this scene together, in that it provides both an oral and contextual background to the action of the scene. It also serves as a “snippet” of part of the musical culture of the play and hence, a different mode of language that contains the same emotional and experiential emphases as the scene itself. There are some moments of the play that allowed for larger/full songs to be sung which served to heighten the context even more;

Girl: *With all the clothes rationing - you never saw an evening frock. We made ours out of mosquito net and dyed them. So when Evie Hayes came out on the City Hall balcony ... there at the front ... in this beautiful white evening frock – singing her heart out! Oh!*

I can still see her up there. Singing

SONG: COMING IN ON A WING AND A PRAYER

Sung: Com-in' In On A Wing And A Pray'r

Com-in' In On A Wing And A Pray'r

Tho' there's one mo-tor gone, we can still car-ry on,

Com-in' In On A Wing And A Pray'r

What a show - what a fight

Yes, we real-ly hit our tar-get for to - night!

How we sing as we limp thru the air

Look be - low, there's our field o-ver there

With our full crew a- board and our trust in the Lord

We're Com-in' In On A Wing And A Pray'

Lighting change

The song becomes melancholy softly under ...

Girl: *I knew quite a few young boys who went to war ... and quite a few who didn't come back. And some came back and they were never the same. But it was a lovely day ... it was the best day ... the day peace was declared.*

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 17)

In this scene, the music is used less as a conjunctive device and more as a kind of exclamation mark, a point of embellishment to more sharply draw into focus the feelings that are being reiterated in the dialogue. It allows for audiences who are uninitiated in the emotional and experiential realities of particular periods in time (such as the end of the Second World War) to literally 'hear' what the feelings of this period were and are for those who lived it. Music throughout the play adds to the notion of 'suspension of disbelief', inviting an audience to imagine the re-told stories playing out in front of their very eyes. As the Fordes point out, using music that has been deliberately chosen, consistently, allows the artist to play with the audience, to invite them to imagine the worlds of the participants, and experience the emotions and feelings in a much more directed and immediate way than simply through dialogue.

The third important element is *the use of lighting*. Lighting is another tool that when used correctly and consistently, can be employed to achieve a variety of purposes. Michael Forde feels particularly strongly about lighting, likening it to ‘editing’ in film. He placed a great deal of emphasis on the lighting and spent hours designing and trialling the lighting choices. Theatre as a live art form depends strongly on the ability to proceed seamlessly and depends on lighting for establishing focus, progressing the storyline, signalling time, weather and environmental effects, and creating mood and atmosphere. The Fordes employ and insist on creative lighting, using it to its full potential. In one particular scene, introducing the theme of romance to the play and recounting some of the participants’ love stories, dialogue, music and lighting are used in unison to create a deliberate mood and atmosphere;

Lighting change. The twenty first birthday in the church hall. Brother and sister stand at the entrance and look in. The atmosphere is awkward. The girls are lined up on one side. The boys on the other. They look shyly at each other – but nobody has the courage to ask anyone for a dance.

Girl: *I hate parties in church halls. You stare at the people right opposite you. And they never come over to say to say hello. And you’re too shy to go over and say hello to them. (She whispers to her brother) If it stays like this - we’ll go home at half past nine.*

Boy 1: *Yeah, that’ll suit me.*

The brother and sister separate. Stan joins the line up of boys. She joins the line up of girls. Boys and girls continue to stare awkwardly across the room at each other. Then the music starts up. Music of the era with an old fashioned dance band feel.

Girl: *Then suddenly – the band started to play ...*

Intro to the song “At Last”

Girl: *and this young man walked towards me across the room ...*

Boy 2: *May I have the pleasure of this dance?*

Lighting change. They dance. Eventually others start to dance too.

SONG: AT LAST

At last, my love has come along

*My lonely days are over
And life is like a song
Oh, yeah, at last
The skies above are blue
My heart was wrapped up in clovers
The night I looked at you
I found a dream that I could speak to
A dream that I can call my own
I found a thrill to rest my cheek to
A thrill that I have never known
Oh, yeah when you smile, you smile
Oh, and then the spell was cast
And here we are in heaven
For you are mine
At last*

Music continues under ...

The young woman and the young man are dancing together, oblivious to everyone else. The brother approaches the dancing couple.

He taps her on the shoulder.

Boy 1: *Hey !*

Lighting change. The dream is broken

In other scenes, lighting is used as a special effects tool, to depict certain environments and activities which, in cinema would be incorporated in using a blue screen or digital effects,

Man: *You didn't have to pay money for a good night out.*

Mum, dad and the kids are getting ready to go and watch TV at the corner shop

Woman: *General Motors was on Sandgate Road ... on the corner where Honda is now. And every night at six o'clock we'd put the kids in their jarmas and dressing gowns – and we'd all go 'round and sit on the footpath and watch TV. You couldn't really hear it .. but it was television. People were moving and there were lights and things.*

Mum, dad and the kids move on up the street – they are watching the fire at Crows

Man: *Another time Crows – the big store up the road - caught on fire at seven o'clock in the morning. So we all put on our jarmies and dressing gowns and went marching up to see the fire.*

The kids go to bed. Mum and dad and the neighbours are watching a house being moved at midnight

And sometimes a house was sold removal. So when they came out with the jinker at midnight to cut the house in half ... we'd go out the front with bottle of wine – and four or five neighbours. And we all had our glass – and we'd say goodbye to the house. It was fun.

(Forde & Forde, 2009, p. 31)

The instructions in this excerpt of script were complemented with lighting effects. The “TV” was executed by silver and white flashing lights towards which the actors/students faced, the “fire” was executed by a red wash on one side of the stage and the “house removal” was executed by yellow and blue lights flashing in the style of large machinery lights. The audience were captivated by the clever but surprisingly simple use of light that transformed the makeshift theatre back in time.

Positioning the Student Actors as Creative ‘Portals’.

As established, the Fordes’ work is highly collaborative, but nowhere more so than in the project of *Skating on Sandgate Road* where they engaged with student actors and the elder participants for over three months to bring the production to fruition. From the very outset of the play, they strove to establish a strong connectivity with the student actors. Their work, as they see it, is only made possible where people are working towards the same goal. They are inherently team players and prefer an ensemble process that shares the responsibilities, the stakes, highs and lows. They strive to empower all members in their own idea of a creative hierarchical model.

Although the student actors involved in *Skating on Sandgate Road* are not given specific focus in this case study, they were a part of the performance process and thus need to be acknowledged as vital elements in the Fordes’ work with this play. The students were involved as actors and the Fordes’ expectations of them were high. Professionalism, long

hours and sometimes unrelenting rehearsal processes were part of the contract made with them but as the Fordes found, the students were more than up to what they were asked to do;

BRENT: Do you still see them as students? Do you see them as collaborative artists?

MICHAEL: I'm trying, it's part of the acting thing I guess that you were talking about before, I'm trying as much as possible to treat them as collaborating artists and not treat them as students.

BRENT: Still a developing relationship then.

MICHAEL: Yeah...

MARGERY: We're finding that more each day that they're actors. They want to be treated like actors by us.

MARGERY: I got the sense, that a couple were really excited because they knew of X-Stacy and you know, a couple of them who actually at the morning tea came up and said we're really excited about you coming and working with us. That was from a few of them. But I always feel that I'm working, when we're ever going to talk to students, I always have the question of "what do they actually think"

MARGERY: I think too with this project, they know we're in a very vulnerable situation too. We're not coming in with this wildly successful play that we've written and they're doing it. They see us... we're in the same situation as them, as that we're trying to create this thing and you're never sure that what you're going to create is going to work or is going to be good. So they're actually seeing us in an unsure situation and working with them, it's more collaborative. So I don't get the sense that we're up here and they're down here. We're working together because we're all collaborating to make something. But that makes the dynamic really interesting for me.

BRENT: You've also, I mean that you have made yourself, as you said, quite vulnerable. I mean you both shared stories, Mike did it from day one in the studio and you've done it since Margery, the things in your own life that really shape your perceptions of this project. Like Mike, your illness and your own parents. And one of the key things about this kind drama is that it's a shared dialogue. Do you think your ability to share like that is a strength? The elders have really opened up to you, opened the floodgates almost.

MICHAEL: Yeah, well I'd say I think in this sort of project you're right. It's absolutely critical, isn't it, it's not going to work if anyone is playing from the ego. You're given this gift of a story from someone who's given it to you freely, and you have, all of you, you know, the writers and the actors, everyone, has this responsibility to that, that you don't really get in any other play. You know, you can do "Romeo and Juliet" and you're quite entitled to take your own interpretation of it totally. You know, remake it the way you want to. But this is... it's as though you're holding something very, very

fragile and everyone is doing that. And that's why the sharing occurs in that way, is that you're holding this... you know, there's more responsibility in this.

(Interview 1, February 2009. Lines 61-134)

This 'ego-less' approach as explained by Michael Forde resonates with Kuppers (2007) earlier description of working in a community-centric aesthetic where,

(we are) wanting to listen, hear and tell, we are abandoned to the distance between the story and our I's, but we lean in, move our heads into the circle, hovering between the space between the I and the communal story. (p.36)

Michael was strong about the need for an 'ego-less' approach in fervently upholding that plays such as these are about the community for which they are written and not just for the artists who create them. As he communicated to the student actors, it was imperative to always be 'really seriously connecting to the beauty of this project- from life to page to stage. What we are going to do is a holy thing. A sacred thing. We are going to honour these stories'. (Field Log April 12, 2009, Lines 31-32).

The student actors had the benefit of being able to meet the participants they were going to portray first hand, and this in turn, deepened the bond and the connectivity for them with the stories they would tell. The fact that in *Skating on Sandgate Road*, they were able to observe and participate in the storytelling process was a definite advantage. Over the months I considered the many facets of this opportunity for intergenerational dialogue and how it would strengthen the overall aesthetic of the play. I also mused how elders talking to younger people in interview situations was quite a fascinating and distinct cultural act. All of the participants possessed a huge amount of local-area knowledge being that they never have lived outside of Nundah. They remember seeing the centre being built along with in numerous other important local developments. Many of the student actors were locals but just

as many came from other parts of Brisbane and had no knowledge of the Nundah area at all.

In an analytic memo, I analysed this aspect of the work and how the project was vitally important as an historical ‘capturing’ of the past;

It is in this way that the almost anthropological trait of elders passing “local area” knowledge and history to the newer generation can be seen living and working in this project. The Fordes see this as a vital element in the work they are doing here. In ancient times the social and cultural function of the elder-young adult exchange was to pass on important messages. It is in this way that ancient cultures and civilizations safeguarded their own discourse, recorded and transmitted their own knowledge and over generations retained their cultural identity. This project too, is about cultural identity, but the relationship is now a more whole one, a more circular, symbiotic one, the students are not taking the knowledge simply to sit on until they are elders and it is their turn to relay them, in fact the students are going to be relaying the stories in a few weeks. By that time the stories will be taken into the students hands to be crafted, broken down, reassembled and interpreted as a piece of dramatic art.

The students’ role in all this is to collaborate with the elders, bridging a gap of years, to collaboratively construct cultural identity. By taking these stories, making meaning from them, disassembling them and re-making them into a relevant, artistically meaningful and culturally recognized ethno drama, the students create a living, breathing, organic and real-time dialogue between young and old- displayed on stage for all to see, not only telling these stories collected, but the students own understandings of them. The Fordes’ work with the students as actors at all times, honing their skills and immersing them into the text for understanding. Michael is a serious director and forces the students to dig deep into themselves to portray the work on stage with dignity but also artistic excellence.

(Analytic Memo, March 2009, Lines 912- 952)

Part of the impetus for the Fordes’ theatre apart from the ethnography of the language and experience of the others, is also to foster a sense of commonality. The former two elements operate in symbiosis as the more detail is garnered from the participant, the more empathy exists. As a researcher, I considered it quite a daunting experience to watch the participants surrender themselves to a position where they would be potentially exposed to emotions and experiences that could be troubling on an empathic level. During the interview process there were both uplifting moments of commonality but also moments of tense emotional strain for all concerned. The ensemble could not help but be moved from the stories they heard and I,

as researcher, strove to remain empathic but objective as I collected field notes and conducted interviews with the Fordes about what was happening.

Whilst they facilitated the process, the student actors were also involved in the data collection from the elder participants and at times, the stories were deeply emotional for them. However, connecting to the emotion of the stories was essential as they would be the portals through and by which, the stories would be told on stage. This process can be best understood as “enculturation”; a sense that the student actors shared in the ethnographic process and were encouraged to form empathic bonds with the elders they would be playing. I suggest that this “enculturation” process also enabled the students to meet the elders first hand and hopefully find congruent points of commonality with them while at the same time gaining an insight into their language; the essence of a community dialogue.

This unravelling process of enculturation and embodiment is exemplified in the following excerpt from the interactions between the Fordes, the student actors and the elders;

Prompted by Margery, Stella talks about her time acting at “Twelfth Night” and as well as directing in a local amateur drama group. The participant reveals theatre and drama to be her great role. It is clear that this is the reason behind the participant choosing to be involved in the “The Great Age Centre’s” project, but more than that, Stella own love of and experience in the performing arts form a vital link between her, the Fordes, Tracey and the students. Suddenly it is as if all the people in the room are standing on common ground. The participant’s narrative exposes shared understandings and meaning.

The participant reveals that she returned to university at a mature age and studied at the University of Queensland. This fact strengthens the link of commonality between her and the students and Tracey as a tertiary educator. The students immediately can identify with a discourse that they themselves share that of university students. [Participant Two] describes her university education and the monologue suddenly becomes a dialogue.

(Field Log, February 2009. Lines 216-227)

The interview with Stella began to open my eyes to some of the deeper issues and themes at work within the project but also in the experiences and challenges the Fordes face as storytellers and as aging artists as well. I reflected;

The session is nearly over as contact details change hands. The key point of this session has clearly been that drama, theatre and the performing arts have forged a common link between Stella and the others, how she finds and creates meaning from texts of theatre and poetry and places this in her own life. This is a point that resonated with the students as well as the Fordes and Tracey. For [Participant Two], language is the structure which imposes meaning onto her own life and life in general, drama, drama education (as well as education in general) and the theatre, is for her, how life is expressed, celebrated, commemorated, remembered and most importantly, how she finds meaning within her own existence.

A reoccurring theme in this interview was that The Fordes could remember or at least were familiar with, were the many places, people and plays that Stella spoke about as part of her own experiences in theatre. It occurs to me here, regarding Margery and Michael at a kind of new angle of repose that I hadn't previously considered, is that they themselves are in a transition phase within their own lives between middle and older age. Though there are two decades at least separating Margery and Michael from the age of participants such as Stella, I begin to glimpse that they themselves have much in common with the participants, both in their recognition of names and places but also in life events such as the death of parents and serious illnesses associated with aging and getting older. For the first time, after this interview I begin to think of the Fordes' own emotional and existential journey in "getting the stories", how they must feel and what the experience must be like for them talking to people who, though older than them by some years, have much in common. It dawns on me that it is a difficult point emotionally and artistically to look into the future, a shared future, sitting right in front of you drinking tea or coffee and eating biscuits, recounting their life. The wrinkled face, greying hair, spectacled eyes are awaiting all of us in the future- old age is a part of life as is any other age.

(Field Log 1, February 30. 2009. Lines 287-318)

Moving Deeper into the Process

The assimilation of the language, experiences and realities of the participants would become one of the most fascinating and crucial elements of *Skating on Sandgate Road* as it bridged a gap between theatrical, communal and collective storytelling. The student actors would need to make the jump between their own understanding of language and everyday conversation to the vernacular of the aged. Part of their workshopping was intensive exercises on what

applied theatre represented and how it would work in this piece of community theatre. The fact that the performance would not be performed in a 'real' theatre space and would not take the shape of more mainstream traditional theatre was a real challenge for everyone. But it was the notion of the community narrative that needed to be unpacked most of all. Not only was this piece of theatre supposed to be entertaining in some way for the community, it also needed to also be a meaningful piece of oral history that could be archived by the Centre and the State Library of Queensland. The applied nature of the performance would have a wide ripple effect that would reach the community in many ways both artistically and socially. Indeed, some three years on, people still talk about the performance and the impact it had on the community of Nundah. For many, it had been a unique theatre experience that had never encountered before. It was the community aspect of the performance though that had the most powerful impact on those involved in the performance.

The applied nature of this theatre was the overlay of stories with conventions of theatre to create and facilitate dialogue and communication with, for, and through the community on stage. I was able to talk with the Fordes about the community aesthetic of their works and the applied nature of their practice;

MARGERY: I'm not sure what the community theatre is? We have never labelled our work.

BRENT: It's difficult to define, it's almost impossible to narrow down a definition. Basically applied theatre is theatre for beyond theatre's own sake. And community theatre is theatre that is generated either by or about a specific group in the community.

MICHAEL: Well, both of those things are true.

BRENT: That was very basic. And someone might contest that definition.

MICHAEL: Well, when I say we want to make good theatre we want to tell a good story and a good story is beyond just doing something theatrical and entertaining, good theatre has a certain depth.

(Interview 2, March 2009. Lines 133-145)

Here the Fordes began to realize that what has been intuitive, visceral and an experience and practice based response to making theatre with communities can be described as a particular incarnation of applied, community theatre and performance ethnography practices.

The ‘certain depth’ that Michael talks about is the notion that good theatre is connected to the community that it belongs to; that in essence theatre should be of, by, from and for, the community to whom it belongs and to which it is addressed. As described by award winning director and playwright Sean Mee (2008),

(Our community plays) can be plays about our stories, our culture, about the history, about the present day, about what we consider to be the future and those stories have to be perceived as worth telling. Worth the telling. In an idiosyncratic way that grows out of the community, because no national agenda, no international agenda wants to see a generic play, because theatre that is created of its own time and its own place develops its own uniqueness because of that. (in Downes, 2008, p. 59)

At the conclusion of the interviews, I tried to sum up my feelings and impressions gleaned from hours of conversations with the Fordes and even longer hours watching them in the field with the student actors and the elders;

I have seen in three days that these elders are very much alive; their stories are not stodgily set down in stone, each following a preordained path from beginning to end. They are fluid, changing, ever morphing into different shapes, shades, hues and colours, yes they have grown old, but even now they are not static, they are talking, recounting, recollecting and sharing.

Before the beginning of these interviews Michael Forde read the students an excerpt from William Shakespeare’s “As you like it”. Shakespeare said ‘sans everything’. I do not think that is the case, these people are not ‘sans’ anything, they retain, recall, they remember, and they ask us now to remember them through the Fordes’ artistic endeavour. Even for those whose memories may be fading, or the more frail elders

who perhaps have less days in front than they do behind, even they have something to offer, they have their life, their selves which they have given freely to this project in the very way I imagine someone buries a time capsule, or perhaps not bury but launches into space, hoping that it may share some of life as they know it with others.

For the Fordes, this project is about capturing lived experiences to show different, more organic, more fluid and more real impressions and perceptions of life, growing older and death that are offered by Shakespeare. This play is about showing the realities of life as it has been described by real people.

(Field Log 1, March 2009. Lines 1392- 1422)

Michael Forde would later tell the student actors, ‘Your line is someone’s whole life, their relationship with their children, it’s in your hands’. (Field Log 10, Line 59). This sense of responsibility and almost at times, service, was the foundation on which the script would come to be formed. For performance ethnographers and for Margery and Michael Forde, data is not something that is static, that is gathered and then inert, it is a living energy and demands attention for how it is best used and employed. Through the interviews something beyond the normal definitions of theatre began to shape and take place in *Skating on Sandgate Road*. Questions about its function and of ownership begin to open up. As Marie-Olberg (2008) states, ‘performance ethnography invites people into dialogue’. (p.1) What the Fordes had initiated was more than performance and product but in fact, it would be a *conversation* that would take place in the venue of the theatre.

