A Study and Reflection About Adapting The Novel For Live Performance

by

Jennifer Munday

MA(VPA), GdipMEdStud, GdipArtsEd, DipMus, ATCL

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ABSTRACT

Playwrights and other theatre artists have often turned to existing literary works when creating live performance. Research concerning the adaptation of literature to another art form previously centred on adapting literature to film; however this study has enquired into the adaptation of the novel for live performance.

The study Adapting the novel for live performance takes the form of a metadiscourse, a created work and an exegesis. The study was undertaken in three ways: Firstly, the exegesis, which explored data researched through interviewing directors and playwrights; secondly, a created work, a playscript, that was an adaptation of the novel Vita Brevis, and finally, although placed first in the document, is a metadiscourse on the process of research and creation of the playscript.

The term adaptation is used in the specific sense of an author, artist, screenwriter or playwright, taking a work of literature, written with the intention of being read in its own style and detail over a period of time, which is then transformed into another art form. And particularly, for this study, adapted for live stage performance.

The study succeeded in:

- Finding an appropriate novel to adapt for live performance
- Exploring a process, built on the researcher’s previous creative work, for adapting a novel for live performance
- Creating a playscript for the adaptation that could result in a dramatically satisfying performance
- Researching the world of the chosen novel for consistent and interesting dramaturgy
- Researching literature related to the topic
- Researching expert opinions and processes related to current practice in the adaptation of novels for live performance
• Producing a reflective metadiscourse on the process and product of the study

This study is the first concerted attempt to interrogate the reasons why theatre artists choose to adapt existing literature for live performance and an exploration into processes undertaken by contemporary practitioners. It reflects on: the theorising practitioner; the desiring practitioner, who searches for something “performable”; the search for principles and processes of adaptation; and, the issue of searching for the “next” project.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1: Metadiscourse ................................................................. 1
Prelude ......................................................................................... 1
The Theorising Practitioner ......................................................... 8
The Desiring Performer: Searching for Something “Performable” .... 28
Identifying with the Focus of Inquiry .......................................... 33
Self-Dialogue .............................................................................. 33
Tacit Knowing ............................................................................. 34
Intuition ......................................................................................... 35
Indwelling .................................................................................... 35
Focusing ......................................................................................... 36
The Internal Frame of Reference ................................................. 37
Applying the “Desires” to Vita Brevis ........................................... 38

In Search of Principles and Process of Adaptation ................. 41
1) From the Literature ................................................................. 42
   The First Person Narration ....................................................... 43
   The Omniscient Novel ............................................................ 45
   The Mode of “Restricted Consciousness” ............................... 47
   The Story/Plot Distinction ...................................................... 49
   The Distinction Between “Distributional” and “Integrational” Functions .... 50
   Identification of Character Functions and Fields of Actions .......... 50
   Identification of Mythic and/or Psychological Patterns ............ 52
   Two Signifying Systems ......................................................... 53
   The Novel’s linearity and the Film’s Spatiality ......................... 54
   Codes ....................................................................................... 56
   Stories Told and Stories Presented ......................................... 58
2) From the Playwrights ............................................................... 60
3) From Critical Feedback on Vita Brevis .................................. 63
The Process for Vita Brevis ......................................................... 68

Looking for the Next Project .................................................... 74
Coda ............................................................................................. 81

Section 2: Chapter 1 ...................................................................... 83
Introduction to the Study .......................................................... 83
Placing the Research in the Study .............................................. 85
The World of Vita Brevis .......................................................... 95
Outline of Chapters .................................................................... 96

Chapter 2: Review of Literature ............................................... 98
Introduction ............................................................................... 98
Current Situation ....................................................................... 99
Key Factors from the Literature Regarding “Adaptation” .......... 104
Tensions Found in the Literature .............................................. 113
How do Theatre Artists Proceed After Choosing to Adapt a Novel for Live Performance? ................................................................. 228
How do Theatre Artist Adapt Different Styles and Types of Literature and Novels in Order to Come up with Contemporary New Works? .......... 234
Implications for the Adaptation of Vita Brevis ........................................ 235
Contribution of the Work to the Field .................................................. 237
Directions for Further Research ....................................................... 238
More Intense and Focussed Scrutiny of the Adapting Process ............. 238
Theatre for Young People and the Difference Between Original Plays and Adapted Performances .................................................. 239
Similarities and Differences in the Process(es) of Adapting for Film and Live Performance ................................................................. 240
Embracing the Stated Difficulties and Solving Problems for Live Performance .................................................................................. 241
Taking the Process Used in this Study Further .................................... 242
Endnote .......................................................................................... 242

Works Cited .................................................................................. 245

Section 3: Appendices .................................................................. 255
Appendix A: Literature Review – The World of Vita Brevis ................. 255
Appendix B: Journal Documentation for the Adaptation for Live Performance of Vita Brevis, by Jostein Gaarder ................................. 264
Appendix C: Observation and commentary on the Adaptation process for Dorothy and Red, American Place Theatre .................................. 325
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Section 1

METADISCUSSION

Prelude
The undertaking of this second exegesis has brought to the surface many new thoughts about the process of writing, but even now, to reflect on the reflection is very interesting. For instance, when organising the “old” exegesis, the Literature Review took a direction that assisted with the initial layer of thinking. In looking more deeply into the interviews of the theatre artists and more carefully at the journal containing my own thoughts on the process of the adapted work, it’s been necessary to read different literature to support the meta-discursive nature of this re-thinking of the study. It’s been necessary to question and reflect on what the nature of a Literature Review for a study of this kind is, and should be, and I’ve had to find other writers, not always theatre artists, who have taken the luxury and space to look back and think deeply about what has occurred in their research and practice. Their conclusions are not always comfortable or straightforward, and I have found collegiality in their uncertainty. The headings I’ve used are not “categories” usually covered in a Literature Review and have been devised to suit this different type of reflective study. The “method” for this exegesis has been worked out in the process of the re-thinking, and that has been extremely valuable.

At the end of his “story” of A Solo Performer’s Journey, Michael Kearns says:

What has been reconfirmed for me as a result of writing this book is the power that comes from telling your story, and the ownership of self that results. I have once again been energized… and perhaps most exciting of all, I got in touch all over again with the gratitude I feel for having
discovered solo work and having made it one of my primary means of
artistic expression (114).

It’s not until the end of a journey that there’s time to think about what
happened, to reflect on the documentation of a process, and consider the
changed person from the beginning of the journey. In this exegesis is a
reflection on all the succeeding sections of the study, as well as the story
that belongs before it, and during it, between the words and lines of text.
This is also the time for re-reflection that leads to the new journey that
travels to further stages of progressing practice.

This revised exegesis traces the emergence of a project that unfolded in a
linear manner; that is, one step precipitated the next. The playscript that
was the creative output of the doctoral study could not create itself nor
even be assembled without each step of prior experience. Prior to this
doctoral study, my performances were always devised and presented with
other theatre artists. These creative people helped me develop my ideas
and joined with me in searching for materials to challenge audiences. All
these friends, colleagues, words and ideas have led inexorably to the
questions in this study.

This part of my doctoral study, though, delves into ideas and processes,
and attempts to connect the academic and the practising artist. I explore
what lies beneath the surface and consider the space where theatre artists
rarely luxuriate: in the metadiscourse of practice. I attempt to bring to light
what Briggs refers to as “intertextual transparency” (396). The texts that
have been created or reflected upon by the process of the doctoral
study—transcriptions, reflections, and products (playscripts and
performances through literature review, theatre artist interview, and my
own work; as well as the sections of the ‘old’ exegesis)—have an intrinsic
connection to their source, the theatre artist, so that they are extensions of
the practitioner. Reflective practice in theatre arts exists, but not often enough to illuminate “the process of extraction, containment, classification, and synecdochic representation into the fabric of the text itself” (Briggs 398). My contention is that practitioners are mostly engaged in the process of making work and only rarely reflect on that process. When they do, it is in relation to the making of the next work, which may, but often does not, proceed in entirely the same way.

The data collection was a qualitative study and included interviews with Australian and American playwrights and directors who have adapted novels for live performance. These included Australians: Chris Drummond, Associate Artist of the State Theatre Company of South Australia; Greg Lissaman, Artistic Director, Jigsaw Theatre Company, Canberra; and, John Romeril, playwright, and Fellow, at the State Library of Victoria; and Americans: Wynn Handman and Elise Thoron, American Place Theatre, New York; John Collins, Elevator Repair Service Theatre Company, New York; David Saar, Childsplay Theatre Company, Phoenix, Arizona; Pamela Sterling, Academic at The University of Arizona, and Playwright. The data also included a seminar on the topic of “Adaptation” given at Malthouse Theatre as part of the company’s Things on Sunday series. The participants were Tom Wright, Artistic Associate and Literary manager of the Sydney Theatre Company; Chris Kohn, co-writer of The Black Swan of Trespass and director of the Theatre Company, Stuck Pigs Squealing; Caroline Lee, actor and adaptor of Alias Grace; Laurence Strangio, director and adaptor of Alias Grace; convened by Maryanne Lynch, dramaturge in residence at Malthouse Theatre.

“Situated textualities occur where people work on words together to build common ground for the articulation and valuing of knowledge”, and therefore I’m not only reflecting on the experiences that brought me to this point, but also how other theatre artists have taken the time to describe
bringing themselves to the point of adaptation (Hunter 122). The theatre artists who were interviewed for this study helped in creating a common ground, a similar language, which helped explain our various motives and, sometimes, our practice: difficult though this may be to put into words.

Not only is it difficult to put these experiences and knowledge into words, we don’t usually try. Fook believes this is because we “do not have the frameworks with which to discuss it, or it does not fit with accepted ‘fashionable’ discourse. Evidence suggests that this forms a large component of the type of theory that practitioners use, that which is built up in their own private store, devised, developed and adapted from a variety of sources, most implicit” (93). Fook is referring to the theory or knowledge that is implicit in action, the assumptions or tacit knowledge that are “understood” in practice. I aim to explore those private sources and the implicit, unspoken knowledge of practice under the following headings:

- **The theorising practitioner** uncovers the background and previous work that brought me to the point of wanting to adapt a novel;

- **Something performable—the desiring performer** considers the lack of other performance material available to me as a performing artist, situated in my own unique experiences and the synchronicity of the articulated desires of other theatre artists in adapting their work;

- **In search of principles and processes of adaptation** overviews the type of literary material being chosen for adaptation and my intention, during the study, of finding a set of principles that could be used for adapting literature for the stage; and

- **Looking for the next project** reflects on the impending push for finding performable material explicitly described by all the theatre
artists engaged in the process of adapting work and argues that the search for the “next work” is an integral part of reflexive practice.

Miranda and Neumark propose that “presentation of practice as research is still an evolving form, much discussed in Australia”, so this reflective writing may bring me closer to answering their question, “How to present one’s own practice in a mode other than that of practice (N.pag.)?” This question also alludes to the issue of “voice”, and one’s own voice, and the voicing of text: quite literally as in a dramatic play; and also semiotically, in the shaping of meaning. These pages and headings represent the difficulty in building a bridge between the academic and the practitioner. The sections or chapters, following this “second” exegesis, which consist of the components of an earlier version of the exegesis, represent my intention to bring the view of the study into a prescribed pattern generally expected for academic discourse. These sections were arm-wrestled into third person, because that is the expected language of academia. They tell a story of sorts, but it is dry without the voice of the experiencer and maker of the work. My voice sits outside those pages and attempts to look at the whole process in an unemotional fashion. Yet, the real truth, if truth can possibly be captured, can be glimpsed within and between the words I wrote in third person, as well as those of the theatre artists who provided their words: we all had the desire to know more about ourselves within our practice.

Chappell et al, when preparing to research into Dance Education and creativity, talk about a “third space” to research in between the spaces of dance artist and student (189). Zeichner describes a situation similar to the one I’m proposing to navigate in this study:

‘Third space’ is a concept from ‘hybridity theory’ which recognises that individuals draw on multiple discourses to make sense of the work. It is a creative recombination and extension, one that builds on a first place
perspective that is focused on the ‘real’ material world – and a second
place perspective that interprets this reality through imagined
representations of spatiality (N.pag.).

Zeichner sees practitioner knowledge as the first-place perspective and
academic knowledge as the second place. These researchers are not the
only ones to struggle with a “third space” in order to explore their ideas.
Hazel Smith employs “fictocriticism” in order to see the conjunction of
academic and creative approaches when interpreting her sound
technodrama, *The Erotics of Gossip*, and Brewster, one of the group of
scholars who practiced fictocriticism explains its origination:

> Fictocriticism emerged strongly during the 1990s, partly as a response to
the growth of creative writing programmes within the university system,
and the need to find a productive way of bringing together creative and
academic approaches to textuality. It has attempted to break down the
binary opposition between creative and academic writing and explore the
continuum between the two (404).

Therefore, in the following pages of this “second” exegesis, I attempt to
find the “third space”, to put my voice back into the study. By allowing
my own voice to speak, new ideas and deeper thoughts have been
provoked. I believe that the structure that represents the earlier stage of my
discourse represents critical thinking, but of a kind Papastephanou &
Angeli identify as one that helps the practitioner be “perceptive of subtle
mechanisms… and more able to view information from a reflective
distance”. Yet, even while this is happening, the “larger political context is
concealed… with an incomplete and distorted understanding” (611). The
use of first person narrative and the recognition of my “self” as crucial to
to all aspects of the study have highlighted the “problematization component”
which is “a profound consideration” to come near some principles “meta-
selectively”, and “bring hidden aspects to the fore, to accommodate
reflectively the new and the unknown” (612). The difficulty in attempting
to bring to a “third space” or central path through the link between the academic and the practitioner requires “the thinking subject to wonder not only about problematic situations but also what is usually taken for granted, and to wander in alternative and as yet unexplored cognitive paths” (Papastephanou & Angeli 616). These ideas are highly pertinent to this part of the study. The noted sources, the theatre artists’ transcripts, the literature cited, the journal required to document the journey of the creative work, are products of practice, and therefore full of so much knowledge that is “taken for granted”. Thus, many of the words in the earlier study are shorthand for years of work where nothing much has been articulated, where actions have resulted from internalising the outcomes of earlier practice.

While I have managed to come to some conclusions, there are also empty spaces. Another practitioner also desiring to represent and reflect on her practice might, in reading my words, find herself closer to a truth or process, by virtue of being able to more directly leave out some of the “floundering”. Maybe they will be able to go to a place of understanding as a result of recognising similar feelings and ideas.
The Theorising Practitioner

The adaptation of the novel *Vita Brevis* grew out of my previous work in performance, which made me desire to learn how to adapt material that presented itself as interesting and engaging. My reflection on the practice that brought me to the point of this present study, according to Stewart (*Smart Art: The Mindful Practitioner-Researcher as Knowledge Worker*), is “needed as a basis from which to create unique and divergent ways forward… The task, therefore, is to show how we can draw upon established traditions, adapting and moulding them to suit new purposes and research questions.” My own experiences, that form a body of work, comprise the kind of traditions to which Stewart refers. These experiences are set within the context of the wider theatre arts community and span the progression of a solo performer emerging from working within theatre and performance collectives.

In 2004, when I began the journal documenting the two-year process of collecting ideas of practice from other theatre artists and writing the playscript for *Vita Brevis*, I sat perched on what felt like a precipice. I felt as though I was diving into the unknown because my earlier performance-making had been based on works I felt driven to do, and unique performances resulted as problems were worked through or ideas adapted and adopted. In the beginning of the journal I noted, as I watched performances at the Melbourne International Festival, that I could never capture all the ideas and thoughts that I wanted to be channelled into making new works, but that this study allowed me to scratch away at the surface and make explicit what had previously been unconscious processes.