The Fordes see the story forming process as a collaborative dialogue between themselves and the participants and also with the artists that they work with. How they plan, create, craft and present the drama is inextricably linked to how they uncovered the stories and how they choose to present them as well. As highlighted earlier, they do not approach the writing with any specific political or social agenda in mind. In fact, they worked to eradicate any bias or preconceived ideas when gathering the stories;

MARGERY: We try to keep that (bias) out of there and that's one of the challenges, you don't judge, it's their [the participant's] voice it's not our voice.

MICHAEL: It's scary because when you go in you don't know what the story is going to be. We didn't know what the story was going to be with "Sandgate Road" we didn't know what was going to happen.

MARGERY: You don't know what's going to emerge from it.

MICHAEL: It's holding the mirror up as much as you can, that's where we're coming from, not being judgemental and not trying to use the stories for your own political ends.

MARGERY: Or to make a point.

MICHAEL: But to have a message that says this is how it is, this is what life is, this is what it means to be human.

(Interview 2, March 2009. Lines 154-168)

In an early workshop session, Michael Forde expanded with the student actors on the process of story shaping;

Michael starts to talk about the search for dramatic meaning in these stories, imposing and constructing a meaning that then conveys the stories as dramatic action. He says, "strange things happen on stage. Someone walks across this room and it means nothing but someone walks across the stage and it means something."

It is in this way that Michael introduced the actor students to the concept of dramatic meaning and they are now tasked to find, impose and/or construct the dramatic meaning in the stories. Essentially this involves a little "bringing order to chaos" and also some aspect of poetic license. How the stories, transcribed from the interviews can be made artistically and dramatically meaningful and thereby translate to dramatic action- this is now the 'everything' of the project.

(Field Log 4, April 2009. Lines 36-45)

The Fordes seem to be the ultimate specialists for bringing order to chaos through playwriting. Writing a script whilst working on it simultaneously with the student actors was an immense challenge but one that they seemed to take in their stride. Margery Forde would work all night only to turn up early the next morning energetic and ready to block the script.

Time constraints and actor fatigue challenged their own professionalism and that of the actors and technical team but the Fordes fed off the team's responses returning home at night and making rewrites and re-blocking scenes where necessary. The collaborative nature of the work kept the process alive and moving forward and the fact that the Fordes had immediate response from the team on the effectiveness of the script kept the work dynamic and meaningful.

In an earlier interview I conducted with Sean Mee (2008) he reflected on the way the Fordes work, 'they] are immensely collaborative, they're every day in the rehearsal room, re-writes every night and the play develops dynamically on the floor. (in Downes, 2008, p. 54) Indeed, it was not unusual to see the play develop on the stage with the actors moment by moment in a raw organic way. This dynamic process became evident during the workshops on script formation and the way the script was becoming an aesthetic offering;

Michael informs the students "A script is as much a blueprint as the plan of a house- it's much more complicated- it's a moving thing." The groups each quietly discuss their scripts in their groups. From each group one of the students reads the adapted transcript which they will now develop and conceptualize into a scene. Tracey tells them "Be thinking how they [the transcripts] translate into dramatic action. Look for the meaning."

(Field Log 4, March 2009. Lines 61-73)

The ensemble was encouraged to explore the interview transcripts in the same way that they would a script and Michael Forde utilised improvisational exercises to glean some insight from them as to how the stories could be realised as dramatic action. Students were given transcripts to explore how they could be brought to life on stage. I recorded one such exercise that had taken place in week four of the project. The approach is one Michael Forde uses regularly in approaching community narrative work;

The students get into their work groups to go through the scenes they were given last week. The groups go through how they will stage their transcripts. Michael lists the important elements of these scenes as being:

- *An authentic sketch for a scene on stage.*
- *A writing exercise more than an acting exercise.*
- *Composed in a way that honours the voices.*

The next group I visit assembles on the modular staging, arranging the furniture, one takes charge of dramatic action, they seem intent on illustrating as much of their scene, which has much movement in it, as possible. The next group discusses dialogue, characterization as well as dramatic action and movement, one member of this group is transcribing the scene they are developing I hear their exchange as one student elaborates “Walk it out/act it out”. Michael Forde watches and guides the way when needed.

In this way, Michael encourages the student actors take on a very “hands on” approach to the drama, most of the groups are eager to “get up and go” or as the student said “Walk it out/ act it out”, they don’t seem to lose much time investing in the construction of ‘fleshy’ characters or talking extensively about costume and setting.

For the students, the main order of business is the ‘doing’. Margery now tells the student actors that the play has been named “Skating on Sandgate Road” which is taken directly from one of the participant’s stories. The title of the play, she explains, helps connect it to its local origins and contexts, to give a connectivity to all concerned. The students go through their scenes. Margery finds some of the emotions that the students have chosen to elaborate in their scene and stories quite confronting. She sheds a few tears.

The emotional core of this project is very real to her and also to the students who have very easily picked up on the emotional cores and themes of the transcripts they were given. These moments of heightened emotions propel the writing and script division forward as moments in transcripts rich in dramatic languages become evident.

(Field Log 5, Lines 81 – 130)

The fact that from this early in the project the emotional themes of the drama were vivid enough to be easily discovered by the student actors and also to move Margery Forde to tears, was both a fascinating and positive indication that this project was composed of some very strong existential themes. I was convinced immediately that this was due to the real nature of the stories, that they were derived from real people and the events and emotional elements

that were now being represented on stage were indeed real. Margery Forde would later reflect;

MARGERY: I found it deeply, deeply affecting on an incredibly personal level. I wasn't at all removed from it, it was very very close to me and it just felt....

BRENT: Was it healing? Cathartic?

MARGERY: I think it probably was, I never asked myself that but the number of times I cried writing it and I'd say to Mike "is this okay?" and start reading something out. I think it probably was healing.

BRENT: I think about it as cathartic.

MARGERY: But that's that universality again, I'm dealing with this, but then you go and talk to these people and everybody's dealing with something, getting older.

(Interview 2, March 2009. Lines 617 – 626)

In this very real way, the writing process of this play aligned with what Pineau (1995) describes about performance ethnography as a, 'deep kinaesthetic attunement that allows us to attend to experiential phenomena in an embodied rather than purely intellectualised way'. (p.46) For the Fordes, the stories they gather represent a much deeper connection to the existential and emotional themes than just listening to the stories. Their efforts go into placing these themes into the dramatic script in a way which will communicate the same deep almost empathic links to the realities of the other. To execute this is by no means an easy feat and essentially, what they do, is act as the interpreters and translators for the action and the emotions.

To realise this, they strive for more than just a verbatim retelling of the stories and seek to uncover a structure by which the action and themes can be contextualised. Their emphasis is as equally on the theatricality of the stories, as it is with the goal of evoking empathy. From very early on, they contextualise the voices they find and endeavour to do this with a

theatrical structure that holds up as piece of art. In one practical exercise, during the very first workshop session, they set about developing a kind of structure they wanted in the play;

Michael begins a collaborative process task with the student actors where they collaborate as a whole group to make a list of the stages of life of people typically in an Australian suburb. As Michael cleans the whiteboard, Margery sits on the floor among the students.

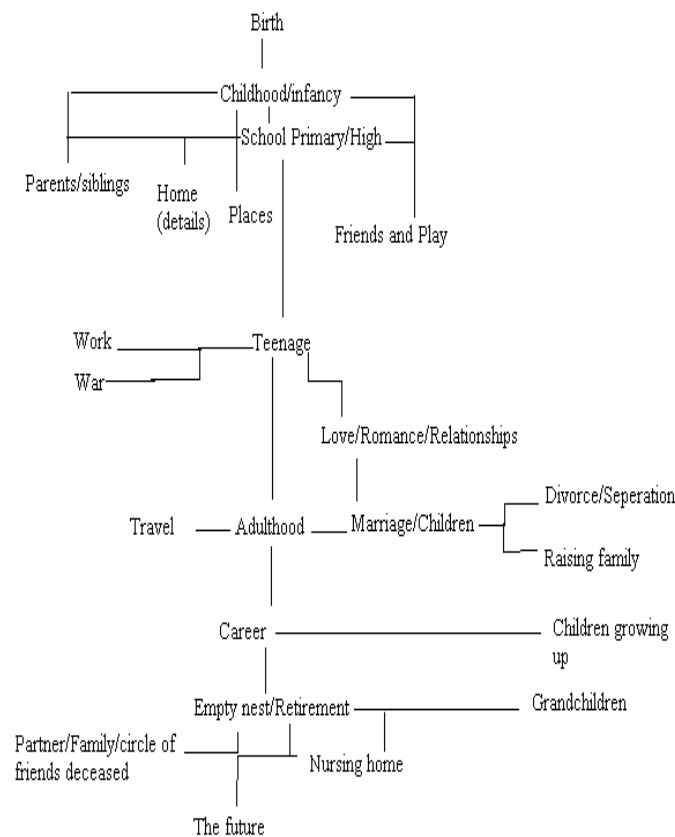
An animated discussion follows with Michael writing their responses on the whiteboard, the student actors bringing up points regarding educational standards, particularly formal education standards, in the participants' generation. The students begin to draw connections between the participants' lives and their own lives and similar stories that pertain to their own families; it seems points such as educational standards as well as changes in social mores and morals concerning marriage, divorce and children.

These are the topics that the students can easily link into their own lives. In this way the students enthusiastically draw links between the participants' experiences and their own worlds. Unbeknown to them at the time, these mile stones and shared experiences would eventually give the play the very structure that would carry it from page to stage.

(Field Log. March 2009. Lines 617 – 640)

This unfolding was to assist the Fordes in formulating a structure of the script and to essentially begin to hone the mass of transcript data into a narrative structure. The narrative was an evolving tapestry of moments in time and the data needed to represent those moments with clarity, sensitivity and authenticity. The stages of the narrative (which was not a linear one) are represented by the following diagram that exemplifies the way the stories provided flow and sequence in quite incidental ways as the stories were told to the Fordes. (Please see over page)

Student's and Artist's Collaborative Process Drama: Stages of life



(adapted from Downes ,2009)

It became evident that what was being structured relatively chronologically, with the phases and steps of the participants' lives in general, would form the different sequences or frames within the script. By week seven of the project, Margery and Michael Forde had completed fourteen pages of the script. They evaluated the impact of the script by allowing the student actors to be muses and in many ways, peer reviewers;

Michael hands out scripts to the students, and tells them “we’re not looking for a huge performance this time. Just clarity.” What begins now is a roundtable reading with the students sitting or laying on the floor. Margery sings the songs that have been included as linking devices between the different phases and stages so far. Although this is some of the first written text the students have seen, they are very invested in the reading and it is evident some are able to identify which of the elder participants

stories were used to shape the dialogue on the play. It doesn't take long for the students to get through the first fourteen pages. At the end they remark "that's amazing!" and "that's pretty good so far" The Fordes know they're on to something.

(Field Log 8, March 2009. Lines 11-21)

Later in that session, Michael would tell the student actors that the play's focus 'is more than learning the lines, it's learning the song of the piece'. (Field Log 8, Lines 27-28) This "song" he spoke of deeply links with the poetic sense that pervades their work. In essence what Michael Forde was attempting to reiterate to the student actors was that they needed to become aware of the natural poetry that exists in the language of participants' interviews and how those stories can be realised as innately dramatic. Bringing the drama and poetry of real life to the script is something I would talk extensively with Margery and Michael about;

MICHAEL: It seems people love that, the realness, they need to know in a way and I don't know if that's the same as reality television. They need to know that what their seeing is somehow based on "real" or "truth". And yet on the other hand it hasn't got quite the kudos that a pure fiction has. A beautiful writer coming out of a journalistic tradition will never get the Nobel prize.

(Interview 2, February 2009. Lines 476- 481)

After the premier of *Skating on Sandgate Road*, the Fordes reflected that they preferred and conceptualized the project to be more of a community effort than it had turned out to be but time constraints placed caveats on the way they normally work;

MICHAEL: I mean I sort of wish that we could have done more in that way (collaboration). I mean there were time constraints and there was, you know, time was so limited. And people constraints, organising people. So I sort of wish we could have done more in terms of... I mean it would have been interesting. It would have been a totally different project though, to actually really collaborate...

MARGERY: We took a long time deciding how we'd actually do it and at one stage it was just going to be the students go in, by themselves. We wouldn't be there and then we got cold feet about that. And I think we did the right thing to be there because you

needed someone who had a history of what those people were talking about to pick up on things. I think it probably would have been fairly...

MICHAEL: It's an interesting sort of question isn't it. It's a whole process question, isn't it. You know, like, we could have really, you know, sat on the process a lot as far as the students were concerned. Got them there to do all the interviews. Do all the transcriptions themselves, you know...

MARGERY: We never would have done it in the time

MICHAEL: In the time, and it would have come out pretty ordinary at the end of that time.

MICHAEL: And the other way was to go okay let's give them the best quality theatre and show them what, you know, the best quality the theatre can do and let that performance be the process. You know, let that final, let what happens in that final performance be the explosion, you know. And I think, I mean that was the decision, it was just the decision we made.

(Interview 2, September 2009. Lines 1898-1899)

Working the Ensemble – Phases of Immersion

It is erroneous, particularly in the case of *Skating on Sandgate Road* to conceptualize the writing, workshopping and staging phases and processes of the project to be distinct or independent phases in the overall production of the performance. The timeline for the play from inception, through to data collection, transcription, workshopping, writing, rehearsal and eventual staging and performance, was condensed into one academic semester in 2009, a period of approximately twelve weeks. Partly due to the time constraints and also partly due to the Fordes' mode of operating as collaborative theatre makers, there was no clear distinction between the writing phase, the workshopping, rehearsal, and performance phase of the project. The process, a fluid and organic process that evolved and changed from week to week, is best understood to have operated in three phases that significantly overlapped .- inception, workshopping and rehearsal/performance.

The *inception phase* articulates the earliest sessions of the Fordes with the students as they entered into the collaborative relationship and undertook mentorship around theatrical artistry and initiation into the particular theatrical aesthetic that they were going to be involved in. The *workshopping* phase relates to activities after the data collection was finished as the actors and the Fordes collaboratively engaged in script design and workshopped the data into a theatrical organic entity. The third phase encompassed the rehearsal and staging process as the script became finalized and the ensemble moved toward the final performance. A closer look at these phases is useful in understanding how the Fordes work and where they draw their inspiration and aesthetic impetus from.

Inception

The Fordes had a lot of initial work to do and a very short and constrained amount of time to do it. From the outset, they had the challenge of forming a cohesive and functional ensemble and establishing a common discourse with which they could communicate with the student actors effectively. They also needed to initiate them to the kind of theatrical aesthetic they would be working with as it became evident early on that the students had limited exposure to the notion of non-naturalist theatrical styles and performance ethnography modes;

When Tracey, Margery and Michael begin to explain the style of the play (non-linear/non-natural characterization and narrative similar to “Snapshots from home” and “Way out west”) the students seem confused and unfamiliar with the form. They ask questions like “does that mean in one scene we are playing one character and in another one a different character”, the students seem particularly confused about the idea of ‘no set characters’ and the use of ‘voices’.

Tracey hands out excerpts from “Snapshots from home”. Michael begins to explain non-naturalist and non-linear characterization and narratives, referring to the scripts the students begin to understand what the anticipated structure of the play will be. Both Margery and Michael stress the importance of the use of “anonymous” stories and the participants assured confidentiality of their identity at all times. One of the students describes the difference between non-naturalism and non-linear

characterization and realism; the students seem to begin to understand this particular approach to playwriting.

(Field Log 1, March 2009, Lines 107-132)

In this session which occurred in the very first week of the project's workshopping process, the Fordes quickly identified that the student actors were not immediately familiar with the use of non-naturalism and in particular the use of character 'voices.' Through the use of a real example (excerpts from *Snapshots from Home*) they immediately provided a concrete example linking and familiarised the students with the structure and the form. Of other paramount importance was the 'getting to know' process in these early stages of the project. What became evident in this session was that many of the students could play musical instruments which would later directly influence the Fordes' construction of the performance to include extensive on stage live music. The Fordes tried as much as possible to make explicit to the student actors their vital contribution to the project and to foster the feeling of an 'ensemble during' these early stages;

"Michael says: "Your attitudes, your experiences, are something new." "Your words, your words will be included in the play."

"It's not just about them, but about you "Michael discloses that they are worried about the time constraints to which there is a general murmur of agreement and one of the students says "It is a bit daunting isn't it". Michael starts talking about the underlying motivations and "bigger questions" behind the play, he explains to the students in a serious tone; "We work because we believe we are artists, we work for the art, for the project, telling the story."

(Field Log 1, March 2009, Lines 145- 156)

In this way the Fordes established a contract with both participants and the students. They needed to initiate the students not only *into* the kind of drama they were to create but also the powerful existential and emotional impetus that was charging the work. In the very first week of the workshop and ensemble phase, a memorable moment occurred with Michael Forde

communicating what he perceived to be the thematic and structural context that *Skating on Sandgate Road* would have;

Michael recounts his own life experiences and questions of life and death, in particular recent health concerns he has had. "It's an important question for me, for all of us and I want answers" Michael talks about the emergent themes of life, death, growing old and mortality.

He reads from Shakespeare "As you like it". Silence descends on the drama studio as the students are in rapt attention to his melancholic delivery of the sobering soliloquy.

(Field Log 1, March 2009, Lines 169-176)

This soliloquy is as follows:

*All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players;
They have their exits and their entrances,
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first, the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
Then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woeful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then a soldier,
Full of strange oaths and bearded like the pard,
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;*

*And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slippered pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank, and his big manly voice,
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all,
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything.*

(Shakespeare (1600) "As you like it" Act 2, Scene7)

The reading of the latter piece brought about an immediate response from the students;

Michael raises a discussion with the students; "What does this character miss out?" he asks. The students react animatedly to the powerful monologue, most criticizing the melancholic and bleak view of the character. One student comments; "If we don't grab it [life] you're just going to despair all the time." "You have to get out there and do things." He continues, Another student agrees and states "He misses out on individuality, "He is world weary when he's writing this" Another student reflects "It's the experiences that make it [life]" Michael agrees with the students and comments "It doesn't show the variety" Two students nod and agree, stating "There's the journey, that's the important part. "He omits the things that give us the happy memories"

Michael nods enthusiastically and states "Hopefully our play is an argument against that"

(Field Log 1, March 2009, 178-197)

In the inception phase the student actors needed to be introduced to the particular theatrical/dramatic discourse they would use in this process;

MARGERY: I think we felt, you know, in those initial weeks when we were doing drama exercises and because we were writing the play and we were just longing to get into it, that the play wasn't there. And so there was sort of a frustration I think. I

loved it because you were doing some wonderful drama stuff with them. But there was always that feeling of, you know, we're here to actually do this play and there was quite a lot of lead-up time before we actually had a play to do what we were here to do.

MICHAEL: But what we were learning in that was what the students could do too. You know, they were given improvisations from the transcripts and things like that. So, you could see right away if there understood what we were doing

MARGERY: That's right, they started doing that pretty early on.

(Interview 2, March 2009. Lines 1226-1236)

The constraints of time made it necessary for the Fordes to begin working with the actual interview transcripts as soon as possible, although they did have some limited opportunities to engage the students in ensemble activities to expand their dramatic discourse. I reflected on this;

I notice again how the group is coming together, forming an ensemble, a community. The students are making a transition from drama students to professional collaborative artists, and changes are occurring in the room from the teacher-student relationship to a communal exchange of ideas and artistry.

The students now stand in a group and begin a movement activity. Margery and Michael role play a simple improvisation of aggression and retreat which is illustrated in the dichotomy of "Come here, Sorry".

In pairs the students go through this improvisation. There is a lot of laughter as the students explore their own power dynamics. The group is filled with many well established friendships and relationships with gender, status and power dynamics all at work beneath the surface. This activity brings these underlying struggles and relational mores to the surface and the students seem to thoroughly enjoy seeing and expressing them in the role play.

(Field Log 4, April 2009, Lines 57-79)

Already by this point, in the chronology of the project, the necessity to begin forming the script for *Skating on Sandgate Road* became a primary focus of the sessions. I would suggest that this phase one of the most important ones in the process as it set up the 'bones' of the

work and invited the actors to interplay with the text that was unfolding. It allowed an immersion into the form and helped the actors get a precise feel of the applied nature of the work.

Workshopping

To understand the way the Fordes work as artists, it is necessary to unpack the way they excavate data, transcribe the information and bring the stories to life for the stage. It is the transformation of this data that is so important in their work. In this project, their work with the student actors was the same process they use with any participants in their community narratives; a high degree of focus and attention to the text and the precise physicalisation of it on stage. The way they used the data in an almost immediate response with the actors made the process quite unique.

As soon as data collection and transcription had been completed, the ensemble began to experiment with the transcribed material. This allowed a progressive view as to how the play would be structured. Many of these initial workshop sessions would directly inform much of the content for the final script. This approach allowed early engagement opportunities for the actors to begin to structure and conceptualize the work;

Back in the studio Margery and Michael begin role playing with the students, giving them each a short transcript of the interviews and also of the session last week. As the students go through another relaxation and centring exercises, Michael tells them softly;

“One of the most important things is to be as still as possible, is to be focused on what you’re saying and what you’re doing. It’s not about you, it’s about the story. Your body, your voice is the tool, the portal for the story. Some actors find themselves centred in the story”

He continues, “This is not authored in the way a script is authored. This is someone speaking from the heart. Someone speaking because they needed to speak.”

The students then read over the transcripts silently. After they are finished Michael tells the students to find their own space in the room and say the transcripts out loud in order to get in touch with “the feeling behind that gave impetus to the words”.

The students all read from the narratives in a cacophony of speaking and sound. They then go round the circle, each reading from the transcripts. They laugh as they encounter some of their own voices. Michael tells them after they have finished “Very strong themes are beginning to emerge about life and how people deal with it.”

Tracey then selects a small group of students to go through a scene that Margery has written. Margery reads from the transcript which inspired the mini-drama she has created. Michael reads through the technical, lighting and stage directions as the students play out the scene.

(Field Log 2, March 2009, Lines 73-104)

Using the students’ voices to unpack the transcripts gave them an instantaneous point of connection with the subject matter and identified the contextual and structural form of the piece. They were divided into working groups primarily to engage in experimentation and practical visualisation of the script. In small groups, of less than half a dozen, they were given various parts of verbatim transcript and encouraged to explore them theatrically, presenting “scenes” back to the group. I was able to record some extensive observations of the students’ collaborative processes in bringing these scenes to fruition; many of which directly influenced the construction of the final script. The students had a strong orientation towards the ‘practical’ and did not intellectualise the data too rigidly. I believe that this worked well in the initial stages to allow them to gleam a more holistic understanding of the data which would become the stories on stage.

The students’ inclination to focus on the “doing” and progressively acting out their scenes suited the Fordes’ particular methods of performance division as it instantly communicated which scenes might visually and physically look effective when presented on stage. It also allowed the Fordes to begin to conceptualize the dramatic action of the play. Similarly, the

students' attentiveness to ideas of characterization presented the Fordes with an insight to how to present the different 'voices' on stage. Both facets allowed them to gain a realistic and pragmatic insight into how the drama could be shaped and performed.

As the script began to take on a more cohesive form, the Fordes' impetus shifted away from having the young actors experiment and portray verbatim transcripts theatrically and challenged them instead to workshop and rehearse sections of script that has entered into a draft phase in the writing of the final performance. Of vital interest to the Fordes was enculturating the student actors into the 'life' of the script and making explicit to them, the ethical and humanist imperatives of the work they were involved in;

Michael talks about bringing the "age to the stage". Michael presses the students to strive for a naturalism within, to find something in their own experience, their own emotions in order to find the feeling and emotional themes in the scene. He tells them "You as an actor have to be in front of the words saying 'come on!'". Soon a new larger group of students go through a scene that is much busier than the last. This exercise is difficult for the students working at a level of intensity than they are used to. He tells them "You need to start really seriously connecting with the beauty of this project, from life to page to stage, what we're going to do is a Holy thing, what we're going to do is a sacred thing- we are going to honour these stories."

(Field Log 6, April 2009, Lines 25-36)

Recurring ideas and language around "sacred", "honour", "authentic", "truth", "justice", "celebration" and "affirmation" and other similar highly charged emotive and symbolic language, was used by the Fordes to convey both their personal beliefs about the essential gravity of the work and also to encourage the student actors to share and adopt these perceptions as well. At all times, they sought to highlight the many ethical, personal and empathetic challenges (and rewards) of the *Skating on Sandgate Road* project and encouraged the students to form a close personal association with the text, the stories, the project and the participants whose stories they were telling;

Michael emphasises “what we’re asking you to do is a huge thing: Carry the history of these people in your speech, keep that bubble of memory”

He tells another student as he blocks the scene, describing how to execute dialogue in a theatre of the round “Have this guy [and the audience] in your mind” Margery reminds the students to keep the audience in mind “We’ll see the faces of the people you are”.

(Field Log 8, May 2009, Lines 22-25)

In the next week, Michael Forde returned to the idea of connecting the performed stories with the participants from whom it originated;

Michael says to the students “I want to talk about what we’ve got here” he says “What is the play saying, what do we do with it?”

The students’ responses are related to Michael’s week one exploration of Shakespeare’s seven stages of life and how it relates to this play. The students remark “every one of those stages are important”, “a man and a woman can play different parts”, “the way people play each role is different”.

Mike asks “What is there about this play that makes us put ourselves on stage?”

The students reply “Because these people gave us their stories”, “once these people are gone, so are their lives”. Michael agrees that this is the most important element of their work together and reminds them “what you’re going to do is a sacred thing, you are going to honour these people”.

(Field Log 8, May 2009, Lines 86-95)

For the Fordes, one of the most important considerations for *Skating on Sandgate Road* was that it was to be performed primarily to the audience of participants who shaped and ‘owned’ the story. They saw this as the ethical imperative and the cornerstone around which the entire ‘world’ of the performance was built. The respect for, and dignity of, performing the stories was one of the most consistent emergent themes of their interactions during the workshop process, and often articulated in an impassioned way with notions of the inherent ‘sacredness’ and celebratory nature of their work as both theatre and community event. As Wickham

(1985) argues, ‘theatre exists to give the community a sense of its own identity’ (p.15) and as Erven (2000) adds, ‘(theatre is) an important device for communities to collectively share stories, to participate in political dialogue, and to break down the increasing exclusion of marginalized groups.’ (p.2)

Rehearsal and Performance

As the script took shape, the workshop sessions began to resemble more of a recognizable performance ensemble and less of an experimental collaborative art making environment. I recounted the first time both the space and the script blocking were changed to reflect the construction of a rehearsal studio. This occurred at a particular milestone in the project when “the first fourteen pages” were written;

The class group and Tracey talk about the rehearsal commitments. Michael tells them “we’ll try and get as many rehearsals as possible from you” It [The project] is just extraordinary, we’re really excited about you”.

Margery and Michael have the first fourteen pages of the play and they talk about the synopsis. Michael tells them “This is now a rehearsal room, it’s not a classroom or a lecture room, and it’s now a rehearsal room”. He tells them “the focus in the room is the director and the actor.” He begins to lead them through rehearsal dynamics. “It’s really just about the focus on the moment” he tells them. The student actors sit in a circle and read through the ‘first fourteen pages.’ Michael walks through an imaginary set as it has been designed, he then allocates roles. Michael hands out scripts to the students, he tells them “we’re not looking for a huge performance this time. Just clarity.” What begins now is a roundtable reading with the students sitting or laying on the floor. Margery sings the songs that have been included as linking devices between the different phases and stages so far. Although this is some of the first written text the students have seen they are very invested in the reading and it is evident some are able to identify which of the elder participants’ stories were used to shape the dialogue on the play. It doesn’t take long for the students to get through the first fourteen pages. At the end they remark “that’s amazing!” and “that’s pretty good so far”.

Tracey tells the students “think how the interviews have formed into script”. Margery tells the students some of the details of this, including parts that she envisaged would be in the play that were cut. The students begin setting about transforming the room into a performance space using modular staging. Michael begins blocking the scene; “It’s more than learning the lines” he tells them “it’s learning the song of this piece”.

(Field Log 7, May 2009, Lines 2-28)

These ‘first fourteen’ pages provided the ensemble with a way forward as it allowed them for the first time, to see a definitive script from which they could work from. It allowed the impetus of the sessions to shift away from script development and into a rehearsal mode as the technical, complicated and convoluted process of acting, coaching and stage blocking began to take place. It also gave the actors a sense of stability as they were able to begin interacting with a script in a hands-on way and direct their energies and attentions to what would be a concrete script. The first roundtable reading of these fourteen pages allowed crystallization for both the ensemble and the Fordes as to what the script would look and sound like, complete with read-aloud stage directions and music. This allowed a very visual imagining and for the first time, the stories began to take on a life. Just one week later, the Fordes presented the actors with the first finished draft of the script of *Skating on Sandgate Road* and this cemented the ensemble’s ability to move forward and begin the practical business of bringing the show to life;

The room is now fully in the guise of a studio; the floor marked up with tape and modular staging being used. Students who are not on stage sit in the ‘audience zone’ on either side of the thrust stage.

Michael tells the students “everyone’s now being looked at as an ensemble instead of individuals”. Today marks the first day of the full reading through of “Skating on Sandgate Road”. This is a round table reading, the students sit in a circle, Michael reads the stage instructions and Margery sings the songs in the script. Students ‘acapella’ any sound effects as required. The students (who are acting as audience) laugh at some of the dialogue as it is read by their fellow performers.

(Field Log 8, March 2009, Lines 45-60)

After a couple of intensive hours, the group gets to the end of the reading and they all applaud. After a brief break and warm up, Michael addresses the group;

“It needs to have a bubble of life, a soufflé at the top of the play.” “We need to set the light at the top of the play and we can move into the dark things later”. The rehearsal begins- this is the first time with the full cast and with a definitive script.

(Field Log 8, May 2009, Lines 3-18)

The ensemble only had a very short time, approximately three weeks from when they were presented with the ‘first fourteen pages’, to bump in to *The Great Age Centre* and into the final phases of rehearsal and the final performance. In those three weeks, the group undertook an extensive and gruelling rehearsal process, much of which I did not record as most of the activity that happened was the usual expected interactions of a theatrical ensemble. Scenes were exhaustively blocked and re-blocked, staged and restaged and rehearsed over and over again. In the week before the ensemble moved to *The Great Age Centre* I was able to record some memorable moments and interactions between the Fordes and the student actors;

This week there is a large cathartic moment on stage. All the students are present and there is music. In this moment, the student delivering the monologue (which is the “snowflake speech”) is obviously emotionally moved by this piece and there is a collective silence at the end of the scene, just after which all the students clap, laugh and exclaim with astonishment. As I feel the tension lift. Margery comes over to me and says exuberantly “That’s exactly what we’ve been waiting for!! They’ve [the students discovered the meaning of the play!.”

Later as the students discuss this catharsis and performing high emotional moments on stage, one student remarks on performing painful or sad memories to the audience that “it’s going to hurt them” Michael reassures “they have volunteered all these stories themselves, It’s okay, it’s called catharsis.” Tracey reminds the students “you just need to give it the space and dignity it deserves, you just need to let that live”.

(Field Log 9, June 2009, Lines 3-13)

It was also in this session that the ensemble was able to progress the entire way through a full run with minimal guidance from the Fordes. Later, during the notes session, in what would be

the last session before physically moving to *The Great Age Centre*, the Fordes were able to share some particularly memorable thoughts and moments with the students;

Later during notes Michael tells the students “I think that you need, as an actor to inhabit the wisdom, inhabit the experience, inhabit it as though it really happened to you.” He tells them about turning points in the play, “the play is now going to get quite still.” He reminds the students of the importance of being conscious of the language and language use “the clue, if you know your grammar, is to hit the verbs. Verbs are the most important words in the English language”

As the session concludes it will be the last time the group is in this space, from next week, the ensemble moves to “The Great Age Centre” where the staging will happen and the process moves into its final phases. Michael shares his thoughts with the students:

“Your line is someone’s whole life, their relationship with their children, it’s in your hands. There’s a point of interest that you are young people are telling these stories. You know that time that Marge was crying? Well, she was crying because you, because it was you telling the stories: young people telling the stories of these old people. It wouldn’t work with older actors, it’s for you, it’s for younger people. Younger people telling the stories of these older people and it just rips us apart. When people come to see this play they won’t think about Margery and Michael, they will think about you, the actors and it’s as if you have heard these stories and you have such respect for them; you’re living them. I want to throw it to you now, I want you to feel the play, I’m not going to say a thing. You have gone to a full run in less than a week. A new play, a new play with changes happening around you and you manage to stagger through a run and I think it’s bloody brilliant. It’s an enormous headspace for you guys, enormous. Your posture is you’re dying to get on stage, we’re telling this story and it’s your turn and you’re going to kick arse! You can’t laugh and enjoy the play for yourselves, you are the crew and the captains, you have to take charge and guide it. Grab the focus and take it. It’s yours! “

Tracey reminds the students “This project will never happen again, we’ll never have the money again. The seniors’ lives, the ripple effects from this, they have been affirmed and celebrated and they thank you for that.”

(Field Log 9, June 2009, Lines 48-75)

This exchange helped prime the whole ensemble for the final stages of the performance and solidify both the emotional and ethical grounding of the project with its theatrical essence and appeal. In a real sense, this exchange set the stage for the beginnings of the Fordes’ “letting go” and passing over the final creative control to the student-ensemble. *The Great Age Centre*

main hall space had to be reconfigured into a performance space complete with the traverse stage and a full lighting rig. The relocation to the new space came with the challenges of adapting to the new space and having to have a full technical run while the final-definitive lighting design was implemented, tested. This happened while the lighting crew had a chance to familiarize themselves with the lighting boards and adjusted lighting design and layout. As soon as the ensemble moved there, all rehearsals became full dress and technical runs. I was able to record the Fordes foregrounding the final performance;

The Great Age Centre” ‘home ground’ of the elders and birthplace of the stories that have formed the project. The main hall has been reconfigured to fit stage specifications, lights, sound and stage equipment is being assembled and configured. The students are in their costumes.

The chorus is being assembled to practise the songs and a-cappella pieces of the show. Margery plays the students some of the recorded voices of the elders, there are both laughs and a few tears from the students, there can be no doubt after happening like these that the elders are extraordinarily precious to the students and the students have very truly come to an ownership of not only the elders, but the stories they have been told and are now embodying. Margery cleverly weaves a link between the students and the elders. Some of them, who are portraying elders they did not meet or interview, begin asking questions about them.

I am noticing the students using dialogue when referring to the elders such as “my elder” or “your elder”- this is further evidence that the students have come to a kind of embodied ownership of the elders and their stories.

Margery tells me “this is just why we did it, it [the play] was written for them, for this group, it’s about life for these people, it’s about the heroism of everyday life, they don’t feel old in their own minds, I don’t feel sixty three. I feel the students honour these stories. There’s almost an ancient history going on here of oral histories being passed down and living knowledge. I don’t care if the play has a commercial life -it’s for these elders and these students”.

(Field Log 10, June 2010, Lines 3-22)

On the day of the performance the student actors arrived early and the Fordes set about their final handover of the work. There was only time for one full run before the show premiered

and I was able to record the interactions between the Fordes and the ensemble at these closing stages of the project before its premiere performance;

The “Great Age” Centre’s main hall has all the elements of performance venue, ladders stand around the stage, lights are being configured and replaced on the frame above the studio. Extension cords, pieces of equipment and tools lay around the stage. The students are putting on their costumes, having their hair and makeup done. They assemble and Mike and Marge address them

Michael tells them “A trite, old statement, but a true statement. Cool heads, warm hearts. Honour those people who gave the stories, who will be in the audience.” Margery recounts an encounter she had with one of the elder’s earlier in the day “It dawned on me, we know it intellectually, but it dawns on me, what this play is”

Michael tells them that his and Marge’s work is nearing its completion and it is now the students’ responsibility. He tells them he is handing over the production to them he tells me “I’m doing nothing now, I’m making it up to them, I say: “I trust you”; it’s an important part of theatre”. This is the last recording I make of Michael and Margery talking to the students. I notice as the performance draws near, that Margery and Michael approach each student individually and talk with them one on one but I chose to let these moments remain private between the actors and the artists. Less than half an hour before the premier, the students gather with Margery and Michael on the stage and we close the stage doors. Again, I allow this moment to go undocumented, allowing the final words shared in the group to be a private exchange. The elders are arriving and the lights are going down. Tracey takes her seat as do the Fordes. It is time.

(Field Log 11, May 2009, Lines 24-36)

This very necessary handing over ritual allowed an ownership of the work by the actors and set up the energy and focus needed for the stories to be told with a deep connectivity and authenticity. It was a powerful moment, a daunting moment but a joyous one as well.

‘Goodnight Sweetheart’. Summary and conclusions from *Skating on Sandgate Road*

Skating on Sandgate Road was performed twice that day. The first was a matinee session attended mostly by the elder-participants who had given their stories and other patrons of *The Great Age Centre*. This session was opened by the then Lord Mayor of Brisbane Campbell Newman. The second performance was an evening session mainly attended by the families

and friends of the student ensemble as well as other interested people and some staff from Australian Catholic University. The makeshift but effective theatre space was overflowing with people. Outside many more people were trying to purchase last minute tickets. The word was out that the performance was going to be a once in a lifetime experience for the community and people who had previously not thought about coming suddenly felt a great sense of urgency to be part of it all. Many missed out and many begged for a third performance to be staged. To this day, there are still requests to stage the performance again. When the play was finally performed, it was decided that the entire cast would be present on stage throughout the duration of the show. Inter-changing between being standing and sitting at the rear of the stage, they formed what can be identified as a 'chorus ensemble'. This would also be accompanied by on-stage live music and a Brechtian style 'singer' to sing most of the play's lyrical score. With the exception of the singer, the cast was clad in identical (gender tailored) costumes similar to the aesthetic that was used in *Cribbie*. The deliberate choice was made for the matinee session since it was mainly patronized by the elder-participants whose testimonies created the possibility for *Skating on Sandgate Road*. At the conclusion of the show, the cast would be allowed to directly inter-act with the audience. It was a gem of an idea. As an audience member on this performance, I recorded my observations of this moment;

To my right and left and everywhere I look I can see some of the elders. Mental note-taking where they have all chosen to place themselves, I confirm that they are all in attendance. Throughout the show I saw nodding, laughs, smiles and some tears too. Yulienka and Yegor in the front role, hold hands through the performance as she nodded with approval. At the conclusion Friedrik steps off the stage as Boris rises to greet the actor that played him. The two link arms and smile to each other, Boris with tears streaming down his face as the two embrace.
(Field Log 12, June 2009, Lines 1-7)

It was this image and this moment that powerfully demonstrated the scope and essence of the project. As Doug, *The Great Age Centre* manager had earlier explained, one of his

“objectives was to bridge the generation gap.” (Interview 1, October 2009. Line 35) This goal was certainly achieved. It was theatre for the people in the true sense of the word.