Therefore, the following paragraphs, which describe the path that led to the study, also begin to delineate what Metzinger (*Being No One: The Self-
Model Theory of Subjectivity 2) describes as “being someone” and present me with a new kind of self-knowledge. Metzinger is proposing “identity criteria” for first-person experience in comparison with third-person perspective. Therefore, as I write the words, my identity as artist and critic appears for the reader and shows how I am the centre of this world. It is a truly subjective phenomenon because it is tied to my individual first-person perspective. In so doing, I am attempting what Popkewitz & Brennan agree is engaging in one possible way to “help”: through the process of seeing things differently, of “getting free of oneself” (22). So, by identifying the self and understanding the involvement of the self in the process, I can then free myself and stand apart, and take a new perspective. Noffke calls this the “‘naming’ that occurs through theorising the ordinary activities of people’s lives and experiences… the things we know in very real and useful ways…and ‘names’ those areas which we do not know, and perhaps cannot know” (33).

My early years of working in theatre and performance saw me move from working with an experimental theatre company in Melbourne, Theatre of Simultaneity, where we presented work in a fringe theatre space; through relocating to a country town, where I worked with other theatre practitioners who assisted in presenting thought-provoking plays; to finally, finding material I could perform alone with the assistance of one or two others.

Although this progression has led me to more solitary work, the desire to find material to engage an audience in a relevant issue, or stimulate people to look at aspects of life differently, has not dissipated. The earlier works I performed were written by other playwrights and chosen for a unique view on the world, or because they offered the opportunity for me to take a distinctive view through my own lens of perception. For example, for Theatre of Simultaneity, I performed a work written by Daniel Kahans, for
cello and spoken voice, called *Elegy*. Kahans had wanted to consider the inner thoughts of a musician working at the highest level; the frustration of travel and practice; the audience response to fame; and the fear of debilitation of the body. When I moved to regional New South Wales, one of the plays I directed was *Abigail’s Coven*, by Fred Goldsworthy and Peter Cox, a youth production comprising the scenes imagined to exist between those actually written by Arthur Miller for his play, *The Crucible*, which explored the power of youth, beauty, charisma, and manipulation. These were examples of my belief in the power of performance to engage the audience, and sometimes change them.

As I worked on the performances I was creating at this time, I didn’t engage in more than a superficial reflection after each project before scampering on to the next. However, the process of creating each of these works required deep thought in what Stewart (*Smart Art*) describes as a “process of border crossing that recognises that practice in the arts and design, by its very nature, challenges convention and is underpinned by structure and improvisation, order and creativity, experience and intuition.” She contends, “that practice is improved by critical exercise as mindful practice.” In what I did before I began the present study on *Vita Brevis*, the process of “mindful practice” in creating works led me to use qualitative research methods and engage in social enquiry as I was planning, directing, and producing the works. The engagement, the creative process, the pathway to the final work, absorbed and reflected the research for the play in the play itself, and then it was immediately on to the next work.

In reading literature relating to methodologies for research, the type of method that appears to fit most comfortably with the processes of my performance-making has been defined by Moustakas as “heuristic”:

Heuristic inquiry is a process that begins with a question or problem which the researcher seeks to illuminate or answer. The question is one
that has been a personal challenge and puzzlement in the search to understand one’s self and the world in which one lives. The heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with virtually every question that matters personally there is also a social—and perhaps universal—significance (15).

Moustakas notes the following as the concepts in heuristic research: Identifying with the Focus of Inquiry; Self-Dialogue; Tacit Knowing; Intuition; Indwelling; Focusing; and, The Internal Frame of Reference. I will return to these concepts in the following section when I consider the desire to create work.

In 1994, I left one regional town for another and worked on a type of bridging project with another female actor. *Tissue*, by Louise Page, is a play about breast cancer. This was the first time I began to adapt material, although not too unconventionally, as the play is written for one main character and many recurring shorter parts. A fellow performer played the main role and I took all the others, changing by way of one prop or piece of costume. The play was performed on four milk crates with four panels of abstract art as the set, and therefore could be performed in very adaptable spaces. Since *Tissue* was a special interest play, we attracted different audiences and performed in living rooms, art galleries and meeting rooms as well as theatre spaces. This experience led me to consider further unconventional places to present performance and connections were made with museums, art galleries, outdoor spaces, cafes, pubs, etc.

When you are predominantly a performer or director working outside an institution like an established theatre company, you look for material that other people have written that will suit you. In my case, I need a female voice saying something I want to say; I also need a character to suit the shape and age of my body (although in the case of *Tom’s Women*, by Geoffrey Sykes, there were thirteen female monologues ranging from nine-
year-old Susie Bourne to an elderly tourist having her afternoon tea); I like to use only a few props, costumes and sets; and I really enjoy engaging with technology in some way. Since my work is outside any company other than Elbow Room, which is the name I use to produce work, I am intellectually free to choose the projects on which I work. Since I work as an academic teacher to earn a living, I can be reflective in my choice of material. The works I choose to translate (take from a playscript to the stage) or adapt (work from various forms of literature to a performance) need to have something to communicate to an audience, and I need to believe in them strongly: in a way akin to what Braun describes as the objectives of Polish actors and directors around the 1920s:

> the ‘theatrical act executed on the stage…is not merely an artistic act, it is a sacred act as well… and that theatre is a deeply human art, as well as an interpersonal process of communication. Theater is an artistic communion between the actor-priests and the congregation of spectators’ (17).

The religious connotations in the latter part of this comment may be a little extreme but as I contemplate the playscript that’s been created from adapting *Vita Brevis*, I acknowledge that there may be some truth to what Braun says. There is certainly a level of commitment to bringing an audience a view of something that would not enter their thoughts without their embarking on the journey of witnessing this performance, and a sense of sacrifice and self-motivation in projects since they rarely form part of my income (indeed, as many other artists find, the desire to create requires much time and a considerable financial commitment in order to realise the work).

One work that illustrates my point about looking out for material that other people have written that suits my body, even though it consists of many roles, is *Tom’s Women*, by Geoffrey Sykes. This was the last major work I created before embarking on this study. *Tom’s Women* had been written
by Sykes to augment the retrospective exhibition of Tom Robert’s works at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1984. The performance included a narrator, a live singer, and projected images of Roberts’s art works inside the small auditorium generally used to deliver lectures. When I saw a video of the work, I saw potential to re-’direct’ the work. Sykes wrote four extra (female) monologues for the new production, and since the musician I had been working with in the project had recently had twin babies and could not take the production on tour, I solved the problem of the singer by introducing projected video. This provided me with the opportunity to choreograph the whole piece with live performance; projected art works; projected video, including interactivity intersected with the live performance; live and recorded songs and sound; and a very portable set; which together enabled a touring performance for art galleries and other similar spaces. During the Bicentennial year, several of Roberts’s works travelled to regional art galleries, and the performance was programmed to augment these exhibitions. One of the main reasons behind choosing this piece to perform and produce was to emphasise the different views one can have of artists, and that a work about artists and art is relevant to be performed, site-specifically, in an art gallery. Whilst there is a whole genre of performance, and performance art, planned and performed in art galleries, having a play performed in an art gallery is very irregular, and audience members commented on the juxtaposition of theatre and visual art and their ability to look differently at both after the theatre experience.

In my pursuit of material that will make audiences think, I’ve found opportunities when I’ve looked to material other than playscripts for performance material. This isn’t uncommon practice for finding resource material, as playwrights will research from any source that will provide information and inspiration. However, it’s not very common to have a performer recite a piece of legislation, or newspaper article, as part or all of a performance piece, which is the direction in which my work developed as
I considered how to manoeuvre my audience by making them travel to “be” in various locations and hear and engage with various types of literature. The pinnacle of this type of work was *Performance Promenades*, which I created for the Murray River Performing Group and in which the audience were led through the outdoor environment and witnessed or came upon pieces of drama being enacted for them. In naming the practitioner of this type of work, Stewart (2006), who is a studio-based artist, uses the term “bricoleur”. The following description captures what I now recognise as the “unconscious” motives of my *Performance Promenades* project:

As a practice-led researcher, the bricoleur is positioned within the borderlands, crossing between time and place, personal practice and the practice of others, exploring the history of the discipline and its changing cultural contexts. Bricolage enables the collaging of experience, involving issues of knowledge and understanding, technology, concept, percept, skill, and cultural and discipline experience. In the process, the bricoleur appropriates aspects of research methodologies that best suit the task at hand, travelling between various research disciplines in an attempt to build the most appropriate bridge between aesthetics and experience, through processes of production, documentation and interpretation. The bricoleur is seeking to explore, reveal, inform and, perhaps, inspire by illuminating aspects of insider praxis within their field (6).