This was the most telling and poignant example of that goal being achieved. Despite the relatively little critical or industry attention that the project of *Skating on Sandgate Road* received from main stage (or other) industry, it was considered to be both an artistic and professional success for Margery and Michael Forde, fulfilling their prerequisites of being artistically excellent, worthwhile and meaningful as well as an admirable and incredibly praiseworthy achievement. *Skating on Sandgate Road* was considered to be a success from the point of view of all the major stakeholders in the project and the Fordes still hold hope there is a future for the script in relation to publication

At the time of this thesis writing, (2012) the play has not been performed since and remains unpublished. However, Dr Tracey Sanders uses excerpts from the script as regular teaching and learning aids in her advance level drama units at the Australian Catholic University and has presented numerous papers on the project at national and international conferences. The Fordes often comment that *Skating on Sandgate Road* was, in their mind, their most worthwhile, challenging and rewarding project because of the chance to facilitate intergenerational dialogue between the elders and the students and to experience catharsis from the project relating to issues in their own lives. It was a true community shared theatre experience.

As final words, at the time this chapter was completed, one of the central elders “Boris”, who words gave the play its title and much of its content and narrative arc, passed away. Another one of the elders passed away also only a few months after the performance and her family expressed the joy of having the play as a testimony to some of her life experiences. The story

and photographs taken during the interviews are now in their possession. The play served not only to unite a community who had forgotten about the value of its aged citizens but also provided a legacy that will be lasting and precious one for the families of the participants.

Towards the end of the project, the Fordes stated that while they always attempt to forge a strong connection between their ensemble and the participants, this is sometimes limited by constraints of time and mutual ease of access. They also acknowledged the kinds of tensions that can exist between trying to shape a great piece of theatre with such constraints. However, *Skating on Sandgate Road* was an extraordinary exception. They felt that it presented one of the best examples of a mutually beneficial compromise in that the student actors were able to focus on the participants and workshop the script simultaneously as the narrative was written. In their eyes, it was an astounding success written under extremely challenging conditions. There had been very little time and a very limited budget and the actors were on the whole, inexperienced. However, as a community narrative, as community based theatre, it surpassed all expectations.

In the next chapter, the last, this thesis will conclude with a discussion and summary of the main points of analysis that have been garnered from the dialogue with the Fordes and readings of the play. These are discussed in relation to future contributions and elucidations they offer to the scholarly areas of community and applied theatre, ethnography as playwriting and contemporary artistry. This chapter will also discuss future considerations for artists and community/applied theatre praxis that have emerged from this case study. Directions and suggestions for future scholarly research will be offered and the thesis will conclude with a reflection on the artistic work of Margery and Michael Forde.

‘Curtain’

Summary and Conclusions

*At this,
the last minute.
I consider the grand, grand future.
Not tomorrow, or the years to come.
But thousands of years.
In that
dread expanse
what chance
do these words have
of mattering
or of
not mattering?*

*All I know is that for whom they are written
they matter very much.
And for me who has written them
they matter very much.
Even my hope that,
that is enough.
Will not last.

But it still is.*

(Reflective Memo in Poetry, July 2009)

Summary and Conclusions: On fluidity of form, the strength of dialogue and the imbedded ‘sacredness’ of the Fordes’ theatrical journey.

The process I have undertaken with the Fordes and the myriad discussions we have shared have been extensive, both in the scope of their own artistry and the scope of these dialogues themselves. The thesis posed the main question, *What are the elements, processes and aesthetics of the ‘community’ playwriting expounded by Margery and Michael Forde?* and then subdivided it into a number of focus questions as follows:

1. What exactly constitutes the theatre of Margery and Michael Forde? What are its identifiable elements? What are the elements that give it structure and purpose?
2. How do they work? What are the processes that give the work impetus? How is the theatre constructed and executed?
3. Why do they work in this way? What are their philosophies and underpinning tenets from which they work?
4. What does their work offer as theatrical and community performance in contemporary theatre?

The unravelling case study was so rich in data as Margery and Michael Forde are the consummate storytellers, generous both in their disclosures and in the time they vested into sharing their thoughts and practice, that the questions were answered naturally and often without deliberation on my behalf. There has been a depth of information, an unravelling of answers and just as many questions arising at every turn. As part creative, part scholar and part ethnographer, I have found that this thesis moves through many different modes, across multiple boundaries of theatrical creativity, practice and scholarly research.

What began as a case study of the Fordes’ work as community narrative artists, became a rich immersion into a hybrid of theatre styles, forms, genres and theatrical/playwriting techniques. Additionally, the Fordes brought to the research, a blend of professional, personal, spiritual,

philosophical and artistic/aesthetic motivations and visions I did not expect. One major insight that has emerged is that their theatrical process and style is fluid, blurring, and a sophisticated blending of genre and form. Their community narrative work is evolving, dynamic and presently unsurpassed in Queensland playwriting.

In terms of what *constitutes the theatre making* of the Fordes, this research has identified that the Fordes' plays are structured in such a way that they have strong narrative arcs but flexible and fluid narration styles and characterization. All three of the main plays explored in this thesis use a chronological style where the plays' narrative arcs progress forward in time from past, to present and through to aspects of future. Driven by participant testimony and an evolving structural and aesthetic goal to give their work a kind of 'historical' shape and impetus, their plays have a similar feel to verbatim historical documents and indeed are shaped in such a way in that they are comprised of primary source material (testimony) and lived experience.

This strong, chronological narrative backbone allows for the malleability of the Fordes' dialogue, character and textual design. There are no 'set' characters in their plays, instead an ensemble of actors recount a variety of stories and scenes that are reconstructed and/or reimagined from participant testimony. The plays' ensemble form a 'chorus' of voices that recount the story in a variety of ways. There is a dominant usage of direct-audience address in the form of in-character monologues that usually comprises of the exact verbatim testimony from the participant interviews and used to literally 'tell' the story to the audience. The audience are part of the story, the telling, the moments in time. The audience is never a passive element but considered an important part of the storytelling.

The Fordes also use dialogue and conversational exchanges between characters so that stories are told within the narrative space of the play. Significantly, characters talk both to each other and the audience. Additionally, the Fordes employ dramatization of personal testimony where stories are re-imagined and replayed physically and dramatically on stage. Evolving experiences related through testimony are re-constructed and re-played. In *Behind the Cane* (2011) the Fordes also, for the first time, explored the use of performing story-telling in song with verbatim testimony used to construct the lyrics of the musical pieces.

In addressing *the inherent processes of the Fordes' theatre and how they execute theatre* for effect and empowerment, there are distinct identifiable elements and techniques. The use of music (both sung and played live on stage), dance and movement, non-naturalistic acting and story-telling (such as direct audience address, talking in and out of character and enrolling as children, animals and inanimate objects) creative lighting and sound design, are all readily recognized and essential components of the Fordes' theatrical style. These techniques are usually associated with Brechtian style epic theatre and as such, are used to disrupt emotional catharsis but in a different way Brecht intended. The Fordes employ these techniques to 'heighten' naturalism and draw out, embellish and high-light the emotional elements and themes of particular stories and scenes. Music, in particular is an important element of their playwriting language in that it serves to shape, direct and colour the action and narration of the play, being a cohesive device and adding the flavour of being the music of the participants' worlds. It also serves a strong dialogic, narrative and aesthetic purpose as the music is carefully chosen to suit and enrich the particular themes, motifs and feelings of the world of the play, its overarching narrative and the individual scenes themselves. By using live on-stage music the Fordes inject an emotional energy into the narrative that could not be achieved by pre-recorded music.

The Fordes strive for uncomplicated, verging minimalistic stage and set design in their plays. The same is true of their costume design with a staple uniform being used for all members of the ensemble. This creates a palatable ‘everyman’ aesthetic and allows cast members to move between different voices easily and seamlessly. Where extra punctuation is required, ensemble cast can adopt extra features to their costume to portray different characters and voices on stage. Where the stage setting and costume design are uncomplicated and understatedly simple, the lighting, sound design and on-stage movement choreography are highly complex. The Fordes believe that these theatre tools are tantamount to the tools of editing in film and they employ them in much the same way, as punctuation, embellishment, camouflage, adding narrative strength and complexity to the stories.

In terms of style and genre, the Fordes straddle three paradigms of theatrical practice - applied theatre, community theatre and performance ethnography (ethno-drama) blurring and blending philosophies, techniques, intentions and styles from the three dimensions. Certainly, I would argue, there is a neat fit of performance ethnography and community narrative writing under the broader umbrella term of applied theatre particularly when we consider the value of the Fordes’ work to inform and enrich audience knowledge about specific cultural sub groups. Further, in terms of aesthetic direction and personal motivation and philosophy, the Fordes are driven by varied and overlapping elements and themes ranging from a preoccupation with ‘truthfulness’ and ‘authenticity’ and an emancipator agenda of affirming people/participants and communities to tell untold stories to be told. Certainly, in this way, personal histories are affirmed and realised on the stage. Importantly, the Fordes strive to offer a different view of the past and to be writers of professional excellence who uncover the ‘natural’ poetry in seemingly mundane and everyday stories.

The paramount element that has emerged in this research relating to the Fordes' theatrical methodology, is that their work is always an active organic reflection of the living process of theatre making: a complexity of storytelling, sharing, empathy, collaboration and artistry. And it is this that lies at the heart of *what drives them, how they approach their work and what gives their theatre impetus and animation*. For them, the theatre is also about themselves as people, as practitioners and as artists. One of the enduring messages to come from them in this thesis, is that there is an implicit mutuality in their theatrical process and product. They *are invested, embroiled and implicated in the theatre making process in a deeply personal way and are co-travellers in the journey towards a collaborative 'truth.'*

They unabashedly explain that they love stories and they embrace the act of searching for and finding stories. Time and again in my conversations with them they made reference to both the challenges and rewards of creating theatre from stories of the 'everyday'. In their own 'data collection' phase of talking to participants and transcribing their interviews, they told me they search for the 'natural poetry' within people's dialogue. They argue that the stories they gather contain the best translations of the human condition for theatre because they are real, raw and uncensored. From their point of view, their work is often enriched and given impetus by encounters with 'seanachies' (natural storytellers) who provide the dominant narrative arc for their performances. This is certainly the case in *Skating on Sandgate Road* (2009).

As well as the inherent poetic and aesthetic value of the stories, I argue that there are the valuable dialogic and emancipator themes that make the stories unique. Through theatre, the Fordes work to empower participants and their communities particularly those who may have

been voiceless for some time. Their community narratives operate on a platform of emancipation, and at times, but not exclusively, are educative, as participants are affirmed by having their stories told to a wider audience as the audience is informed of injustice or marginalisation. Importantly, participants are invited to share their stories, their experiences and points of view in ways that extend beyond themselves as storytellers and the Fordes as playwrights. Their stories and all they contain are shared not only in the community from which the stories are born but to myriad audiences across many contexts. Through the telling of community stories, *a performance can become an agent of emancipation and affirmation*, liberating and enfranchising those the stories are about.

I suggest that another important function of the Fordes' work serves is the gathering and documenting of memories in what is essentially, a theatrical archive. The memories and remembered experiences of people are recorded and communicated to a wider audience in a creative and aesthetic way that brings them back to life on the stage. In this way, the Fordes work brings into light the 'hidden', and most importantly, offers remembrance to that which may have been forgotten or ignored otherwise. It is these overlapping aspects, particularly the third, remembrance, that compels the Fordes to attach an inherent 'sacredness' or 'holy' nature to their work. Their endeavour is to display, present and re-imagine what is lost and forgotten, particularly when generations pass, and re-invigorate the memory through the telling and communal remembering of their stories.

Recommendations for artists and industry professionals:

Although discussions of the practice of other artists, artistic professionals and the wider creative industry landscape or trends is beyond the scope of this research, there are a number of worthy insights for emerging playwrights/ethnographers of community narratives and to

the theatre industry in general. The Fordes, as current working contemporary artists, occupy a particular niche in the landscape of current Australian and Queensland performing arts and playwriting. However, it is erroneous to conclude that they operate in a creative vacuum, excluded from other artists in the theatre industry. Indeed, their work should not be considered in isolation away from other artistic and professional creative industry practice but an organic part of an emerging paradigm. A number of ideas that are of potential value for developing artistic practice and creative industry direction are outlined in the following discussion and address the sub question, What does their work offer as theatrical and community performance in contemporary theatre?

At the core of implications and suggestions arising from this case study for contemporary theatre praxis and scholarship, is the emerging theme of the inherent worthwhile-ness, artistically, professionally, personally and sociologically for artists/playwrights to proactively engage and create with communities. The writing of communal and culturally specific plays and the use of real participant testimony has a bi-lateral purpose in catering to an identified audience need and interest in 'local', 'home grown' and 'Queenslander' stories. Such creative works serve as a portal through which individuals can explore deeper themes pertaining to human condition in local 'everyday' stories whilst engaging with the dramatic form. I would suggest that the possibilities for emancipatory, cathartic and community building dialogue through such works as the Fordes , should not be underplayed or seen as 'soft option works' or 'theatrical tokenism' where marginalised or voiceless groups are 'used' to create feel good mediocre theatre. Indeed, working with community groups in theatre projects can;

- Animate stories of myriad dimensions that span diverse cultural and societal experiences, perspectives and ways of knowing.

- Empower groups to share stories that make powerful and unique forms of theatre.
- Enable individuals to partake in applied forms of theatre that can be shared with their own and wider communities.
- Affirm the lived experiences of marginalised and voiceless individuals and groups whose stories may not otherwise have been heard.
- Make exciting and organic forms of theatre that can be performed in any space by various individuals who are not necessarily actors.
- Offer historical documentation of diverse lives through a theatrical medium that can be performed for years to come.

With these points in mind, it is a strong recommendation of this research that theatre artists or industry professionals consider engaging the community in playwriting projects and include reality testimony as script where possible and on a greater scale. The use of ‘real’ dialogue that is derived from interviews should not be devalued as the content for dynamic scripts for, as the Fordes have found, it is in the seemingly mundane that the extra ordinary exists.

There are a number of theatrical and artistic techniques used by the Fordes which this research suggests would be particularly useful for emerging playwrights and more broadly, drama educators. In particular, the implementation of recognizably Brechtian catharsis-disruption techniques used for the converse purpose of heightening the naturalism and cathartic elements of performances is of value. It is a recommendation of this research that artists consider experimenting with some of these techniques and elements with a view towards embellishing and heightening narrative elements instead of disrupting them. In the Fordes’ work, the audience is drawn in through the use of these techniques rather than detached from the emotion on stage. The audience is invited to engage, to immerse and to partake.

The use of live on-stage music as a particular realization of the ethno-dramatic work is also noted as a possibility for expanding theatrical work. Music, used contextually to both form and inform the narration as well as embellish the emotional content of scenes and stories to create ‘the world’ of the performance, is one of the most effective and distinguishing marks of the Fordes’ theatrical style. As in *Behind the Cane*, using participant testimony to create songs is an innovative and imaginative realization and incarnation of dramatic work. It offers possibilities away from and beyond singular narrative dialogue and opens the doorway for stories to be told in a number of exciting and engaging ways. The way the songs were moulded from participant interviews in *Behind the Cane* was one of the most powerful experiences I had personally encountered and it enhanced the theatre form not only because it added light and shade to the spoken dialogue, but it also tapped into the Islander musical rhythm and cadence so embraced and recognised by the community.

For theatre professionals and companies, this thesis makes a strong recommendation that ‘local’ flavoured community plays should be considered as an offering in theatre seasons on a regular basis. This is a unique and powerful way to bring the community into the theatre, for individuals to participate actively in making theatre and to make theatre an accessible art form for all. Whilst it may seem a daunting prospect to launch new works in this way, the benefits are numerous and the ripple effect of the collaboration should not be underestimated.

The work of the Fordes has, because of this agency, a palatable sense of community ownership and creates a vested interest in those they write about. In turn, the community has the same vested interest in the stories that evolve from their playwriting. The participants, their families and the wider community to which they belong, all form a viable audience

group and are likely to attend in large numbers and spread information about the performance to places and peoples that are outside the established marketing base of theatre companies - particularly those estranged from or unfamiliar with theatre.

Additionally, plays such as *Skating on Sandgate Road* (2009) and *Cribbie* (2009) operate at relatively low cost compared to other main stage theatre productions due to their small cast sizes and simple staging design. The Fordes' work, like much community-centric work historically conducted in Queensland, can be created with low resource or financial expenditure since the stories are in the communities themselves and the required resources for the final theatrical product are modest. The result is powerfully dialogic and whilst the plays often offer cultural specificity such as in *Behind the Cane*, they also tap into universal themes and experiences.

Recommendations for Future Research

The Fordes employ a robust method of working combining qualitative-style research techniques and collaborative workshopping with traditional theatrical script writing and authorship. It is a recommendation of this research that working artists employ a similarly thorough method of working. Considering the work of the Fordes as an intuitive, evolving ethno-dramatic style, offers possibilities for playwrights to utilise established qualitative research methodology tools, techniques and practices on a far greater basis than simple dramaturgy offers.

More precisely, the Fordes' work operates as its own kind of research model in both a theatrically and scholastically viable form. They set a clear precedent for considering how qualitative research paradigms and practices can be used to influence, shape and form

theatrical (or other) artistic processes or products. Artists, practitioners and theatre professionals are encouraged to take this on-board and investigate the use of how qualitative ethnographic research paradigms can shape and inform their artistic practices. Further, implementing qualitative dialogue as play script posits possibilities of creating research relationships between working artists and scholars on a grander scale than simple one off community 'projects'. The possibilities of collaboration between artists and scholars through the lens of qualitative and collaborative dialogic research are many and varied. A recommendation of this research is for artists to proactively engage in scholarship and in dialogues for mutual information and benefit. Suggestions for possible projects include:

- Collaborations with historians to document specific cultural and social mores or practices.
- Creating community plays with medical professionals, the homeless, prisoners, refugees and asylum seekers and other such groups where dialogue not only forms script but also musical scores and poetry.
- Working inside communities over a period of months or years in an anthropological style to record the histories of districts and regions through a performance for future reference and archival collections.
- Collaborations with social workers and psychologists to form performances with interested participants to educate students and communities about challenges and triumphs individuals face.

One of the strongest recommendations this thesis makes for artists is to continue to work not only as creators of dramatic form but as scholars as well. Theatre praxis should not exist in a vacuum of self indulgence nor be locked into traditional forms and genres of representation but rather be dynamic in pushing the boundaries of imagination, style and approach. Playwrights and other theatre professionals play an active in shaping contemporary creative

arts discourse and enriching the field of knowledge that exists on contemporary creative arts, artists and art praxis. There are several directions and themes that can be expanded or pursued in further research, particularly in the areas of applied and community theatre, performance ethnography and other community-centric dialogic theatrical works.

This thesis offers insight into how these elements are explored and worked in a very specific way through the lens of a case study of Margery and Michael Forde. As Ackroyd (2007) points out there needs to be ongoing evaluation of the dimensions (such as community based theatre) of applied theatre and its myriad applications. Arguably the same is true for advocates of performance ethnography particularly in the way the Fordes use participant interviews for the dual purpose of making theatre and harnessing historical snapshots. It is a recommendation of this research that more specific case studies be conducted as ongoing evaluation of the different dimensions and paradigms of contemporary artistic and theatrical practices both in Queensland, Australia and internationally.

As I posed in earlier research (Downes 2008), part of our creative and cultural history is a cognisance of what is happening now in the contemporary sphere. Through case study and the gathering of qualitative data, scholarly theatre discourse can be shaped *as it happens* and provide immediate and rich perspectives of the way theatre works and the way it is formed. In particular, this applies to works that are progressive and occurring ‘at the coalface’ like community theatre. Future drama researchers should consider qualitative and dialogic projects in partnership with existing and emerging artists which allows them to become active collaborators in the construction of the history and discourse in the field of playwriting. The Fordes are the ultimate dramaturges and playwrights in the area of community narrative plays in Australia presently, who exclusively gather the content of their work through extensive

research and field work. This is done in a deliberate and time consuming way so that the work not only stands as exemplary theatre but also as a theatre of authentic storytelling, of organic and raw humanity. Their work has provided a sphere where creative arts and theatre/drama researchers can inform each other in a robust, creative and collaborative way.

Theatre and drama practitioners have an opportunity to further the emancipator and humanist agenda of work like the Fordes. By engaging proactively in recording not only the work and the testimonies of participants but by also expanding on the dialogic impetus and importance of the works through publications and discussion, exciting frontiers can be forged. Theatre artists have the chance to establish more insight into the theoretical underpinnings of their work and style as well as work towards more robust methodologies for working in areas such as performance ethnography and applied theatre.

Participant experience in the applied/community theatre and performance ethnography context is not a major element of this research and warrants further exploration. This is a rich area which is currently not untapped but certainly would benefit from more extensive investigation. Similarly, the economic viability and audience impression of works such as the Fordes is another area that warrants potential scholarly inquiry. Furthermore, ethnographic style case studies of currently working artists, their creative processes and the Australian theatre industry at large could reveal further insights into the practice of story-telling and art-making.

The Future for Margery and Michael Forde

At the time of the conclusion of this research (September/October 2012), the Fordes have been in a rest period following their intensive and exhausting work convening three major

community-centric and ethno dramatic plays over the 2009-2011 period. Both *Skating on Sandgate Road* and *Cribbie* were performed just within a year of each other, with *Behind the Cane* the year after. At the time of this writing, *Skating on Sandgate Road* remains unpublished although the Fordes have tirelessly negotiated and sought printing options for the script. *Cribbie* was published by Playlab Brisbane in late 2012 as part of a series of verbatim and reality plays written in and about Brisbane communities and is now available for distribution and sale. *Behind the Cane* as noted earlier was nominated for an AWGIE award in 2012 and whilst not successful was commended highly and is expected to have a printing/publishing release in the near future.

The Fordes have been approached by a number of commissioning bodies to engage in new projects and new works on a variety of subject matter, including the 2011 Queensland Floods but none of these offers have reached fruition. At the time of the writing of this chapter, they are in negotiation with a commissioning body for a new work on a yet-to-be-specified topic but negotiations and conceptual design are still in their early stages and there are few details at this time. I enjoy an ongoing creative dialogue with the Fordes who keep me abreast of the developments both in their lives and their professional careers. We speak regularly on the phone, email and sometimes meet for chai at a ‘trendy inner city cafe’ where stories are bountiful and rich.

Margery and Michael Forde are in the business of telling and listening. For them, stories exist in the minds, soul and psyche of the teller and arrive from people’s natural inclination to tell stories, sometimes in the most exquisite ‘natural’ instinctive poetry. Stories exist everywhere, everyone has one and they exist in the everyday, the ordinary. Sometimes it is the most offhand and unnoticeable thing that yields a story of such flavour, colour and

intensity, it defies explanation. For the Fordes stories are sacred. They are our way of remembering ourselves, each other, our place in the cosmos, our tribes, and our place in the community. They are rich with views and perceptions of history, of time, place, space, of events and phenomena. The Fordes would assert that you can never really know the past. But they also believe that the views, experiences and perceptions of the people who lived in those 'pasts' are just as real, if not more real, than what the recorded histories say. Stories are living memories. They are fluid, organic and multi-layered.

I now believe stories are journeys. They are records and unfolding happenings, weaving textures and tones that blur and bend between what is 'real' and 'truth', what is remembered, related, recorded and retold. Stories are the embodied sacredness and the spiritual nature of the move from life, the reality agency of participant telling, to page. The Fordes' take simple but powerful human stories, give them meaning and then mount them on stage where the stories take on a theatre life. The human bodies and voices of actors act as the platforms for the tellings. Stories are the quest for knowing ourselves and others, the listening and the making sense of things. Ongoing, eternal, and as much a part of the human experience as talking, thinking, dreaming and being. This has been but one story for the telling.

{curtain}



Myself and Michael and Margery Forde. December 2010

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APPENDICES

Appendix One

DATA EXEMPLARS

Okay, we might just lead into that (*unclear*). Is it an act, or is what you're doing now with the students and with the elders, because you're both performers, what acting is there. I mean Michael, you've talked about that you assume a role of a teacher, of a director. How much of it is an act? Is it authentic? Is it an act? Is it a fiction that you've created?

Comment [B1]: LANG/STORY

MICHAEL F We hope it's authentic. I mean when you're interviewing somebody you have to be as authentic as possible, don't you, because human beings are so good at picking up lies, and so good at picking up disinterest or fakery, that... And I guess if there is any acting in it is that you have to really motivate yourself. It's sort of true, I think, that you have to motivate yourself into real interest into whatever the topic is that you're interviewing somebody for.

Comment [B2]: LANG/STORY

MARGERY F But then it becomes genuine. You know, it always becomes genuine. It's always exciting and you've got to say (? well that's what) we're doing, we're going to interview (? this honestly) because that's their lives. (? And we said, you know,) where is this going to lead us, is this going to be interesting. But always (*background noise*), always... (*background noise... inaudible*)

Comment [B3]: LANG/STORY

MICHAEL F Speak up for the microphone Marg.

Interviewer Did you find that coming to the project you, what were your sort of... before you began, and you might have to sort of think back now, but before you actually sort of met the students and you met the elders, what were you anticipating and what did you think that you would have to do? Did you think that you would have to maybe feign interest or you were worried about how the students might perceive you or anything like that?

MICHAEL F Yeah, I guess we were worried about the students...

MARGERY F I wasn't worried about talking to the elders. I mean when Tracey said this is what we were doing, the (? aspect) of going and talking to people. I'm always (? thrilled) with that. Whenever anyone asks us to do anything that involves gathering real stories I feel really excited, because I know it's something I really enjoy and I love writing this type of thing. We were tentative about how the students...

Comment [B4]: ORAL/REL/STORY

MICHAEL F We didn't know what the students would be like. We didn't know whether they would, you know, not be attached... and that was our biggest worry, which turned out to be no worry at all.

MARGERY F Because I remember Mike saying now this is going to be hard because (? we're) used to doing Black Rock and X-Stacy...

MICHAEL F And we're doing this like, you know, Nundah suburban storey. And that was a worry, was that much. (*background noise*)... turned out to be really good...

Interviewer So on day one, whether you (*background noise*) the first time the students or the elders (? *unclear* centre) or whether that was the first session you were

all together at the drama studio. What were your initial impressions of the students?

MARGERY F going to the morning tea, which you weren't at...

MICHAEL F I wasn't there.

MARGERY F I was really impressed. I was really impressed with; I mean I was worried about that encounter. I thought they were all going to sit and there was going to be (? desks)... were you there at the morning tea? And I walked into this room and they had it set up just a big long table with students (*unclear*) and it was just talking and people leaning in like this talking to each other. And I was just thrilled. And then what impressed me was the actual interviews, the way the students presented, that they all came really well dressed and looking like they had a real respect for the people that they were interviewing. That was surprising. We've heard so many horror stories about people working with students...

MICHAEL F At uni, you know.

MARGERY F Yeah and we're just not finding that at all here. (*inaudible*)

MICHAEL F Yeah, that's right. That was a really pleasant surprise. We talked before about (*background noise*) losing their energy and all that, that that's natural.

Interviewer Do you still see them as students? Do you see them as collaborative artists?

MICHAEL F I'm trying, it's part of the acting thing I guess that you were talking about before; I'm trying as much as possible to treat them as collaborating artists and not treat them as students.

Interviewer Still a developing relationship then.

MICHAEL F Yeah...

MARGERY F ... finding that more today, that (*background noise*) that they're actors.

MICHAEL F I want to do that. I don't want to (? the curse) of the teacher, student relationship.

Interviewer Because you're not drama lecturers. You're not tertiary drama educators.

MICHAEL F No and I don't want to take on that responsibility, you know. All I want to do is... and I feel as though if we can get across (the plan) that it's the moment in the play that's important, and that's all we're concentrating on is to try and make that moment the best we can...

Interviewer How do you think they see you?

MICHAEL F Oh God, (*background noise*) a bit of an idiot, I don't know.

MARGERY F I mean I got the sense (? with some of them), a couple were really excited because they knew X-Stacy and you know, a couple of them who actually at the morning tea came up and said we're really excited about you coming and working with us. That was from a few of them. But I always feel that I'm working, when we're ever going to talk to students, I always get the sense of what do they actually think. You know, if we're going to talk to them about particularly something like X-Stacy and I'm sixty-three years old, they've read the play and they've done the play, and you walk in and you get the feeling that they think hmmm.

MICHAEL F those old codgers.

MARGERY F I don't think they feel that about (*background noise*), I don't know what they feel about us.

Comment [B5]: REL

Comment [B6]: REL

MICHAEL F No, they think I'm a young, groovy, I'm sure they do.

Interviewer It's very possible.

MICHAEL F It's highly possible they think that...

Interviewer Because you don't look your age, either of you. I mean that's not just a compliment, that's a statement of how you appear. I mean, you know, you're obviously older but no-where near I don't think what you think you look like. And I think that's everybody, we don't...

MICHAEL F Well that might be also to do with the industry as well, the industry of theatre. When we go in and do a play it's a leveller. Like you don't, you play people of different ages but you're just all actors, you know. Like there's no sort of sense of... not really a sense of age, is there. It's about what role you've taken and how well you're going to do it. And you're playing the young person because you're young and you're playing the older person because you're old, but we're just actors. So it's just a levelling thing.

MARGERY F I think too with this project, they know we're in a very vulnerable situation too. We're not coming in with this wildly successful play that we've written and they're doing it. They see us... we're in the same situation as them, as that we're trying to create this thing and you're never sure that what you're going to create is going to work or is going to be good. So they're actually seeing us in an unsure situation and working with them, it's more collaborative. So I don't get the sense that we're up here and they're down here. We're working together because we're all collaborating to make (? history). But that makes the dynamic really interesting for me.

Interviewer You've also, I mean that you have made yourself, as you said, quite vulnerable. I mean you both shared stories, Mike did it from day one in the studio and you've done it since Margery, the things in your own life that really shape your perceptions of this project. Like Mike, your (*background noise*), your own parents. And the students have started to share that as well. And one of the key things about (*unclear*) drama (*background noise*) is that it's a shared dialogue. Do you think your ability to share like that is a strength? Can you talk about, you know, that you felt that you're able to open up to the students, but the elders have really opened up to you, opened the floodgates almost, and that the students are also imparting and there's a lot of sharing going on.

MICHAEL F Yeah, well I'd say I think in this sort of project you're right. It's absolutely critical, isn't it; it's not going to work if anyone is playing from the ego. It is and, you know, you're given this gift of a story from someone who's given it to you freely, and you have, all of you, you know, the writers and the actors, everyone, has this responsibility to that, that you don't really get in any other play. You know, you can do Romeo and Juliet and you're quite entitled to take your own interpretation of it totally. You know, remake it the way you want to. But this is... it's as though you're holding something very, very fragile and everyone is doing that. And that's why the sharing occurs in that way, is that you're holding this... you know, there's more responsibility in this.

Interviewer It's not fiction is it.

MICHAEL F No, that's right. I mean you are making a piece of art out of it and you're moulding, the clay you're moulding from is fact.

Comment [B7]: REL

Comment [B8]: STORY/ORAL

Interviewer [It's not imagined, though is it. These lives are not... actual lives, they're not imagined lives.]

MICHAEL F When you say to something, you know, we lived at Rivington Street...

Interviewer They really did.

MICHAEL F Well you lived at Rivington Street, you know.

MARGERY F And then when you (*background noise*) my husband left me with a child and he threatened to smack me in Queen Street. We're doing that and it's incredible (*background noise*) on how we do that. How she's allowed us to take that story and that. And is always that worry when they send off the transcript they'll say actually I made a mistake, I don't want you to (*background noise*).

Interviewer But they didn't.

MARGERY F No. But then when we portray that, we have this incredible responsibility to (? hop into that) (*background noise*)... we've got to feel it. We've got to really understand what it was she went through, to portray that. They're very fragile (*background noise*)... and it's about a sensitivity to the material and the way...

MICHAEL F I think we got that. That's first stage isn't it. It's first stage when you create something like this that, everyone to understand that. To understand that responsibility and I think, you know like you said about these guys, they picked that up very quickly. Really quickly.

MARGERY F I was really, you know, that discussion we had a couple of weeks ago about Rita saying, I think it was Rita, and she said (*unclear*) was wearing a nigger brown shirt. Were you there that day?

MICHAEL F Yes.

MARGERY F And we were talking about should we use that word and they said oh yes, I think we need to because, you know, it was of the time and other thought it wasn't actually anything derogatory, it was just something (*background noise*). And Frank said, I don't know; I don't know how her being in the audience how she would feel about us showing that. And it's really important for them to have that because that's what we have to do and it's fantastic that they start...

MICHAEL F That debate.

MARGERY F That debate, yeah. That debate about how far can we go.

Interviewer Do you think it's affecting (*unclear*), the debate?

MICHAEL F You know, the process...

Comment [B9]: LANG

Generally just everything, you know. A couple of questions (? that are Skating on Sandgate Road specifically). So we'll start with number one and this is probably one of the difficult ones, because it was something I talked about with (Don Rudd) as well because Q150 is such a complicated and controversial thing to understand. So how Queensland is your latest work, particularly on Skating on Sandgate Road? How indicative of Queensland to you think it is? Is Queensland central to your work and in what way?

MICHAEL F Well yeah, I mean we always say we like to tell stories of our tribe and, you know, geographically I guess Queensland is where our tribes are placed. And yeah, I mean we have been very forthright that, against some argument occasionally with some of the plays that they should be, specifically reflect the culture that they're in; specifically reflect the culture, haven't we.

Comment [B10]: STORY/ORAL

MARGERY F Yeah, we have. And I mean a number of times with (? X-Stacy), you know, we've been approached about moving rights to that and it's always been oh but we'll move it out of Brisbane. And we've just said no...

Interviewer You want to retain its place.

MARGERY F Yeah. We did let (Milo's Way), which has been (*unclear*) in New Zealand become a New Zealand play. Because we were asked about that and we thought oh no, no. But it's worked. But we just, I suppose we write about what we know and what our experiences are and, but what you were saying, you know, what Don Rudd said about Sandgate Road that it's got a universality and a spinelessness, I think that would be true no matter where you went in this country that those experiences of that particular...

MICHAEL F ... in the west, possibly in the western world.

MARGERY F In the west, in the western world, yeah.

MICHAEL F But there's something really great about specificity as well, you know. When you do say Sandgate Road, I mean you're placing a very specific place. Somehow that sort of, for me stories that have that specific placement, you sort of allow the universal to come out of that, you know.

MARGERY F I love that quote, that Willy Russell quote, where he says if you can write well about your own backyard you're writing about everybody's backyard. And I think, and we were just talking about that on the way here, you know. I love Alan Bennett's writing because it's just so grounded in something that I know about real working class beginnings. And I mean his experiences are very different to mine. You know he came from England...

MICHAEL F He's your peer and all that.

MARGERY F But there's still a universality about when you're writing about, and I suppose...

MICHAEL F When you say specific, you know, his characters are set in that sort of, you know, lower middle class Yorkshire place. But you've seen the...

MARGERY F Talking Heads.

MICHAEL F Talking Heads, so they're very specific to that particular part of England. But then, you know, it's about life and death and relationships.

MARGERY F And I think we're asked a lot of times to write stories that are particularly Queensland. Like (? Privy) at the moment, it's just... I mean you couldn't get anything specifically about a particular place than what we're doing at the moment.

Comment [B11]: STORY

Interviewer And it's certainly the case with Sandgate Road. As Mike just said, you can't get more specific than naming a play after this place.

MARGERY F That's right and we...

MICHAEL F And there's also a thing too isn't there where Australians in general, and Queenslanders specifically devalue their own experience. (*talking over the top*) value the fact that their own experiences are universal, are worthwhile a way of exploring the universal theme.

Interviewer It's a very difficult thing to find in Australian literature. This sense of selfness. This sense of we are in this place, in this time and that is inherently valuable. In European literature it's extraordinarily common. And there are great novels and plays written about people who just write about their childhood or their family. And there's a massive pride in it but not so much in Australia.

MARGERY F Well David Malouf really was one of the first to do that (*talking over the top*), Edmondson Street...

MICHAEL F Yes, it was just that beautiful description of that Queensland house.

MARGERY F Yeah, and it was literary and it was about us. But, you know, when I was growing up there were no stories about us. It was all English stories, but your identity came from England. You know, there was nothing.

MICHAEL F Yes, and then later America.

MARGERY F Yeah, so...

MICHAEL F But it's important and valuable that people should know. And that's what happens, isn't it, when people go to see Sandgate Road, when those people saw it. And they saw that their own, when you put their lives on stage you do sort of rise it into a sort of a, that universal area don't you. And I think they do sort of, hopefully they do value, they get some value out of saying yes, well, you know, our life, our experience here in Queensland, in Nundah...

MARGERY F In this street...

MICHAEL F ... is as valuable as, you know, Champs-Élysées.

Interviewer Like you look at something on the surface that's quite ordinary and then you look at people who've lived in the suburbs all their life, in most cases, in the same suburb in a lot of cases. But out of it come these rich stories. And I mean, I'm just (? key) thinking and I've written about this in my thesis, about Marcel Proust. That on the surface it's about this weird kid, but underneath there's this really rich tapestry of almost intoxicating proportions.

MARGERY F Yes, have you read it?

Interviewer Yeah, I'm currently reading the second, because it takes a really long time.

MARGERY F I know. I've taken it out of the library so many times and never finished it. (*talking over the top*) ... and I think well maybe I should just read five pages a day, because I love...

MICHAEL F ... difficult, really tough.

MARGERY F But I love that. I love that absolute, you know, god of small things...

Interviewer And Sandgate Road is such, and why I'm reading Proust is because there's such a similarity between Sandgate Road and what Proust is doing. There's almost back-breaking mundane.

MARGERY F Yes.

Interviewer ... intoxicating beauty and just underneath it, fighting to come out, and if you persist with it it just knocks you completely flat.

MARGERY F Do you know, we're battling that with Cribb Island at the moment... that is real working class ordinary people, no money. They were worn diggers, shell grit diggers, and fishermen, and you're just going... and then suddenly out of all this stuff you go, oh it's this. This is what it's about. It is the ordinariness of it, you know.

MICHAEL F You've got to accept that, accept it for what it is. And you can't actually force it to be something else.

MARGERY F No, but then that's the beauty. Like (*unclear*), I so agree with that Brent, now, it just comes out of writing. It's the detail and, you know, just that, you know, the old holding the mirror up thing.

Interviewer And it's incredibly powerful. Once it becomes apparent, once it comes out and you realise that it's there it's an incredible force and it's a force to be reckoned with. It's a huge thing. This kind of leads onto the next thing; in your understanding of the terms applied and community theatre, how do you see your latest work within these? Do you categorise your work theatrically, theoretically, within a certain mode or model? Why? Why not? How so? How not?

MICHAEL F I don't know if we do. I mean you just want to make good theatre, you know, with the tools that you've got. And, you know, we've actually, this was like a new experience for us working (with the students). We hadn't really done this before and it ended up being good theatre. And so it's just about making the best theatre you can and you don't really compromise on it do you. And I don't know, the thing about do we go for any particular model, I don't know. I mean we do... as you know we're really stuck on this about gathering stories from people and researching and finding those sorts of things, from out there. That's our bag, you know, rather than being the sort of writer that comes from in here. We're sort of, this sort of (*inaudible*). But that's about the only thing I can say about our model really. Otherwise it's just what works, you know, what makes...