Because “learning from other artists is a key aspect in the art process, using others' work as inspiration and as a learning tool to expand a personal style”, I found that my witnessing of works by two theatre companies who brought work to Australia, influenced me deeply and stretched my own ideas about what theatre or performance could be (Robinson, N.Pag.). These companies were Complicite, from Great Britain, and The Wooster Group, from New York, and I will now try to capture some of the ways in which they influenced me as a reflective practitioner.
I saw Complicite’s *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol*, when it toured to Melbourne for one of the International Festivals. The work itself is adapted from a short story by John Berger, and the performances were mesmerising for their physicality. For the Complicite actors, this didn’t necessarily mean acrobatics or dare-devil stunts (although many of them looked physically fit enough for this type of action), but rather the use of their bodies to present aspects of the story to the audience in clever, surprising, and often amusing, ways. I still have a clear “snapshot” memory of the image created by actors as they created an uninviting environment and became brambles for the character playing Lucie to scramble her way through.

I was impressed enough by the intelligence of the company’s performance that when they toured again to Australia, one or two years later, I travelled overnight to Sydney, even though heavily pregnant. The experience validated the discomfort—*The Street of Crocodiles* was startling for its physicality, again, and the magically amazing use of props and set which transformed the short stories of Bruno Schulz. The artistic director of Complicite, Simon McBurney, describes the visual aspect of the production thus: “they took over the room, filling pockets and the insides of the actors' hats, or under their tables. Umbrellas, book sprouting feathers, boots, shirts, plates, glasses and cutlery” (Complicite). In explaining the production, McBurney continues, he “realised that Schulz's vision, which evokes the transforming power of the child's eye, necessarily meant that objects and their transmogrification would be central to the process”. These two evocative pieces of theatre created by Complicite, both adaptations of literature, emphasised the immediacy of performance and the experience of the audience in witnessing theatrical devices: they reinforced for me the power of the magic of ideas that might be hidden and then presented in a flourish to an audience to provide new meaning.
Relating in this way my viewing of these works provides me with a “pause in an iterative process of representation and reflection” (Somerville 209). Somerville calls this “a temporary stability within the dynamic flux of meaning-making in (re)search for new knowledge” (209). The influence of witnessing these works had a direct impact on my own work, and in particular in my direction of Abigail’s Coven, by Fred Goldsworthy and Peter Cox. I was appointed as Director for a collaboration between The Riverina Theatre Company and the New South Wales Department of Education, Riverina Region, to initiate the Wagga Wagga Youth Drama Ensemble, based on a successful existing model in Sydney where young High School students from across the region audition to become part of a select troupe to perform a work written for a young cast. Having the luxury of a large cast meant that movement could be choreographed in symbolic ways and a budget allocation provided for some stylish props that also held meaning for the themes of the play, key aspects of Complicite’s performances that were inspirational. I can draw a thread specifically between some of the elements in the Street of Crocodiles and Abigail’s Coven: particularly with regard to the lighting; the choreography; and the additional percussive rhythm.

For Complicite, lighting and darkness were crucial and evocative, with several “moments” occurring in Street of Crocodiles with the stage in complete darkness and the light on only one actor. One such instance had the actor suspended and appearing to be walking horizontally down a brick wall, giving the audience the idea of a bird’s eye view of someone walking along a cobbled street under a street lamp. Several times in Abigail’s Coven the lighting was minimalised to emphasise an action, and at one point, to heighten the action happening inside an interrogation room, with the stage in darkness, a strong light streamed through a doorway onto one of Abigail’s friends “witnessing” and reporting what witchcraft she had
seen. The Complicite performance gave me courage to allow darkness to be used to effect instead of always emphasising lighting.

*Street of Crocodiles* was highly choreographed, with a memorable moment being where, as if one bird, or a flock of birds, the actors moved seamlessly and smoothly together as one, each actor holding a book: they flapped the covers, as if the books were the wings of birds. Having a large cast in Abigail’s Coven meant movement could be choreographed in ways that suggested symbols and meaning. At one point, all the girls moved to the stage in a spiral, as if sleepwalking, and called out lines that were to be heard when they were sleeping. Another highly choreographed scene was at the conclusion of the play when Abigail appeared to be drawn into “Hell” in the midst of the whole cast who held her up and then slowly drew her into their midst to make her “disappear”. Since this time I’ve enjoyed adding dance, or choreographed movement in performances that will give the audience more information, but not necessarily more words.

An impressive aspect of *Street of Crocodiles* was a rhythm accompaniment that was created through percussive means by the actors with their bodies and props like chairs; a clever and complicated rhythm was created in the lead-up to a dramatic moment where a male character from one of Bruno Schulz’ short stories was mimed shot in the head. *Abigail’s Coven* had a percussion score and a live performer accompanied the play every night. At several crucial points the percussive elements were echoed and taken up in the action on the stage by the actors. Sound, and sometimes, music created on the stage has also been used in many of my performances since this influential time.

The other impressive International theatre company that influenced my work at this time was The Wooster Group. The Wooster Group were very different from Complicite, but no less breathtaking, and the work they
brought to Australia was a collision between the actors’ physicality and glaring types of theatrical technology. The work was the company’s adaptation of Eugene O’Neill’s *The Hairy Ape*, and it was an amazing cacophony of sights and sounds. It seemed like a violent response to modern life and culture, and appeared to draw on a number of texts. The Group, on their webpage, summarise their work as “assemblages of juxtaposed elements: radical staging of both modern and classic texts, found materials, films and videos, dance and movement, multi-track scoring, and an architectonic approach to theatre design” (Wooster Group). The performance was so surprising and invigorating I wanted to read more about them and the ideas the artistic director, Elizabeth LeCompte, brought to her work.

We are reminded by Noffke that “knowing is in relationships to and with others involved in practice” (28), and witnessing the originality of stage presentation in *The Hairy Ape* and the use of technology gave me the subliminal courage to solve problems I’d had in presenting the play *Is that you, Nancy?* by Sandra Shotlander. While the resolution of how to stage this play didn’t reflect the violence in performance I’d witnessed in *The Hairy Ape*, the use and influence of technology was a very strong message for the audience. Experiencing the rawness of emotional content performed by The Wooster Group also gave me the courage to tackle *Us*, by Karen Malpede, which was a raw, emotional piece whose theatricality had spoken to me when Malpede talked about her work at an earlier International Women Playwrights conference in Athens. These were two plays I’d worked on in conjunction with each other to present at the 3rd International Women Playwrights conference in Adelaide, in 1991. My desires, in producing these two works together, were twofold: to present as “showcase” performances two women’s plays of a controversial nature that would not be found on the programming for mainstream theatres at that
time, and, to work on two plays of differing styles and by women playwrights from dissimilar backgrounds.

Shotlander’s play had not been my first choice from her suite of plays but I finally chose it for functional reasons rather than what Kearns describes as a necessary “level of passion” (x). It was written as a comedy and only needed two actors playing a number of roles. One of the actors would overlap with the Malpede play. When one of the actors was unable to travel to Adelaide for the conference, I decided to put all the characters (divided between two actors to accentuate the differences) who were “coming to dinner” on videotape and placed a screen at the end of the dining table. The live actor then interacted with the screen performers. Other televisions/video monitors were placed in various positions on the stage where “characters” were located: one was atop a very high set of steps to give an impression of a New York apartment fire escape; another beside the stage floor, almost in the audience. This gave a sense of movement around the stage, even though it was through videoed performances. Us, by Karen Malpede, appealed to me from the moment Malpede began to describe it at the conference. The play, although poetic in nature, centred on violent family histories with two actors doubling as parents and their abused children. There have been very few productions of this play: the first was directed by Judith Malina in 1987, which Malpede described in her conference presentation and has been documented in the text Women on the verge; and the second was my production at the 3rd International Women Playwrights Conference in Adelaide in 1991. When shown the documentation, Malpede called it “a brave production”.