Interviewer You've never stuck the flag in the ground that says community fed or (*talking over the top*) and waved it around. And I think (? Tracey Sanders) specifically has noted that about and continues to remind me about that you guys have never waved, particularly a community theatre or applied theatre flag. You wave the (Margery and Michael Forde) flag and that's about it, and you don't go looking for...

MARGERY F I'm not sure what the community theatre flag is.

Interviewer It's very difficult to define. And so is applied theatre. It's almost impossible to narrow down a definition. Basically applied theatre is theatre for beyond theatre's sake, very basically. And community theatre is theatre that is generated either by or about specific communities or community group.

MICHAEL F Well, you know, both of those things are true aren't they...

Comment [B12]: STORY

Comment [B13]: LANG/STORY/ORAL

Interviewer Very basically. And, you know, I might, as some academic, might walk along and challenge those descriptions because this is a hotly contested thing.

MICHAEL F But, you know, all theatre, I mean when I saw we want to make good theatre, we want to tell a good story and a good story is beyond just doing, you know, something theatrical and entertaining. A good story poles a certain depth. So you've got to have that. You can't just do it for, you know, just do it for glitter and, you know (*unclear*) in it's own way as well. But that's not really interesting is it. It's to do with a sort of an entertainment, purely and simple.

Interviewer I guess you kind of answered this in part. But in terms of playwriting and theatrical styles, can you elaborate on your latest work. Is there anything that particularly influences you? Not just Skating on Sandgate Road, but everything you've written. Is there anything particularly that you're like I write like this, or is it really your own thing?

MARGERY F I think we're always actually really conscious of not, of you not hearing our voice in what we write.

MICHAEL F Trying to keep that out.

MARGERY F And we try to keep that out of it. And that's one of the challenges in writing, you know, you don't judge you just... it's their voice, it's not our...

MICHAEL F And our theory too, because when you go in you don't know what the story's going to be. You know, we didn't really know what the story was going to be with Sandgate Road. We knew how it would happen, but we didn't know what the story...

MARGERY F You don't know what's going to emerge from it.

MICHAEL F And, yeah, it's a holding a mirror up, isn't it, as much as you can. And trying to be, that's where we come from, trying to be non-judgmental or not, and not use the stories for your own political ends of, you know, to...

MARGERY F To make a point.

MICHAEL F To make a point or give a message, but just say this is how it is. This is how life is. This is what it means to be human, you know.

MARGERY F And we might, you know, there may be something there where you think, you know, there could be something that you strongly disagree with in what's been said and then, you know, you still make the decision. But that's what's been said so you...

MICHAEL F That was difficult, wasn't it, in, at the end of Snapshots from Home, where people said oh yes, it was a good idea to bomb the Japs. There you go, and I wish I hadn't really said that.

MARGERY F Or even to use the term Japs...

MICHAEL F But then you finally say well this is who they are, you know, this is what they believe. And then you say well if you've been through like six years of war and your best friends have got killed and your brother's come back from a concentration camp in the Burma Railway or something. And you go well why wouldn't you feel that way.

Comment [B14]: STORY/REL

Comment [B15]: STORY/ORAL/REL

The students pick up quickly that the Forde's won't tolerate their inattentiveness and 'messaging around' and start to participate more fully in the discussion talking about the last interviews that were conducted on the weekend. One of the students claims "There were no horrible stories." This is a particular point that has begun to emerge; I agree that the main theme of most of the interviews was resounding and at times surprising positivity from the participants. However, I wonder what the student is really saying here. Do stories have to be 'horrible'? And they almost have a point, where were the dark stories that exposed times of tragedy, hopelessness and personal trials? I look back over my own notes and the stories are there, darkly, always suggested, and alluded to, never spoken of outright. For me this makes them take on a more insidious nature than if the participant had just 'blurted out' their darkest experience. Instead, the 'horrible' stories are hidden, veiled in mystery, lurking darkly and with a sinister sort of vibe under the surface, like whispers.

Comment [B16]: REL/ORAL

The students however don't seem to have qualms with the positivity and good humour expressed by the participants. They enjoy laughing as they recount some of the interviews and stories they have heard over the weekend. Michael starts to talk about the search for dramatic meaning in these stories, imposing and constructing a meaning that then conveys the stories as dramatic action. He tells the students "strange things happen on stage. Someone walks across this room and it means nothing but someone walks across the stage and it means something."

Comment [B17]: LANG

It is in this way that Michael introduces the students to the concept of dramatic meaning and they are now tasked to find, impose and/or construct the dramatic meaning in the stories. Essentially this involves a little "bringing order to chaos" and also some aspect of poetic license. How the stories, transcribed from the interviews can be made artistically and dramatically meaningful and thereby translate to dramatic action- this is now the focus of the project.

Comment [B18]: REL/STORY

Margery talks about the intense emotional core of the stories when she reveals to the students "I found myself writing some of this stuff and just weeping". The dense emotional core of the subject is something that I myself noticed in the final interviews on Sunday, the participants gave us their voices and with the voices came a certain element of weight, things were revealed that are difficult to process emotionally and also sit with for long amounts of time. Stories of participant's deceased friends, relatives, loved ones, tales of hardship and suffering as well as the stark realities of ageing all presented to us vividly, lucidly and in real time. I muse that there are many deep emotions and also anxieties that are alive and at work at the core of this project.

Comment [B19]: REL

Tracey talks about the responsibilities the students now have to keep the participants' identities confidential along with any stories or information which is sensitive and/or personal. She then gets them up on their feet and in a circle for a vocal and physical warm up which Margery and Michael enthusiastically join in on.

It's about an hour later now and the students are soon split into their work groups. Each group will compose and conceptualize a scene based on an interview transcript which is given to them. I am excited; this is the crux of my research, the beginnings of collaborative process ethnodrama. Michael informs the students "A script is as much a blueprint as the plan of a house- it's much more complicated- it's a moving thing." This introduces the students to the concept of process drama, some of them are more familiar with the concept than others but this is definitely a departure from traditional modes of theatre where they are given an

already written play and project and expected to perform it, instead they are now collaborative artists, playwrights in their own right and they are shaping the drama at its rawest, most basic inception, the drama begins here to be collaboratively constructed around them.

The groups each quietly discuss their scripts in their groups. From each group one of the students reads the adapted transcript which they will now develop and conceptualize into a scene. Tracey tells them “Be thinking how they [the transcripts] translate into dramatic action.”

Comment [B20]: STORY/ORAL/LAN
G

Michael selects a number of the students to stand up on the modular staging. He gives them no further instructions. After a silence the students begin laughing and talking amongst themselves. They are confused and awkward, they wonder what is happening, and they vacillate between awkwardly laughing, talking and silence. Suddenly Michael asks them to count the lights, they immediately do so, each telling how many lights they think there are in the room. Michael lets them sit down, telling them the exercise was developed by Stanislavski to illustrate that actors must “always have something to do on stage”.

Comment [B21]: LANG/REL

He continues talking about actors who he says “come in all shapes and sizes and different types of personality.” He describes the most important aspect in acting is “putting all your heart and soul into the action”. He describes both the theatre and life as being a search for details that stand out or strike out in some way that sets them apart from the norm.

“Most people” he says “go past in a grey blur, but some grab your attention.”

Comment [B22]: REL

Michael now asks the students to sit in a circle. He introduces them to a “clap” game, which is designed to establish a flow of energy, a rhythm around the circle. He explains the importance of this activity as illustrating a poignant aspect of theatre-making which is collaboration and community. He tells the students “we want to treat you as an ensemble, the combined talents of this room create the play”.

I notice again how the group is coming together, forming an ensemble, a community. The students are making a transition from drama students to professional collaborative artists, and changes are occurring in the room from the teacher-student relationship to a communal exchange of ideas and artistry.

The students now stand in a group and begin a movement activity. Margery and Michael role play a simple improvisation of aggression and retreat which is illustrated in the dichotomy of “Come here, Sorry”.

In pairs the students go through this improvisation. There is a lot of laughter as the students explore their own power dynamics. The group is filled with many well established friendships and relationships with gender, status and power dynamics all at work beneath the surface. This activity brings these underlying struggles and relational mores to the surface and the students seem to thoroughly enjoy seeing and expressing them in the role play.

Comment [B23]: REL

The group takes a break at half past eleven. After a short break the students are restless and noisy. Margery and Michael call them into the circle. After a warm up they launch into another improvisation activity where in pairs they must improvise a short scene with the aggression/retreat roles. Again the students are amused by being able to explore their power and push-and-pull relationships, this time through their own discourse. The first few pairs of students immediately enrol into power relationship archetypes such as Father/Daughter, Brother/Sister, they fictionalize the discourse in relation to these archetypes. Michael encourages them not to enrol but instead to remain in their own identity, instead of investing in a character and a fictional situation, trying to make the situation as real as possible. The students quickly adapt and instead of investing in fictional characters, the content of the scene and tensions of task, surprise and relationships are all expounded in the students’ own voices. They thoroughly enjoy the activity.

After the scenes are finished the students get into their work groups to go through the scenes they were given last week. The groups go through how they will stage their transcripts.

Michael lists the important elements of these scenes as being:

- An authentic sketch for a scene on stage.
- A writing exercise more than an acting exercise.

- Composed in a way that honours the voices.

Comment [B24]: REL/STORY

Joan talks a lot about her school life and growing up during the war years, she continually comments on everyday realities such as air-raid drills, war-rationing, tram-rides and school uniforms. All these details Joan is vividly able to remember and recount, which paints a much smaller, precise, personal and immediate picture of Brisbane-life during the second world war than the large and dehumanized straight-historical view that the students are perhaps used to.

Joan also talks extensively about her time performing and involved in the performing arts and theatre. Her experiences in theatre further solidify the 'common ground' that I have noticed everyone in this conversation to be on. More stories follow of her marriage and honeymoon, Joan is further able to recount the facts of these events and Allan jokingly remembers the humorous circumstances that surrounded them. Allan reveals that he runs a computing class for seniors and the students laugh as he admits he is "an avid 'Googler'". It turns out that computers and teaching others to use them is his pastime.

Comment [B25]: LANG

Joan also enjoys computers but confesses she much prefers reading books and regularly patronizes the library. Joan reveals she likes to travel, especially to conferences where she enjoys meeting likeminded people, she laughs and states "I talk a penny off an iron pot!". Everyone laughs.

Comment [B26]: LANG

Asked by Tracey what her hope for future generations is, Joan argues passionately for younger people to have a good "ethical standard". She is distressed to see the standards in manners, language and how people conduct themselves become more lax in her opinion. She talks about changing social mores and morals between generations which she attributes mostly to the media and younger people's immediate access to media through internet and television etc.

The session is nearly over as contact details change hands. The key point of this session has clearly been that drama, theatre and the performing arts have forged a common link between Joan and the others, how she finds and creates meaning from texts of theatre and poetry and places this in her own life is a point that found much sympathy with the students as well as the Fordes and Tracey. For Joan, language is the structure which imposes meaning onto her own life and life in general, drama, drama education (as well as education in general) and the theatre, for her form a crucial part of how life is expressed, celebrated, commemorated, remembered and most importantly how she finds meaning within her own existence.

Everyone stands and bids farewell to Joan and Allan who leave together. Margery continues to be fascinated by the precision with which Joan remembered details as well as her extensive historical knowledge of Brisbane and the culture of theatre which they share.

A reoccurring theme in this interview was that Margery and Michael could remember or at least were familiar with many of the places, people and plays that Joan spoke about as part of her own experiences in theatre. It occurs to me here, regarding Margery and Michael at a kind of new angle of repose that I hadn't previously considered, that they themselves are in a transition phase within their own lives between middle and older age. Though there are two decades at least separating Margery and Michael from the age of participants such as Joan Cook, I begin to glimpse that they themselves have much in common with the participants, both in their recognition of names and places but also in life events such as the death of parents and serious illnesses associated with aging and getting older. For the first time, after this interview I begin to think of Margery and Michael's own emotional and existential journey in "getting the stories", how they must feel and what the experience must be like for them talking to people who, though older than them by some years, have much in common. It dawns on me that it is a difficult point emotionally and artistically to look into the future, a shared future, sitting right in front of you drinking tea or coffee and eating biscuits, recounting their life. The wrinkled face, greying hair, spectacled eyes are awaiting all of us in the future- old age is a part of life as is any other age and I begin to think of Margery and Michael's own viewpoints, whether they feel the immediacy of older age as they are closer to it than the students, whether they are aware of the level of commonality and similarity that I have begun to notice between experiences the participants tell and experiences that Margery and Michael reveal they themselves have had. I wonder if it is like looking into a mirror, an aged mirror perhaps? A mirror that is aged only ten or twenty years, which is not incredibly long in the scale of a life. I begin to become aware that "aging" is something that is at the emotional core of this project and time will tell how all the participants, the students, Margery and Michael, Tracey and even myself respond to it, respond to the fundamental truth; that we are going to grow old, some sooner than others and how we respond to this fundamental truth when it is presented to us, living, breathing, remembering and sharing a story for us to interpret, a real story, from a real person, living a real fundamental fact of life that we all must live some day.

Comment [B27]: LANG/REL

"I said : 'It's white! And cold! What is it? Its snow?!" – Mary G

Mary is a short, stout eighty one year old woman who I meet after a short bathroom break at about noon. The day is warmer now and some fatigue is starting to set in. She sits at the table with a large white hat on jovially talking to Michael and the students about some travel she has done in her life as I make myself a coffee and return to my desk in the corner of the room, stretching my wrist and getting ready to write once again.

From the onset it is clear that theme of this interview is travel. Mary is enthusiastic to tell her anecdotes of her quite extensive travelling life. Probed by the students, Mary tells of growing up in Mackay and Rockhampton and eventually moving to Brisbane. She tells of a series of dogs she had as pets when she moved to Brisbane and also of her wedding day, she laughs as she cheekily retells that she had to be put on a box for her wedding photo as she was much shorter than her late husband. When asked about their courting, she tells how they used to go to the cinema and her husband (then boyfriend) teased her when she cried in "Lassie! Come home" .

The students (both male) laugh and exclaim as Mary tells them that her late husband would ride a pushbike large distances to come and see her for dates and they would ride large distances together. In the age of widespread cars and public transport this is an unknown to the students who are teased jovially by Margery, Michael and Tracey on whether they will be showing the same physical devotion to their girlfriends.

Prompted by Margery and Michael, the participant tells about her early days in Nundah, in particular about her first stove. There are murmurs of recognition from Margery, Michael and Tracey as Mary tells of some of the brands of stoves from the period which she is recounting. Again, I muse about these points of recognition between Margery, Michael and Tracey and the participants and I think more about my "aged mirror" metaphor and about how these little treads of recognition begin to weave together in a discourse of 'aging' that seems to envelop, entwine around and bond Margery, Michael, Tracey and the participant. The students seem less in tune to the discourse of ageing as the stories and points of recognition are fewer for them, their culture is the culture of a different generation, their discourse is the discourse of the 21st century, their social consciousness is rooted deeply in their younger ages, their fewer life experiences and less exposure to simply the "chronology" of life and the world.

Comment [B28]: LANG/REL

However the students can identify with and are interested in Mary's stories of travel. Mary reveals that the impetus for her quite extensive travelling was the death of her husband and mother and it was important for her to "get out of the house" and "get over it". This participant reveals herself to be widely travelled and has been throughout most of Australia. She recounts long distance train trips, bus trips, her anxiety about "going underground" in Cooperpeddie (sp?) and her first glance of snow: "I said ; 'It's white! And cold! What is it? It's snow?!" . It is with this kind of anecdotal and conversational based storytelling that Mary discourses her travel experiences. This reminds me of a statement Michael made in discussion with the students of "people becoming their own playwrights" through this kind of "telling" language which directly recounts speeches or parts of speech as they occurred from the participant's point of view. Mary is particularly indicative of this anecdotal and conversational kind of storytelling, using "snapshots" and "parts of speech" to tell her story.

Prompted by Margery and Tracey, Mary reveals she has eight grandchildren and thirteen great grandchildren. She recounts some of their occupations. She also talks about the opening of the Golden Years centre and that one of her daughters had a wedding reception in the hall and she tells of the exercise classes she did when she first started at the centre.

Mary tells of how one of her great grandchildren bears an uncanny resemblance to her late husband, this story is found extremely amusing by the others and she animatedly recounts how the child is like her late husband. From this topic she goes on to say "I feel him around me all the time" telling about a number of strange occurrences in her house which she jokingly attributes to her late husband's presence or poltergeist. During this story, the door of the room the interviews are being held in knocks and opens slightly, probably one of the children from a class being held in the centre being lost, the door opens a little more and knocks, as the story goes on about strange (and similar!) occurrences happening in Mary's house that she attributes to her late husband, Michael gets up and investigates the sound at the door, he closes it and turns to the group grinning announcing jokingly that it was Mary's late husband. The group roars in laughter.

Comment [B29]: STORY/LANG

I notice through this humorous exchange how mythologies are collectively formed and reformed through storytelling, no doubt this story will be retold by the others and the participant for its funny nature, but at its core

are elements of a shared mythology that is constructed, deconstructed and reconstructed through storytelling and humorous anecdotes.

One of the students asks Mary how her late husband proposed to her, the other student slaps him playfully and teasingly jibes “You old romantic, you!” There is much laughter at this display of horseplay, it is also interesting in dramatic terms of tension and how tension is diffused as the students begin to find themselves comfortable in the unusual and new experience of interviewing a senior of the community.

Laughter continues as Mary tells that she was married on April Fool’s Day and that her husband’s aunt played a prank on them on the wedding night attaching a bell to the bottom of the wedding bed.

Prompted by Tracey and Margery, the participant begins to tell of her life at school and as a child. Mary talks extensively about Brisbane now and contrasts it to her past, all the stories she tells of school, friends, nicknames, her house and the development of the local area are all told in her anecdotal, conversational style, with small “snapshots”, “snippets”

Comment [B30]: STORY/LANG

to the recorder and exclaims “All this is going to be repeated!” she talks unashamedly about social mores of her era concerning men and women going out and sex. She reveals herself again to be quite outspoken and unashamed of her colourful personality.

Comment [B31]: REL

Margery asks about Synthia’s religion to which she replies she sees no point in “going to confess”, on the subject of sinfulness and confession she turns to Michael cheekily and says “I’ll bet you know you’re talking about.”

Comment [B32]: LANG/REL

Synthia reveals she also raised her grandchildren when her son’s marriage broke up. She talks at length about her swimming and also her unlikely job as an accountant. She exclaims “I’m a bloody skyte, aren’t I!” when she tells that she was rarely out of work.

“Life- you do what you want, I’ll tell you something, this’ll kill ya” she says as she tells how she refused high pay to return to work because she wanted to retire. This is followed by laughter. Margery asks if there are any negative experiences in the participants life, “anything terrible that happened”, Synthia cheekily exclaims “I got bloody pregnant” to which everyone laughs.

Synthia talks about growing up and her schooling, Margery asks if Synthia’s siblings are as enthusiastic and as energetic as she is. Synthia explains her sister does not play as many sports as she does, but does play lawn bowls. Synthia tells “She has to play with balls somehow”. There is more laughter.

When the group comments on how positive Synthia is she quips “If I want to do it, I’ll bloody do it”. An interesting point that comes up when Synthia is questioned about her involvement in the “Golden Years” centre, she tells that she began coming to the Golden Years to “take the ‘oldies’ out”. There is much laughter as the point is revealed that even though Synthia is older than many of the members of the Golden Years centre, she doesn’t consider herself one of them. Her language choice describing them as “oldies” sets them in a different group as them, obviously as she does not consider herself to be all that old. She argues “your dancing days are over if you don’t take care of yourself.”

Comment [B33]: REL

She imparts her life philosophy directly talking to the students saying “You do what you want to do”. For Synthia the secret of her longevity is the absolute capitalization on her free will and simply doing what she wants to do and being however she wants to be. The session is close to ending as she tells the students cheekily and directly “Thank you for listening to all my bullshit.”

Comment [B34]: STORY/REL

I’m awake now, even though it has just gone ten o’clock in the morning, it was impossible to be sleepy with Synthia’s vibrancy in the room.

“Every generation learns to cope with the problems that face them” – Jo-Jo (and Ray) King

Joan King has been affectionately renamed by a group of the students to “Jo-Jo” it is a mantle she quite enjoys. Joan is a stayed, reserved but very wise seeming elderly woman with an unflinching look; she looks people squarely in the eye, maintaining eye contact all the time. Her husband, Ray suffers quite badly from both hearing loss and an escalating Alzheimer’s disease, his posture is more slumped, and his face and attitude are quite withdrawn.

Comment [B35]: REL

Michael explains the scope of the project and member checking. Jo-Jo starts talking about her grandchildren; one of the students in particular recognizes the participant from their previous meeting. It is clear from the onset of this interview that family is a core theme for Jo-Jo’s life, she talks at length how she wanted to be a stay-at-home Mum.

One of the students shares that, like the participant, her family also comes from Toowoomba. Jo-Jo talks about her Catholic faith and Margery is enthusiastic to learn more. Although a Catholic woman of an older generation, Jo-Jo reveals herself to be an incredibly tolerant woman, even quite enamoured with her Muslim daughter in law. She also reveals that she is not just a ‘blind follower’ of her faith and that she attends a Bible-study group and has learnt to critique and dialogue with her faith forming both a personal and intellectual understanding of the Gospel message as well as the Bible as a faith-text.

Comment [B36]: REL

Ray, who suffers quite badly from Alzheimer’s disease and hearing loss sits quietly at the table, he interjects

that he is aware of what is going on but due to his hearing loss and memory loss that he does not feel he is able to fully participate in the discussion. He excuses himself from the conversation. One of the student's shares her own family's experience of Alzheimer's disease. Joan talks more about growing up in Toowoomba during the depression years, eventually marrying and moving to Nundah. On the subject of the depression years, Joan talks about the Australian tradition of helping each other out and that the community spirit of helpfulness was very strong in the depression years which made it easier to endure the difficult times. Helping people is a strong passion of Jo-Jo's as she also tells how she was a Lifeline telephone counsellor, often talking to people who were suicidal. She describes that the most important thing to help these people was "you just listen".

Jo-Jo claims to have never wanted a social life and that having a large family negates the need for an extended circle of friends. What is interesting about this session is there is a very strong sense of rapport between the participants, the students and the Forde's. Many of the opinions, experiences, and views on families, fashions, morals and pastimes, even similar experiences with illnesses create a very strong sense of commonality. Travel is another point of similarity between the participant and the students.

Talking of changes in society and social morals, Jo-Jo states that "Every generation learns to cope with the problems that face them." She reiterates that "we spend a lot of time, feeling our way".

What is most poignant in Joan's mind of the changing social mores is a sense of despair, anxiety and loneliness that she has begun to notice to pervade younger people and society in general. She comments how "stillness" is a quality that is rarely seen or desired in people, who surround themselves with the fast-paced and technology infused life of the twentieth century. She argues that the most disconcerting change she has observed in her own lifetime is a sense of anxiety and insecurity that pervades culture and the younger generation, she attributes this to a fear inherent in people. "People are afraid of themselves, what's in here (she points to her own heart)".

There is a stunned silence from the rest of the group to hear words that touch on such a profound observation of human nature and society in the 21st century. One of the students even chimes "You're amazing". The students are truly stunned to encounter an elderly woman with such a wise and articulate understanding of the depersonalization, despair and despondent loneliness that is part of a kind of 'culture of fear' that has pervaded modern and post-modern thought and the world at the turn of the 21st century.

Jo-Jo argues that "what happens at home is the most important thing", she assures "I'm on my way, that's my goal" and has few regrets about her life. The students continually try and involve Ray in the conversation, he occasionally interjects some stories that come to mind, but is unable and seems saddened at the fact that he cannot recall more details when questioned further. This is an emotional point for the group to see Ray suffer quite badly but Jo-Jo still incredibly supportive of him.

The session ends with Margery telling Joan that "we could talk to you forever" but as she leaves I sense the dynamic in the room has changed, with her wisdom and profound strength and faith as a juxtaposition to Ray's frail mental and physical state. It is quite a difficult session, emotionally for the Forde's as well as the students. I do notice that Margery's nerves are a little frayed at the end from not only being encountered face-to-face with someone suffering quite badly from Alzheimer's Disease, but who is trying to remain dignified at the same time as being incredibly apologetic, this is juxtaposed against the immense strength, faith and wisdom of Jo-Jo who is able to not only see the despair both in her own life and at the core of human nature in the 21st century but also transcend it, she seems neither weighed down nor melancholy by the burden she carries caring for Ray but also having such an articulate understanding of human sadness. Instead she finds comfort and solace in her faith, in her intellect, in her family and in an immensely deep reservoir of personal strength. After the session, Margery and Michael debrief the students congratulating them on conducting themselves so well in what was quite an emotionally tough interview. The students themselves are quite affected by the suffering of Ray and how it is juxtaposed with the strength of the woman they named "Jo-Jo" I notice that two of the students (both young women) are quite close to tears and Margery also seems saddened, drained and quite frayed.

I muse that mortality and also a decline in health due to illnesses such as Alzheimer's disease are concepts that are quite easy to talk about abstractly, generally, empirically, scientifically, statistically. The two ultimate truths of human existence, birth and death, are easy to abstract from the personal reality and death as the more remote, future-prospect, unavoidable, "undiscovered country" remains a concept that seems almost kinder, almost better removed to abstract considerations, philosophical notions, theological teachings and scientific or statistical assurances. It is strange that one of the greatest dictators and cruellest leaders the world has ever seen, Joseph Stalin should impart such a maxim on the world as "The death of one is a tragedy; the death of one hundred thousand is a statistic".

Comment [B37]: REL/STORY

In a sense, I muse, it is in this way that we abstract death from ourselves, we push our own demise away from us and what is confronting is when we are encountered face to face with people who are suffering their demise. "The undiscovered country" is something that is universally shared among all human beings, but it seems to be the last thing we think about, the last subject we wish to talk about, I muse perhaps we do this out of self-preservation, to save ourselves from confronting it, but what stays with me after the session with Jo-Jo and Ray is that the nerve inside us which concerns demise and death and how people express and deal with it is a very raw nerve indeed and when the nerve is bared, it can be quite painful.

Comment [B38]: REL

"I'd like to live to one hundred!" – Eleanor

As usual Michael begins the session talking with Eleanor about member checking. Eleanor is a strong, alert and almost fierce looking elderly woman dressed coolly for the hot day. Although she doesn't seem like it at first glance she has a fiery demeanour and is unafraid of expressing her opinions on generational changes.

Comment [B39]: ORAL/STORY/REL

The students not having arrived yet, Margery asks about the participant's early life and career. Eleanor tells of how she worked for the 'Queensland Temperance Society' and that she didn't try alcohol until she was fifty years of age. She also talks about working in the Canberra Hotel. There is laughter as she tells of some of the antics the American soldiers who patronized the hotel used to get up to during the Second World War.

At almost half past twelve the student arrives. Eleanor talks about seeing old houses moved away, she reiterates that she had a happy childhood in a close-knit community where everyone knew each other. She talks quite extensively about generational changes, particularly in social mores and morals and the nature of communities between her generation, her children's generation and now.

Comment [B40]: STORY

She looks through a small notebook she had brought with her to prompt some stories. She talks about her musical tastes and tells of going to some of the performances of vaudeville at The Cremorne Theatre which is a history that Margery and Michael are familiar with and the student has studied earlier in drama.

APPENDIX TWO

ETHICAL DOCUMENTATION

Human Research Ethics Committee

Office Use Only
 HREC Register No.:

Principal Investigator's or Supervisor's Name:
 Dr. Tracey Sanders

Students' Names:
 Mr. Brent Downes

<u>PROJECT TITLE:</u>	From life, page to stage": An exploration of the experiences of participants collaboratively involved in creating a community ethnodrama.
<u>SIMPLE TITLE FOR USE ON PARTICIPANT DOCUMENTS:</u>	A case study of collaborative playwriting process, community discourse and ethnodrama.

Application for Ethics Approval Research Projects with Human Participants

All research projects involving human participants and/or access to their records/files/specimens must be approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC).

1. **Before completing this form, applicants should read carefully the document *Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans: Guidelines for Applicants to the Human Research Ethics Committee* (approved by Academic Board 23 February 2001). This document is available on the Research Services website at www.acu.edu.au/research. All applications are assessed in accordance with the National Statement available at: <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/e72syn.htm>**
2. Completed applications are to be emailed as an attachment to: res.ethics@acu.edu.au. Once the application has been checked by the relevant Research Services Officer, you will be required to submit a signed hard copy.
3. Applications must be submitted at least six (6) weeks before the proposed date of commencement of the research project.

[Please note that any information of a commercial or patentable nature should be forwarded separately and marked "COMMERCIAL IN CONFIDENCE".]

In preparing your application please note the following:

- ALL sections and subsections must be answered. Incomplete applications will be returned to the Investigator or Supervisor without being considered by the HREC.
- Insofar as possible, the *Information Letter to Participants* and the *Consent Form* are to be formulated in plain English. **There should be no typographical, spelling or grammatical errors.**

Sample *Information Letter to Participants* and sample *Consent Forms* can be found at www.acu.edu.au/research

If you require assistance in interpreting the Guidelines, or if you have any queries, please contact any member of HREC and/or any Research Services Officer. .

You are reminded that contact with participants and/or access to their records/files/specimens must not commence until written ethics approval has been received from the HREC.

SECTION A: ISSUES RELATING TO HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

Does your research involve any of the following? (Please tick)		YES	NO
A.0	Use of non-identifiable data about human beings that is use of existing collections of data or records that contain only non-identifiable data about human beings If your answer to the above question is "Yes" go to Section B1 and complete B1, B2.1, C1 <u>only</u> and attach a copy of the Research proposal. YOUR PROPOSAL ONLY REQUIRES TO BE RECORDED AND DOES NOT NEED ETHICS CLEARANCE IF YOU ANSWER "YES" TO ANY OF THE QUESTIONS A.01 TO A.08 YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT MUST BE REVIEWED BY THE FULL COMMITTEE.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.01	(Chapter 3.3 of the <i>National Statement</i>) Interventions and Therapies, including Clinical and non-clinical trials and innovations. Does your research involve		
01.1	Administration of any substance or agent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
01.2	A treatment or diagnostic procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
01.3	A surgical procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
01.4	Any other therapeutic procedure or devices, preventative procedure or diagnostic device or procedure	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.02	(Chapter 3.4 of the <i>National Statement</i>) Human Genetics. Does your research involve	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
02.1	Study of single or multiple genes, gene-gene interaction or gene-environment interaction	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
02.2	Acquired somatic variation or inherited gene sequences	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
02.3	Gene expressions or genes of individuals, families or populations	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
02.4	Epigenetics or use of informatics and genetic information or clinical phenotypes	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.03	(Chapter 3.6 of the <i>National Statement</i>) Human Stem Cell Research. Does your research involve		
03.1	Use of embryonic or somatic stem cells or those derived from primordial germ cells	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.04	(Chapter 4.1 of the <i>National Statement</i>) Women who are pregnant and the human foetus. Does your research involve		
04.1	Research on a woman who is pregnant and the foetus <i>in utero</i>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
04.2	Research on the separated human foetus or on foetal tissue	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.05	(Chapter 4.4 of the <i>National Statement</i>) People highly dependent on medical care who may be unable to give consent. Does your research involve		
05.1	People who are highly dependent on medical care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
05.2	People in terminal care, emergency care or intensive care	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
05.3	People who are unconscious or in a state of post-traumatic coma unresponsiveness	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.06	(Chapter 4.5 of the <i>National Statement</i>) People with a cognitive impairment, an intellectual disability or a mental illness. Does your research involve		
06.1	Anyone who is intellectually, mentally or physically impaired	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.07	(Chapter 4.6 of the <i>National Statement</i>) People who may be involved in illegal activities. Does your research involve		
07.1	Study that intends to expose illegal activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
07.2	The likelihood of discovering illegal activity, even if not intended	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
07.3	The inadvertent and unexpected discovery of illegal activity	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

	<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
A.08 (Chapter 4.7 of the National Statement) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. your research must conform to the Values and Ethics – Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research document. All applications must be referred to the ACU Indigenous unit prior to submission to the Research Office. Does your research involve		
08.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
The following questions are designed to help you and the Committee ascertain the level of risk involved in the project and factors that may affect consent		
A.1 Access to members of the following groups who may be vulnerable or unable to give fully informed consent:		
1.1 Minors (anyone under the age of 18, e.g., students or children)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.2 Anyone at risk of criminal or civil liability, damage to financial or social standing or to employability	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.3 Elderly people who may be vulnerable or unable to give fully informed consent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.4 Welfare recipients who may be vulnerable	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.5 Members of minority groups who may be vulnerable or unable to give fully informed consent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.6 Anyone who is a prisoner or ward of the State	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
1.7 Other: (please state) <div style="background-color: #cccccc; height: 15px; width: 50px; margin-top: 5px;"></div>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A.2 Risk of social, mental or physical harm:		
2.1 Access to confidential data (including student data, patient or client data) without the participant's written consent	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.2 Performance of any acts which might diminish self-esteem or cause embarrassment or distress	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.3 Use of non-treatment or placebo control conditions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.4 Collection of body tissues or fluid samples	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.5 Administration of any stimuli, tasks, investigations or procedures which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally stressful, painful, noxious, aversive or unpleasant, either during or following research procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.6 Any possibility of cardio-pulmonary difficulties (e.g., asthma, headaches, shortness of breath, chest pains, heart attack)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.7 Treatments or techniques with unpleasant or harmful side effects	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.8 Contact with electrical supply (e.g., electrical stimulation)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.9 Use of injections which may result in the transmission of HIV (AIDS) or another disease	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

		<u>YES</u>	<u>NO</u>
2.10	Intended contact with persons with infectious diseases (e.g., measles, hepatitis, TB, whooping cough)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2.11	Other: (please state) [REDACTED]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A.3 Possible breaches of State or Commonwealth legislation:			
3.1	Interviews/Focus Groups involving the photographing or audio/video-taping of participants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.2	Deception of participants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.3	Possibility of identifying participant/s, either directly or indirectly, through identifiers or by deduction	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.4	Disclosure of participants' identity to anyone other than the investigators at any stage	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.5	Use of one or more fertilised ova	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.6	Finger-printing or DNA "finger-printing" of participants	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.7	Recombinant DNA, ionizing radiation, or contact with hazardous, illegal or restricted substances (e.g., chemicals, quarantinable materials)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3.8	Other: (please state) [REDACTED]	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.4 Secondary use of existing human specimens:			
4.1	Access to human pathology or diagnostic specimens (e.g., blood sera or tissue samples) originally provided to authorities for purposes other than those sought in your research project	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
A.5 An application for funding either internal or external to the University		<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

A.6 Level of Risk

Please indicate the level of risk to the participant in this research.

- ☒ "Negligible risk" is defined as follows: "Negligible risk research describes research in which there is no foreseeable risk of harm or discomfort, and any foreseeable risk is no more than inconvenience. Examples of inconvenience may include filling in a form, participating in a street survey, or giving up time to participate in research. (*National Statement*, 2007, p.16)
- ☐ "Low risk" is defined as follows: "low risk research describes research in which the only foreseeable risk is one of discomfort. Discomfort can involve body and/or mind and include, for example, minor side effects of medication, the discomforts related to measuring blood pressure, and anxiety induced by an interview." (*National Statement*, 2007, p.16).
- ☐ "More than low risk" refers to "Research in which the risk for participants is more serious than discomfort." This could include research with potential for physical or psychological harms, devaluation of personal worth, social harms, including damage to social networks, economic harms and legal harms.. (*National Statement*, 2007, p.16)

[For information on HREC procedures when considering applications see *Guidelines*, Part A, Section 3.]

A.7 Peer Review of the Research

YES

NO

The National Statement states that where prior peer review has judged that a project has research merit, the question of its research merit is no longer subject to the judgement of those ethically reviewing the research (*National Statement*, 2007, s.1.2)

A.7.1 Has the project been peer reviewed?

☐☒

A7.2 If Yes, please indicate what process was used to review the project

SECTION B: GENERAL INFORMATION

B.1 Principal Investigator or Supervisor

Title & Full Name:

Dr. Tracey Sanders Senior Lecturer

Qualifications:

Dip Teach (Prim); BEd; BAarts; MPhil; PhD

Full Postal Address:

ACU National

P.O. Box 456 Virginia. 4015

(delete inapplicable title)

School:

Arts and Sciences

Campus:

McAuley

Telephone No:

36237187

Fax No:

3623 7245

E-mail address:

tracey.sanders@acu.edu.au

Co-Investigator 1 or Co-Supervisor (if staff) or Student Researcher 1

(delete inapplicable title)

Title & Full Name:

Dr. Lindsay Farrell

Qualifications:

PhD

Postgraduate or Undergraduate (if student):

Full Postal Address:

.

School:

Arts and Sciences

Campus:

Mc Auley

Current Enrolment Programme:

Telephone No:

7191

Fax No:

7458

E-mail address:

lindsay.farrell@acu.edu.au

Co-Investigator 2 (if staff) or Student Researcher 2

(delete inapplicable title)

Title & Full Name:

Mr. Brent Downes

Qualifications:

BAHons

Postgraduate or Undergraduate (if student):

Postgraduate

Full Postal Address:

39 Aberdeen Pde Boondall

Brisbane, QLD 4034

School:

Arts and Sciences

Campus:

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Current Enrolment Programme:

PhD

Telephone No:

32655589

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brentus01@hotmail.com

Co-Investigator 3 (if staff) or Student Researcher 3

(delete inapplicable title)

Title & Full Name:

Qualifications:

Postgraduate or Undergraduate (if student):

Full Postal Address:

School:

Campus:

Current Enrolment Programme:

Telephone No:

Fax No:

E-mail address:

Co-Investigator 4 (if staff) or Student Researcher 4

(delete inapplicable title)

Title & Full Name:

Qualifications:

School:

Campus:

SECTION C: RESEARCH DESIGN AND PROCEDURES

C.1 Brief description of project. National Statement, 2007, s.1.2

Please provide a brief description of the research proposal. Also, please attach to this application, in electronic format, a more detailed outline of the research design, objectives and methodology (2-4 pages).

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of participants involved in a collaborative playwriting community theatre/performance ethnography project. Using ethnographic techniques (interviews/questionnaires/field observations, it is the intention of this research to uncover the particular experiences of participants involved in the creation of drama within a 'community' aesthetic framework. The study intends to document the experiences of participants at all stages of the project, from inception, through to playwriting and workshopping, to eventual staging and reception of the final artwork. The study is defined methodologically as a case-study that describes and documents the experiences and perceptions of people involved in the collaborative creation of 'community' themed performance. The participants are defined in three groups; the playwrights (Margery and Michael Forde), the collaborative-artists (ACU drama students) and the consumers (members of the Nundah Golden Years centre) who collaborated in making the drama.