The translation of these influential theatre productions into new ideas for productions that I was working on at the time brings up two thoughts for contemplation in this doctoral study. The first is the “translation” itself and
its introspective nature. The second is the need, in the pursuit of making performance, for access to others’ ideas and products of creativity to continue the process of learning within the discipline. Even though I had no access to the internal thoughts and desires of the theatre artists when they were in the process of creating these works, the products contained ideas that impressed me in ways that transferred an influence into the works I was creating, and, as can be seen in the descriptions of witnessing the performances by Complicite and The Wooster Group, ephemeral links can be made. Apparent solutions to problems can be impressive in major theatre productions, and these have often influenced me when adapting an idea. For example, Cheek by Jowl’s performance of Hamlet at the 1990 Adelaide Festival used a huge knitted, moving curtain as the essential piece of set to designate different scenes and settings, and I transferred this idea in a smaller way to the use of a venetian blind to divide the stage and imply voyeurism in my direction of Stephen Sewell’s The Blind Giant is Dancing for Powerhouse Players in Melbourne. That said, the transference of what I witnessed in Complicite’s and The Wooster Group’s work is much less precisely discernable, even though much more broadly influential.

In hindsight, I am able to trace my growth as a theatre arts practitioner within a time period beginning in the 1980s and 1990s termed as “postdramatic”. Hamilton tells us:

This period constituted a critical time in terms of the emergence of a field of practice that involved the partial invigoration of avant-garde forms by artists interested in addressing recent developments in philosophy, changes in everyday culture and different conceptions of social and political expression. It was a creative phase influenced by the art practices of the late 1960s and 1970s, and specifically by the shift undertaken by a number of artists to work beyond the institutional structures of the theatre and the art museum (7).

The performance artists Hamilton names in her article were based in the capital cities and I witnessed much of their work. I participated in
performance-making workshops and events with Sidetrack Theatre, Nigel Jamieson (Director of Legs on the Wall), Jenny Kemp, Lindy Davies and Ray Mooney from the Australian “postdramatic” scene, as well as Mike Alfreds, from Great Britain; Robert Sturua, the director of the Rustivelli Theatre in Georgia; Julian Crouch from Improbable Theatre in Britain; Phillipe Gaulier, from France: all international visitors who shared their practice in the International Workshop Festivals. Most of these practitioners had not, at that time, written about their work, and so participating in their ideas through workshops was the only way to find out about their undocumented “theories”.

When theorists like Hamilton use the term “postdramatic theatre” they are not talking about all performance that is not “drama”. They reflect on the work of a number of Australian artists in the 1980s and 1990s from a variety of disciplines: theatre, dance, opera, and the visual arts, which explains the myriad of influences that were changing the concept of what comprises a performance and producing “an increasing dichotomy between mainstage (literary) theatre and innovative hydrids developed and presented at the margins of mainstream production” (8).

There are several reasons that my work has moved beyond the “institutional structures” and might be termed postdramatic: I’m motivated by reasons other than mainstream audience-pleasing in creating work; because I need to earn a living to support my family and cannot afford to be a “starving artist”, my creative expression happens outside of paid employment; I’m curious about exploring the power of performance to communicate and educate; I’m interested in presenting theatre in unusual performance places (as well as in theatres).

The Vita Brevis project, which is the basis for this doctoral study, began as a personal project that pre-dated the discovery of the novel. It was a
synchronous coming together of a growing desire to make a work responding to St. Augustine, and the need to create something that I could perform alone. My first introduction to St. Augustine came with a plan to travel in Algeria. My pre-reading about some of the towns I wanted to visit unearthed the information that St. Augustine had been the Bishop of Hippo and that the ruins of the monastery still existed outside the small fishing village of Annaba. As a non-Catholic, I knew very little about St. Augustine and felt moved to read some of his work and what others had written about him. I discovered he was, historically, a “giant” who affected many people in his own lifetime, and for centuries after. Indeed, I’ve reflected on the effect he’s had on my own life through the relationships I’ve had with members of the Catholic community, as well as his cultural impact on vast sections of modern society.

The discovery of *Vita Brevis*, by Jostein Gaarder, seemed like a solution to two desires for expression: the female voice of Augustine’s concubine taking him to task over *The Confessions* presented both the beauty of Augustine’s writing along with the anguish Floria feels in witnessing her former lover’s impoverished but chosen monastic life of denying the senses. As well, the main character is a woman of an appropriate look and age for my body to perform. So to adapt a novel, or more particularly this novel, became the next stage in my performance development.

As I reached this point in my development, I witnessed a number of impressive performances that were adaptations of novels. *Cloudstreet*, by Tim Winton, adapted by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo, and *Night Letters*, by Robert Dessaix, adapted by Susan Rogers and Chris Drummond, were both vast performances with large casts and beautiful, absorbing staging. I was intrigued by the complexities in the resolutions to the problems the novels must have given the adapters, and the wonderful nature of the experience I had as an audience member.
Smaller, but no less intriguing, were three other adaptations: *Miss Tanaka*, by Xavier Herbert, adapted by John Romeril; *Alias Grace*, by Margaret Atwood, adapted by Caroline Lee and Laurence Strangio; *Journal of the Plague Year*, by Daniel Defoe, adapted by Tom Wright. All three were adapted into entirely different styles of theatre, very different from the novels, which made me curious about the thoughts, ideas, problems to be solved, likes, desires and personal motivations of the theatre artists responsible.

The synchronicity of these events—my desire to make a work about St. Augustine; the discovery of the novel, *Vita Brevis*, by Jostein Gaarder; and being impressed by the theatricality of other theatre artists’ adapted novels—held me poised at the beginning of this study. All three gave me the desire to engage in an enquiry in parallel ways: to ask theatre artists, and where possible those whose work I’d witnessed, how they managed the transformation of a written piece of literature; and, at the same time to use my prior experiences and the new-formed knowledge of these theatre artists to create my own adaptation of a novel for performance.

Fook discusses qualitative research and proposes that “questions of generalizability and relevance relate to the varying degrees to which theories can apply more broadly, yet can also provide understanding” (84). So, with the view to generalising what I could find about adapting novels to live performance, I took a straightforward approach towards reviewing literature and asking theatre artists “why” they would choose to adapt a novel rather than write an original play, and, more importantly to this study, I asked, because I needed to know, “how” they went about the process of so doing.
Gilgun, when discussing qualitative research in social work, distinguishes between two types of generalisability:

The first type, ‘idiographic’, refers to theory that is developed from specific situations and can be tested for its relevance for, and its ability to provide understanding of, other situations. The second type of generalizability, called ‘nomothetic’, is associated with the search for more ‘general laws, abstracted from time, place and specific person (122).

The review of literature for the doctoral study developed along the nomothetic “theoretical” path in my desire to produce a “predictive function, with the ability to impose order and clear guidelines for practice”. Fook says these theories can give us a starting point, and that even though inadequate, can provide a beginning framework that makes new experiences initially manageable (84).

So, the chapters in the “old” exegesis that collect the responses around the two generalised questions of “why” and “how” enabled me to look at an overview of the ideas of the theatre artists and consider those that resonated with my own experiences. I was very much in awe of all these practitioners as they were practising artists in the full-time sense. Some of them worked under the umbrella of an established theatre company, and others were professionally engaged, project-by-project. I did feel intimidated by the value of the material I had collected and didn’t want to misinterpret or misconstrue any of the words or ideas of these generous practitioners, so the gathering of their responses into a broad “general” framework felt like the most respectful way I could proceed.

Only in the Conclusion to the “old” exegesis do I think I begin to reach the “idiographic” type of generalisability described by Gilgun and Fook. Fook agrees that there needs to be a closer link between theory and practice:

I think one of the difficulties for both practitioners and researchers is that an artificial distinction between idiographic and nomothetic theories has
been created—it is often assumed that idiographic theories emerge from practice, and nomothetic theories from research. This has led to a devaluing of the forms of theorizing associated with practice. Idiographic theorizing is often thus not even viewed as research. But in fact both forms of theorizing are used in, and are integral to, practice and research, indeed, to the business of living (84).

However, in speaking to other theatre artists about their adaptations, I took a step of my own beyond usual practice, and asked them also to take a step that practitioners rarely do. We reflect on our practice, usually only in order to remedy any inefficiencies of process. Critics will write about performances, but practitioners, aware of the inconsistencies of criticism, rarely use these reviews to change or interrogate their practice. David Kearns shares a belief that “success in performance has nothing to do with good reviews or monetary gain or positive feedback. It’s about the degree to which artists feel safe to create what they must, for the sake of doing so” (107). Therefore, the process undertaken by theatre artists is much like the differentiation Metzinger (The Ego Tunnel) discusses when talking about states of consciousness. When we are working on a project: adapting; writing; rehearsing; performing; we are engaged in the “feeling of the self” absorbed in what we see as the “human self model”: ourselves engaged in performance making. We identify with the image of our bodies as ourselves working inside the ideas of the project (16).

Taking the time beyond the project to reflect back on the way projects come about; detailed thinking through the motivation or desire to use a text as the basis for performance; considering the effectiveness of the outcomes of the performance and audience reaction; Metzinger says all these take us outside the ‘body’ and the sense of self. We can ask ourselves questions that help us consider what state of consciousness we want to bring to the
reflective process “and start an open-ended process of gaining self-
reflective knowledge” (215).

Abbs, too, reinforces this need of the individual:

to have a sense of themselves as part of a wider community as well as
some mastery of the techniques involved in the execution of an art (or
design) form if the discipline is to be fully apprehended or experienced.
So our practitioner-researcher-bricoleur may develop a process of looking
more closely at the practices of other practitioners in their field while
identifying avenues of appropriation from a variety of qualitative research
methods’ (223).

These avenues were chronicled in the required reflective Journal as I
listened to my fellow theatre artists and at the same time engaged in the
research of the “world” of Vita Brevis in order to write the playscript.

And why would I want to engage in such a process? Noffke has summed
it up when she says that:

through our research work, we hope, not for ‘validation’ through the
public sharings of our efforts, although such warmth and solidarity do
sustain us. We mostly hope for help in understanding the contradictions,
the consonances and dissonances in our ‘reporting’, that will help us and
others see spaces for the creation of new action and thought (29).

By uncovering and reflecting on the theatre projects that led to the Vita
Brevis adaptation in this study, I have recognised and uncovered the
threads that led not only to the new work, but new works to come. The
“spaces for creation” appear when one opens oneself to new possibilities,
and “new action and thought” is recognised in the work of others and
absorbed into the working consciousness of the theatre artist. The desire to
produce work manifests in a desire to say something of meaning to the
world, the audience. The desire does not always translate into a work,
though, and in the following section I will discuss the obstacles I
repeatedly encounter as a desiring performer. The lack of satisfying
performance material was also identified by other theatre artists when adapting work, and in the search for something performable, and will be considered in the next section.
The Desiring Performer: Searching for Something “Performable”

A woman’s body ages and, even though a performer needs to keep their body “in tune” and be versatile, roles to be performed need to be suitable for the performer’s instrument. It’s quite obvious that the roles being written by playwrights are often for young performers coming out of Performing Arts faculties and schools, and perhaps it’s perceived that general audiences respond best to beautiful young bodies, male and female, engaged in hyper-real lifestyles on the stage. Good engaging writing for older women is sadly lacking. If a female performer wants to continue to perform, then the performer/director often needs to find or make work of their own. If playwrights are not writing for older (female) actors, then the older (female) actors may need to find material for themselves or commission others to write for them.

What moves a theatre artist to identify material that has potential performability is hard to describe and can sometimes be fleeting. Delight in language is one element that can inspire an inkling of what’s possible. For example, a radio play by John Griffin inspired me to make a stage realisation of Kurada Coming that toured to the Adelaide Fringe Festival. The language Gaarder gives to Floria in Vita Brevis felt right for my body to communicate ideas that could make an audience think more about issues of a woman deserted; social mores; and the delights of the senses. Allen Gaborro, in a book review of That Same Flower, the North American title of Vita Brevis, says:

Her distress and indignation is far more convincing than anything Augustine has to offer, and what she writes is enough to compel the reader to identify with her suffering, to feel her pain in the name of pity and compassion. As the victim in this affair of the heart and soul, Aemilia expresses her pain eloquently as the words inscribed in the Codex Floriae become a cathartic salve for her heartbreak: "In your heart you cleaved to me, and your heart was wounded so that it bled. My heart suffered the
same hurt...for we were two souls torn from each other...because you loved the salvation of your own soul more than you loved me” (N.pag.).

This comment from the reviewer describes the emotional content of the author’s writing for the character of Floria, and the excerpt he quotes from the novel shows how clearly Gaarder expresses the intimate memories of a woman abandoned. Gaarder manages a balance between contemporary speech and stylistic rhetoric from the period. In my Journal, I noted:

In my head she begins to ‘tell a story’, she begins to take on the type of argument that Augustine would have used as an orator—colourful language painting pictures for the audience, beginning to create a good argument that will win the debate by putting forward a number of indisputable points (28 September 2006).

Clearly, there was a quality about Gaarder’s Floria that stimulated me. Michael Kearns (x) agrees that committing to a work needs that special something. In his “story” about creating solo performance, he describes being drawn to particular pieces:

It either speaks to me or it doesn’t (and if it doesn’t, I would never consider signing on as a director). I could teach someone who was creating work that didn’t inspire me but I couldn’t attach my name as director unless there was a level of passion.

The spark of the idea that material could be “performable” comes in several forms. For Vita Brevis, it was the idea of saying something ‘social’ about St. Augustine, and from a woman’s point of view. For many of the theatre artists interviewed, it was an image of something on stage that started them on the, often long, process of adapting a novel, or an epic in the case of The Odyssey, to be dramatised for the stage. Chris Drummond “saw” an image when he read the blurb on the back of the book, Night Letters:

There is nothing overtly theatrical about the blurb but I immediately ‘saw’ that Venetian hotel room as a theatrical space with the figure of a dying
man in exile surrounded by his ghosts and demons—a magically metaphorical space… I felt I knew what such a theatre show could be—it was a kind of epiphany—all before I’d turned the first page (Personal communication 2005).

Wynn Handman senses the possibility of the actor presenting something already inside them to carry the drama. The language in the novel provides this potential source of inspiration. Of course, not only adapters of other texts want to affect the audience. Stephen Sewell, one of Australia’s most highly regarded playwrights of original plays, talks about wanting to affect an audience:

…I want people to, in some kind of way, feel more compassion for one another. And one of the wonderful things when it works is to see an audience coming out of one of the plays holding one another, or being careful of one another (qtd. in Gifford 7).

Chris Drummond echoes Sewell in desiring the audience to have a transformative experience:

As an audience member I want to laugh and cry and scream and be delighted and disturbed, whatever it takes to really feel alive. I want it acknowledged that I am present there, that I have a brain and life experience and a whole lot of other baggage as well (qtd. in Oxenburgh).

In my journal, I noted the desires I had for Floria and the audience:

I think she is ‘everywoman’ and her story could be any woman’s. I want the audience to understand how she feels and be compassionate (8 November 2004).

Once a theatre artist establishes a project, the influences in the staging or production can be varied, and the ways these influences come about can be purposeful or accidental. For example, the mention of Seneca’s Medea in Gaarder’s novel is only one line, but it provoked me to read further about the figure of Medea from varied sources.
Floria talks about Medea! “I talked of Seneca’s tragedy Medea which I had just read. In the play it says that the other side too should be heard, and that was me” (Gaarder 29) (14 November 2004).