C.2 Potential benefits of the research project. National Statement, 2007, s.1.1

2.1 To the participant:

The participants can expect to benefit from this study in gaining a deeper insight into their own artistic/aesthetic processes and motivations. Through the questionnaires it is anticipated that artists and students will come to a greater understanding of ethno drama and the processes involved in the creation of a dramatic works. Since the performance project is deeply rooted in 'community' theatre and associated 'community' ideals and experiences, it is anticipated that the participants of the subject will gain a greater appreciation of the role of the community in the creation of drama and also become more cognizant of the issues that effect the community and pervade the drama. It is also hoped that the participants will feel that have contributed valuable information for Queensland's history.

2.2 In general:

In general, this study hopes to contribute to contemporary Australian dramaturgy, in particular the highly discourses area of 'community theatre' and performance ethnography. With practice-led or process-led research becoming more common in Australian drama research, this study positions itself to offer a worthwhile and original discussion of the experiences of participants in a collaborative process drama with the 'community drama' aesthetic. Generally, the study will contribute to the discourse of contemporary Australian drama and is relevant to both artists and educators of drama in Australia.

C.3 Brief description of the procedures to be followed.

List sequentially the procedures which will apply to the participants, e.g., use of questionnaires, focus groups, interviews, and indicate any procedure/s which may have adverse effects.

Small Questionnaires (usually half a dozen open-ended questions) given on a week-by-week basis to the participants in the 'data collection' phase of the study.

Face-to-face interviews with the playwrights at different stages of the project.

Group interviews with student participants at corresponding stages and the members of 'The Golden Years' after the final performance is presented.

Field notes/Participant observation of the participants and their dynamic environment.

C.4 Risks to participants. National Statement, 2007, s.2.1

- 4.1 If there are any risks to participants, please describe the risks and the measures that will be taken to limit them.

Participation in the study will remain completely voluntary at all times. Participants will sign a consent form that allows any information they give to be used in the study. With the exception of the playwrights, the identity of the participants will be kept confidential and their names will be replaced with pseudonyms. The risk to participants is negligible as the responses to questionnaires and other data is kept confidential and only used in the context of the study, the data will not be used for any other purpose or divulged to any other persons. It is anticipated that the participants will have to volunteer some of their time in order to answer questions etc but participation remains voluntary and participants will be informed of the expected duration of interviews etc. Data will be locked away in a locked cabinet in the Principal Supervisor's office.

- 4.2 If there is any chance that the participants may become distressed, alarmed or disadvantaged in any way, please identify a person to whom they may be referred for counselling or other appropriate support.

[Note: It is normally not appropriate for investigators, supervisors or student researchers to undertake this role themselves.]

It is not expected that participants will become distressed in any way as part of the research. In the unlikely event that participants become alarmed or distressed, ACU counselling will be able to provide support for students. All participants will be made aware of University procedures regarding complaints and ethical issues.

C.5 Administration of drugs, compounds, or biological agents.

Does your research involve the administration of any substance or agent? ☐ YES ☒ NO

If "YES", please complete Attachment 1 and append it to your application.

C.6 Use of body tissues or fluids

Does your research involve any procedures to remove body fluids or tissues? ☐ YES ☒ NO

If "YES", please complete Attachment 2 and append it to your application

SECTION D: PROJECT PARTICULARS

D.1 Participant Details. National Statement, 2007, s.1.4

D.1.1 Brief description of participants:

[E.g., Year 11 students in public schools, childless couples who have been married for 10 or more years, nurses who have been working for at least 5 years etc.]

Group 1: Playwrights, Margery and Michal Forde (professional playwrights, theatre professionals and ACU artists in residence.)

Group 2: Collaborative Artists, ACU advanced drama students in their second and third years of their drama major.

Group 3: Selected members of "The Golden Years Centre" at Nundah.

D.1.2 Estimated number involved: Females **group 1: 1 group 2: 15-20 group 3: 3-4** Males **group 1: 1 group 2: 15-20 group 3: 3-4** Total **approximately 30-35**

D.1.3 Age range for each gender: Females **18-80 all groups** Males **18-80 all groups.**

D.1.4 Participants' state of health ☒ Normal ☐ Other (please specify)

D.1.5 Method of recruitment of participants (including how participants will be approached)

[Note: Researchers who intend to use their own students, patients, clients etc. as participants need to be especially aware of the potential risks, e.g., coercion, misuse of power.]

Participants will be approached and informed of the goals and their potential role in the project, they will be given the ACU approved information letter and if they are willing, they will sign the ACU approved consent form that allows the use of information collected from them to be used in the context of this study.

D.1.6 Conflicts of Interest. National Statement, 2007, ch.5.4 and ss.5.2.10 and 5.2.11
D.1.6.1 Researchers who intend to use their own students, patients, clients, etc. as participants need to be aware of the potential risk of conflicts of interest, for example, of coercion, misuse of power, etc. Does your research involve possible conflicts of interest in relation to recruitment and use of participants?

☐ YES ☒ NO
 If "YES", describe how you will deal with this.

D.1.6.2 Other conflicts of interest may arise in relation to research undertaken in one's place of employment or through financial or other interest or affiliation that bears on the research. Does your research involve any conflicts of interest?

☐ YES ☒ NO
 If "YES", describe the conflicts of interest and how they are being dealt with.

D.1.7 Compensation to participants. National Statement, 2007, s.2.2.9
 Will a reward or incentive of any kind be offered to the participants?

☐ YES ☒ NO
 If "YES", provide full details.

D.1.8 Involvement of special groups of participants

D.1.8.1 Will participants be selected specifically based on cultural or community groups to which they belong? (e.g., Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples, Asian communities)?

☐ YES ☒ NO

In the case of research involving Indigenous issues or people: (a) the [Values and Ethics - Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research](#) must be adhered to; and (b) the application must be forwarded to a Head of one of the University's three Indigenous Support Units for comment prior to submission to the Research Office and (c) written comment from the Head, ATSI unit must be attached to this application.

D.1.8.2 If yes, do these participants require permission from community leaders?

☐ YES ☒ NO

D.1.9 Does your research involve participants in other countries? If so, please advise the committee as required under National Statement, 2007, s.4.8.4 of information relating to any ethical processes or approval required in that country. Please attach any relevant documentation.

D.2 Access to personal information, data/files/records or samples of human tissue

Will the project involve access to personal information, student files, computerised records or other data banks, human pathology or diagnostic specimens provided by one or more institutions or government departments?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If "YES", please identify the sources and location of the data.

Again, if "YES", will the identity of the participants be known in any way?

☐ YES ☒ NO

Please explain how they will be known and what will be done with the data.

D.3 Location of Study

Where will the research be conducted?

D.3.1 If outside ACU, give name and address of institution and contact names:

D.3.2 If at ACU, give campus location: Mc Auley Campus.

D.4	Approval from institutions or organisations external to ACU to access participants. National Statement, 2007, s.2.2.13 <i>[Note: Researchers should be aware of the requirements set out in the current privacy legislation.]</i>
D.4.1	Is formal approval required to access participants from an external institution or organisation? <i>(E.g., from the state Department of Education, Catholic Education Office, School Principal/s, Hospital HREC)</i> <i>[Note: If participants are to be recruited from schools, hospitals, prisons or other institutions, approval from the institution or appropriate authority must be sought.]</i>
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	
D.4.2	Please indicate whether formal approval has already been obtained from the appropriate authorities of other institution(s) or from another HREC: <i>[Please refer to Part B, Section 2.2 and Section 3 of the Guidelines.]</i>
<div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;"> <input type="checkbox"/> YES – If “Yes”, when was it obtained? Please attach a copy of the formal clearance/permission </div> <div> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO Please attach a copy of the letter of request or of the Application Form used by the relevant institutions or organisations, or please indicate when such approval will be requested: </div> </div> <div style="margin-top: 10px; background-color: #cccccc; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid #000;"> Approval will be sought on clearance of the university ethical standards. </div>	
D.5	Informed consent of participants, parents or guardians of minors, next-of-kin, community leaders
D.5.1	Will persons aged 18 or above be asked to complete a Consent Form? National Statement, 2007, Ch 4.2
<div style="display: flex; align-items: flex-start;"> <div style="margin-right: 20px;"> <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> YES (If “Yes”, attach a copy of the proforma to this application. See sample Consent Form at www.acu.edu.au/research) </div> <div> <input type="checkbox"/> NO (If “No”, please explain; e.g., participants will be completely anonymous at every stage of the project.) <div style="background-color: #cccccc; width: 100px; height: 1.2em; margin-top: 5px;"></div> </div> </div>	
D.5.2	Consent of parents/guardians to access minors <i>[Note: See Guidelines Part B, Sections 4.8 and 6.2. National Statement, 2007, Ch.4.2.]</i> Does the research involve minors as participants and therefore require the consent of parents/guardians?
<input type="checkbox"/> YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	
“If “Yes”, a copy of the proforma for gaining the consent of the primary care-giver must be attached to this Application. See the sample Parent/Guardian Consent Form at www.acu.edu.au/research	
D.5.3	Consent of person responsible for those unable to give consent. National Statement, 2007, Ch 4.3, 4.4, 4.5

[Note: See also Guidelines Part B, Section 6.2.]

Does the research involve participants who are unable to give consent (e.g., because they have an intellectual or mental impairment, or because they are highly dependent on medical care)?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If "Yes", a copy of the proforma for gaining the consent of the person responsible must be attached to this Application.

D.5.4 Consent of community leaders

Does the research involve participants from special groups or communities where such approvals are customary?

☐ YES ☒ NO

If "Yes", a copy of the proforma for gaining the consent of the community leader must be attached to this application.

SECTION E: GATHERING OF DATA, SECURITY OF DATA, DISPOSAL OF DATA, AND DISSEMINATION OF RESULTS

See Chapter 2, Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research

E.1 Gathering of data

E.1.1 How will the data be gathered?

Data will be gathered through the use of field notes, paper questionnaires and group or face to face interviews.

E.1.2 How will the data be recorded?

Data will be recorded with hand written notes and printed questionnaires which will then be transcribed to computer print outs. Interviews will be audio taped and the transcribed.

E.2 Security of Data

Data needs to be regularly archived in a secure environment, in a room at ACU during the study, and held for a minimum of five years following completion of the study.

[Note: See Guidelines, Part B, Sections 8.1 and 8.2]

E.2.1 In which room and at which campus of ACU will the primary data be stored during the study?

In a locked cabinet in the office of principal supervisor Dr. Tracey Sanders EC: 17

E.2.2 In which room and at which campus of ACU will the data be stored following completion of study?

In a locked cabinet in the office of principal supervisor Dr. Tracey Sanders EC: 17

E.3 Disposal of data

How are the data to be disposed after complying with the requirement to retain data for a minimum of five years (e.g., erasing of tapes, shredding of questionnaires, deletion of electronic data)?

All originals and transcripts will be shredded after five years, all electronic files will be deleted, all audio tapes will be erased and destroyed after the five year period.

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E.4 Dissemination of results

Do you intend to use the results of your study in publications or in other communications with colleagues?

☒ YES

☐ NO

If "Yes", participants must be advised both in the Information Letter to Participants and on the Consent Form, if applicable, that results from the study may be summarised and appear in publications or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify the participants in any way.

SECTION F: IDENTIFIABILITY OF PARTICIPANTS. National Statement, 2007, Ch.3.2

F.1 In what format will the data be collected?

- ☐ **Individually identifiable data** where the identity of a specific individual can reasonably be ascertained. Examples of identifiers include the individual's name, image, date of birth or address;
- ☒ **Re-identifiable data**, from which identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code, but it remains possible to re-identify a specific individual by, for example, using the code or linking different data sets;
- ☐ **Non-identifiable data**, which have never been labelled with individual identifiers or from which identifiers have been permanently removed, and by means of which no specific individual can be identified. A subset of nonidentifiable data are those that can be linked with other data so it can be known that they are about the same data subject, although the person's identity remains unknown.

F.2 Please indicate whether the identity of any participant will be disclosed to anyone other than the researcher/s, and, if so, please explain the reasons for this disclosure.

The identity of the participants, with the exception of the playwrights will never be disclosed to anyone except the researchers.

SECTION G: CONFIDENTIALITY OF PARTICIPANTS' RESPONSES

Confidentiality refers to the obligation of people not to use private information – whether private because of its content or the context of its communication – for any purpose other than that for which it was given to them. (*National Statement*, 2007, p.99) The information given is to be used only for the research purposes stated in the protocol. Without the explicit permission of the person providing it, such information must not be divulged to others in any way that might allow it to be linked to that person.

G.1 What measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of the personal information gathered in this project (e.g., removal of names and other identifiers either before, during or after analysis of data; reporting aggregated data only)?

During the transcribing process from interviews, all names will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms. All questionnaires will be anonymous, with the participants not required to divulge their identity on the questionnaire. Field notes will not refer to participants by their real identity (except the playwrights)

G.2 In this project are there any particular risks to the confidentiality of personal information (e.g., reporting non-aggregated data or descriptive data from small samples)? If so, how is it proposed to minimise them?

SECTION H: INFORMATION PRIVACY

Researchers should be familiar with the existence of relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory legislation regarding privacy. Of special note are the *Information Privacy Principles - IPPs* (see Appendix D to the *Guidelines*) and the *National Privacy Principles – NPPs* (from the *Privacy Act 1988* (Commonwealth), incorporating the *Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000* (Commonwealth)).

H.1 Are you aware of any privacy issues that may impact on participants?

☐

YES

☒

NO

If “Yes” please identify this issue (making reference to IPPs and NPPs).

H.2 If applicable, please identify the IPPs/NPPs which are being cited to justify the use of identifiable data without seeking the participant’s consent.

SECTION I: ETHICAL ISSUES – still to be addressed

If you answered “YES” to any of the areas on the checklist in Section A (above) and have not commented on those areas in any other section of this Application Form, please indicate here how you intend to address the ethical issues arising.

SECTION J: CHECK LIST – to be completed before submitting the application

Please tick, as appropriate		YES	NO	N/A
J.1	The Guidelines have been read and adhered to.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J.2	All sections of the application form have been completed.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J.3	Details of participant requirements have been fully described.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
J.4	All relevant supporting documents are attached:			
4.1	Documentation from the Indigenous Support unit.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4.2	Copies of any external approval forms to be submitted to hospitals, schools, etc	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4.3	If your research involves an external organisation, the letter from the organisation agreeing to be involved in the research is attached.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4.4	Ethics approval from external institutions (e.g., hospitals, schools) if available.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
4.5	Research Proposal (as requested at Section C.1 of the Application Form)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.6	Information Letter to Participants and consent forms are on University Letterhead.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.7	Information Letter to Participants and consent forms follows the recommended format and wording as at www.acu.edu.au/research and are in plain English	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.8	Two copies of the Consent Form have been provided.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.9	Copies of all questionnaires and interview schedules. (If interviews are to be open-ended, a list of sample questions for each stage of the interview schedule.)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.10	In cases of more than low risk to participants (at Section A.6 of the Application Form), copy of statement from medical practitioner, psychologist, counsellor prepared to provide professional assistance as required for procedures which might have an adverse effect on a participant's well-being.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
J.5	The Information Letters and this application have been checked for typographical, spelling and grammatical errors.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

SECTION K:	DECLARATION – to be completed before submitting the application electronically.
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I/We declare that the information I/We have given above is true and correct in all respects and that I/We have disclosed all aspects of the project. I am/We are familiar with and have access to copies of the National Health and Medical Research Council's *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007).

I/We accept responsibility for the conduct of this research in accordance with the principles contained in the NHMRC Statement and any other conditions specified by the Human Research Ethics Committee of Australian Catholic University.

I/We will notify the Human Research Ethics Committee immediately of any variation to this project, e.g., changes to the number or mix of participants, to research procedures, to the survey instrument(s) or questionnaire(s).

You are reminded that contact with participants and/or access to their records/files/specimens must not commence until written ethics approval has been received from the HREC.

I/We declare that we will NOT commence data collection and/or access participants' records/files/specimens until written approval has been received from the Human Research Ethics Committee.

Name (block letters)	Signature	Date
Dr. Tracey Sanders Principal Investigator or Supervisor	_____	<input type="text"/>
Dr. Lindsay Farrell Co-Investigator 1 or Co-Supervisor (if staff) or Student Researcher 1 (if applicable)	_____	<input type="text"/>
Mr. Brent Downes Co-Investigator 2 (if staff) or Student Researcher 2 (if applicable)	_____	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/> Co-Investigator 3 (if staff) or Student Researcher 3 (if applicable)	_____	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/> Co-Investigator 4 (if staff) or Student Researcher 4 (if applicable)	_____	<input type="text"/>
<input type="text"/> Co-Investigator 5 (if staff) or Student Researcher 5 (if applicable)	_____	<input type="text"/>

PRIVACY STATEMENT:

Australian Catholic University is committed to ensuring the privacy of all information it collects. Personal information supplied to the University will only be used for administrative and educational purposes of the institution. Personal information collected by the University will only be disclosed to third parties with the written consent of the person concerned, unless otherwise prescribed by law. For further information, please see the University's Statement on Privacy http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy_policy.cfm.

ATTACHMENT 1

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY Human Research Ethics Committee

Administration of Substances/Agents

Detailed information on any chemical compounds, drugs or biological agents is required, together with indications of dosage, frequency of administration and anticipated effects.

- Name(s) of Substance(s):

[REDACTED]

- Dosage per administration:

[REDACTED]

- Frequency of administration:

[REDACTED]

- Total amounts to be administered:

[REDACTED]

- Anticipated effects:

[REDACTED]

- Other comments to assist the Committee:

[REDACTED]

PRIVACY STATEMENT:

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http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy_policy.cfm.

ATTACHMENT 2

AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY Human Research Ethics Committee

Sampling of Body Tissue or Fluids

If the research involves administration of foreign substances or invasive procedures, please attach a statement from a medical or paramedical practitioner with indemnity insurance, accepting responsibility for those procedures.

- What will be sampled and how?
[REDACTED]

- Frequency and volume?
[REDACTED]

- How are samples to be stored?
[REDACTED]

- How will samples be disposed of?
[REDACTED]

- Who will take the samples?
[REDACTED]

What are their qualifications for doing so?
[REDACTED]

- Other comments to assist the Committee:
[REDACTED]

PRIVACY STATEMENT:

Australian Catholic University is committed to ensuring the privacy of all information it collects. Personal information supplied to the University will only be used for administrative and educational purposes of the institution. Personal information collected by the University will only be disclosed to third parties with the written consent of the person concerned, unless otherwise prescribed by law. For further information, please see the University's Statement on Privacy
http://www.acu.edu.au/privacy_policy.cfm.

CONSENT FORM
Copy for Participant to Keep


TITLE OF PROJECT: From life, page to stage!: An exploration of the experiences of participants collaboratively involved in creating a community ethnodrama

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): Dr. Tracey Sanders

STUDENT RESEARCHER : Mr. Brent Downes

I Michael Forde..... have read (or, where appropriate, have had read to me) and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in these interviews of 60 minutes which will be audiotaped and transcribed, realising that my real name will be used in the context of the study. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers. I consent my photograph be used for inclusion in the thesis.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT: Michael FORDE.....

SIGNATURE ..... DATE 10/10/2012.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:.....

CONSENT FORM
Copy for Researcher

TITLE OF PROJECT: From life, page to stage": An exploration of the experiences of participants collaboratively involved in creating a community ethnodrama

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR (or SUPERVISOR): Dr. Tracey Sanders

STUDENT RESEARCHER : Mr. Brent Downes

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NAME OF PARTICIPANT:Margery Forde.....

SIGNATUREMargery Forde..... DATE10/10/12.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR:

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:

DATE:.....