In this journal entry, I explore the possibility of thinking that Gaarder is having Floria identify with the motives and feelings Medea had when deciding that her only possible action was to kill her children, and that it wasn’t the woman, Medea, it was the situation in which she found herself. Floria didn’t kill her son, but she feels responsible for his death. Ultimately, I used the idea that the passion in the words of Seneca’s Medea was a way for the well-mannered and previously dutiful Floria to demonstrate and channel the buried and deep emotions she had been hiding from herself and the world. This solved many problems for heightening the onstage drama, and allowed the character to develop more convincingly: it gave the work more “performability”. The character needs a superobjective: for Floria I think this is to love and wait for Augustine, and even though she goes through many twists and turns as she reads The Confessions and remembers their lives together from her point of view, I think she maintains that objective right to the end. Yet, when she gets to the end of the play, she’s grown as a person and knows more about herself. The anger, and the ability to step outside herself, which the Medea character demonstrates in Seneca’s play, becomes a theatrical process that Floria can experience, and shows the audience how much she’s buried her own desires.

The theatrical device of showing Floria’s inner feelings through the Medea character is one way of presenting the desired idea, or message, to the audience. Pamela Sterling said she purposefully used theatrical devices in her adaptations in order to extend or reinforce the advantages that theatre can bring to the written word in communicating ideas to an audience. Examples of devices that she said she liked to use were: direct address; choral speaking; music; and in one performance a “Brechtian” approach.
John Rommeril also used theatrical devices to give meaning to his adapted work. *Miss Tanaka* was one of several short stories by Xavier Herbert that were based on Herbert’s own working life in Darwin, and it was the potential for theatricality that appealed to Rommeril in his desire to adapt a story into a play:

It took my fancy because it’s a bit of a cross-dressing story. It’s already got a built-in theatrical premise. People putting on costume, and playing at someone other than who they are, in the kabuki form of female impersonation role that featured the Japanese diving community (Personal communication 2005).

I don’t consider myself a “highly trained and highly skilled” performer because I don’t get enough performance opportunities to be able to maintain my skills constantly; they need to be honed again for each project. Yet I agree with Kearns when he talks about creating solo work: that writing a piece for predominantly one actor does take a lot of consideration (12). The length of the work needs to be physically possible for the body and the mind. It needs to be like a story unfolding, with language that will help the audience use their imaginations.

At this point, it is timely to return to Moustakas and the “heuristic concepts,” since this framework can provide retrospective structure to understand and articulate my “desire” as a performer and director to undertake the adaptation of *Vita Brevis*:

Essentially, in the heuristic process, I am creating a story that portrays the qualities, meanings, and essences of universally unique experiences. Through an unwavering and steady inward gaze and inner freedom to explore and accept what is, I am reaching into deeper and deeper regions of a human problem or experience and coming to know and understand its underlying dynamics and constituents more and more fully (13).

The concepts and phases of heuristic research are considered a way of self-inquiry and dialogue with others “aimed at finding the underlying
identifying phases of heuristic research, Moustakas covers some concepts that position him ready to consider the phases in relation to a question or study. I will look at each of these concepts in relation to this doctoral study.

**Identifying with the Focus of Inquiry**

Moustakas talks about imagining himself as the subject of his scientific research to gain a sense of the action or engagement in order to construct or reconstruct activity. Because I “desire” to perform or direct the character I am adapting, this type of preparatory work is essential: visualising what Floria feels like when she encounters Augustine’s writing; thinking what kind of character she might be; imagining or remembering other wives or partners of Great Men, since she was the partner of one of history’s intellectual or philosophical “giants”. All these thoughts go into imagining the world of the play and the character of Floria. This happens each time a novel or piece of writing is identified as “performable”: it’s the very first step in knowing the potential of a performance piece.

**Self-Dialogue**

Moustakas comments, “one may enter into dialogue with the phenomenon, allowing the phenomenon to speak directly to one’s own experience, to be questioned by it” (16). This comment fits very accurately with a process I learned and adopted when working with Mike Alfreds at the Australian International Workshop Festival in 2000. Alfreds gave the workshop participants some exercises with which to interrogate a text and begin the process of characterisation:

List what you and the character have in common, biographically, culturally, physically, psychologically. The last two take a lot of objectivity about yourself—but if you don’t know yourself, you will limit your means of expression (1).
According to Moustakas, self-dialogue is the time to “face oneself” and to be honest. Part of Alfred’s process is to scour the text and list the facts given by the playwright about the character, which gives the actor a base from which to begin “facing oneself”. There are some similarities between Floria and me: she refuses to be baptised—I have long since explored spiritual ideas that do not fit with traditional Anglican views; she lived faithfully with Augustine for more than 12 years—I also lived “faithfully” with the father of my children and recognise many of Floria’s revelations from leading a single-parent life when the partner-relationship was abandoned; she had no fortune—the necessity for Floria to give lessons in the classics is similar to my need to work to provide an income for my children. There are other similarities; and there are many differences. Alfred’s advice is to “learn to be objective as possible about yourself otherwise you can’t play truthfully” (1).

**Tacit Knowing**

The implied—known but unstated—will be looked at further in the section, “Looking for the next project”. In this instance, though, it includes all the prior experiences I’ve already described from previous theatre projects and performance works that waited behind me, ready and waiting for the moment when I needed to draw an idea forward to make it manifest in the working of the adaptation. Even though Moustakas discusses various kinds of tacit knowing, his final example is the pertinent one to this study. He refers to “speculative skills” and gives the example of a chess player who uses this knowledge to make the next move (22). As the desiring performer, I’m not always explicitly aware of what I know until I use the “knowing” to effect the creation. Fook offers the alternative names of “practice wisdom” and “life experience” for this concept (93). Something like the “next move” of a chess player in the case of the desiring performer can be exemplified by my discovery of *Vita Brevis*, or *A Very Easy Death,*
by Simone de Bouvoir, and the implicit understanding that these are uniquely appropriate raw performance material for my body to perform.

**Intuition**

Moustakas describes the bridge between tacit knowing and explicit knowledge as intuition. In intuition, he explains, “we perceive something, observe it, and look and look again from clue to clue until we surmise the truth” (23). Each of the theatre artists talked about their intuitive processes. While these are very difficult to describe and grasp Moustakas advises that they guide “the researcher in [the] discovery of patterns and meanings that will lead to enhanced meanings, and deepened and extended knowledge” (24). Indeed, the overarching themes I identified from the theatre artists’ motivations to adapt in the ‘old’ exegesis, (popularity of the story, characters, or cultural aspects; exploration of social or psychological fear; and the taking up of large themes that challenge audiences), were the basis from which I assembled common ideas and reasons from the first review of literature and interviewing the theatre artists. This has now led to a more sophisticated “knowing” as I proceed through this reflective process: I am learning to articulate the more elusive perceptions.

**Indwelling**

The concept of indwelling is an internal process that is reflected in two ways within this research. As a step beyond intuition, it reinforces the commitment in desiring to communicate something worthy to your prospective audience members. Secondly, it is about identifying those aspects within yourself that can be drawn upon as the performer working to create a character or vehicle of performance. Moustakas explains that “indwelling requires practice to enable the researcher to tap into intuitive awakenings and tacit mysteries as well as the explicit dimensions which can be observed, reported, and described” (24). This was certainly an
activity or exercise that Wynn Handman asked his actors to engage with when working on a character. This was part of his considering whether his desire for a performance was worthy of pursuing into adaptation and production. Sections of text that he felt had the potential to inspire were given to students to work on and “marinate”. In my Journal, I reflected on whether I could adopt this practice myself:

I’ve been thinking about Wynn’s way of working with the actors in order to get an authentic performance from them. His method is his way, but other great directors get great results too…. And this is what Wynn asks the actors to do as ‘homework’ and asks them to ‘marinate in the character’ (11 April 2005).

For me, working alone—I have to probably follow the Mike Alfreds process until I’m up and working the material. Then I can ‘marinate in the character’, but unless someone else is involved, I’m not sure I can have a character interview. Besides, Wynn says he has been doing it so long that the questions, and what he wants to achieve, can happen in this improvisatory way rather than all the preparation he says he used to do in his early years (11 April 2005).

**Focusing**

After interviewing the theatre artists and reading literature, my “desire” to persist with *Vita Brevis* as the vehicle for performance, even though it sat within a type of literature that was designated inappropriate by some, made me “focus” on possible solutions to this problem. I discuss the criticism in more detail in the next section, In Search of Principles and Processes of Adaptation, under the heading “From critical feedback for *Vita Brevis*” but the main negative points were: the novel consists of (imaginary) letters that include much reflection and memory; is centred on the feelings and ideas of a woman; and, contains little or no ‘action’—all attributes that made two of the reviewers deem the novel un-performable. Moustakas says that “focusing enables one to see something as it is and to make whatever shifts are necessary to remove clutter and make contact with necessary
awarenesses and insights into one’s experiences” (25). Focusing on what other experts had said about this type of literature and analysing my thoughts about its suitability enabled me to have the following insights in order to appropriately adapt the text to represent the way I desired to present the performance to an audience: intersection of Floria’s words with the Medea text; inclusion of “physical” performance and technology to translate key ideas within the text; and the production of the work in an intimate setting.

The Internal Frame of Reference

In this study, the internal frame of reference occurred when I truly understood I was ready to begin the adaptation of Vita Brevis, as only I could reflect on the previous concepts within my own experiences that Moustakis has delineated above. I could look at my earlier perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and sense; I had talked directly to others in order to understand their experiences; and I had the desire to create a performance that would communicate and have meaning. Moustakis summarises and explains:

[that the] heuristic processes relate back to the internal frame of reference. Whether the knowledge derived is attained through tacit, intuitive, or observed phenomena—whether the knowledge is deepened and extended through indwelling, focusing, self-searching, or dialogue with others—it’s medium or base is the internal frame of reference’ (Moustakas 26).

The adaptation of Vita Brevis began as a mystery I felt I could not fathom. However, through the processes of reflection within the journal as I searched for a way forward, and through the interviews with expert theatre artists, I was able to reach the point of an “internal frame of reference”. Ultimately, I proceeded in a way that began the adapting of the playscript. The beginning of the process was a result of all those initiating concepts Moustakas refers to; all contributed to my own internal frame of reference and the confidence to make my desire to perform manifest.
**Applying the “Desires” to *Vita Brevis***

As discussed earlier, when I initially started to think about adapting *Vita Brevis* for performance, I had no inkling that Seneca’s *Medea* could be woven through it. That idea arose as I worked through analysing the text of *Vita Brevis* and researching the world of the play, and being open to the possibilities the research might bring. These possibilities led to the “performability” of the work: the suitability of the material to the body, and the capacity of the material to be communicated to an audience.

There were other elements I discovered in reading about the “world” of *Vita Brevis* that assisted in adapting Gaarder’s writing into something performable: I was concerned that the voice Gaarder had given Floria was too contemporary—more like a 20th or 21st century voice—and whilst I wanted to make plenty of the points Gaarder’s Floria does in the novel, I also wanted to be sure her historical situation was credible. Gaarder makes her a student of rhetoric, as Augustine was in his late teens when he was studying in Carthage, around the time he and Floria might have met. Indeed, historians have emphasised Augustine’s revelling in the senses during this period of his life and his passion for the stage is documented in his *Confessions*. Gaarder’s Floria uses Augustine’s own style of language in refuting *The Confessions*, which suggests he believes she was intelligent and free-thinking: an appropriate mate for a man of high intellect. I take this further by proposing she could be a performer, an occupation that was beginning to be acceptable for a woman in Roman Africa, or she might be a teacher of the classics, and hence very familiar with Seneca’s *Medea*, a play contemporary with the period. The idea of using excerpts of *Medea* within the adaptation of *Vita Brevis* came from two places. The first was the search for literature about Augustine; and the second from the brief mention of Seneca in Gaarder’s novel, to which I have already referred. I
found a chapter called “The Singing Actors of Antiquity”, where Edith Hall describes Augustine himself participating in performance and performing a song named *The Flying Medea*:

Augustine’s supposedly shameful passion for vocal music had been fed by his successful participation, as a young pagan, in theatrical singing competitions (*Conf.4.2*). He recalls a solo he used to sing entitled *The Flying Medea*. The tragic theme implies that Augustine performed in costume and with gestures as a *tragoedus* or *tragicus cantor* (a ‘tragic singer’). We do not know whether this aria was composed in the first person, requiring the singer to impersonate Medea as she flew, but it was certainly much performed. Augustine’s testimony opens a fascinating window on the late Roman theatre, where famous songs on mythical themes were still being sung by expert singers, more than eight centuries since the first actor to impersonate Euripides’ Medea had flown off to Athens in the chariot borrowed from the Sun (3).

As early as November 2004, I noted in the journal that the mention of Medea gave me cause for further investigation into a myth with which I wasn’t very familiar, in order to explore the “performability” of integrating two stories: one being told through the intellectual means of rhetoric and logic, and the other through heightened drama:

I want to represent Floria as a woman from her time—on the other hand she could be ‘everywoman’, she might be me. Somehow, I want to tell a parallel story. I know that Augustine used to perform a song called *The Flying Medea*—is the story of Medea the one that interweaves? Could Floria’s story be a retelling of *Medea* through the Gaarder story? Will Floria be an actor preparing to play *Medea*? What about a Goddess myth? I need to revisit the pagan goddess that was used on the coins in North Africa at the time—perhaps Floria has an altar set to this goddess—is this a retelling? Is this a chasm that separates these two lovers (as Augustine embraced Manicheism and then Christianity) which precipitates their departure from each other? (4 November 2004).

This passage is a key extract from my journal. It represents the articulation of many thoughts and ideas and avenues for research that became possible when engaging with this text, and such a process would probably constitute
part of my first stage of working to create a performance with any literature, whether that be playscript or other material requiring adaptation.

Another of the interviewed theatre artists talked similarly about enriching the performance with new and possible ideas. Greg Lissaman talked about creating “vertical stories” for the characters in his adapted works. Since he was working with young people’s fiction, he often had very spare lines of text to work with, but enjoyed embellishing what might be suggested by the illustrations in the books.

So we went “right, well what’s in the visuals that we want to draw on”—the idea that Pete is an artist. He is actually trading art that goes all over the city and gets put everywhere. “We’ll expand that”—and because we were working in the National Gallery, we said “well what artworks are similar to Pete’s, here?” So we chose John Olsen’s *Sydney Sun* and said “well, right, let’s this be an exploration of his art, let’s get the moment where we see in his world that someone actually loves art and someone is just fascinated by what it looks like and what it makes you feel” (Personal communication 2005).

I’m interested in Lissaman emphasising the desire to make the audience “feel” what is going on. The interest in using the “Medea” myth interspersed with Floria’s reflections is, similarly, to give the audience a chance to “feel” what the words of Seneca’s *Medea* mean to Floria, and how they might understand how she “feels” in this situation.
In Search of Principles and Processes of Adaptation

Prior to beginning my adaptation of *Vita Brevis*, I’d witnessed some wonderful adaptations. Each production was highly individual and varied in size of cast, style of theatre, and how closely the text of the novel was adhered to in the live performance. Also, synchronously, adaptation seemed to come to the fore in the performing arts, and the 2006 Melbourne International Festival attracted several productions that Virginia Trioli termed “adaptations” when she interviewed the theatre artists presenting them during a *Sunday Arts* television program (11 June 2006). If media were asking theatre artists about their adaptations, I felt even surer there must be some key principles that could be drawn out from talking to people who had worked to produce one or more adaptations. I wanted to find a series of steps, which could be shared and repeated, regarding a process of working. Or, if not an explicit process, then I sought some guiding principles that might be derived from reading about, and talking to, theatre artists where I might listen and discern how their “thinking selves” shared a cognitive self-reference, and how those thinking selves influenced their work; their motivations for choosing their material; and, the journey to the outcome of the performance (Metzinger 2003:5).

Even though I’ve written some short plays and adapted literature for performance before, I didn’t feel that I could immediately adapt something as large or complex as a novel like *Vita Brevis*. It had presented itself as the next work I wanted to create but I felt ill equipped to begin the adaptation of a whole novel.

I believed I could find a process for adapting a novel; there are hints in the scant literature I’d found in preparing for the doctoral study. The way some theorists referred to the performer’s art made me think there could be
a way to provide some steps to continue working in this way and then bring my own unique perspective to the process:

There exists a secret art of the performer. There exist recurring principles which determine the life of actors and dancers in various cultures and epochs. These are not recipes but points of departure which make it possible for an individual’s qualities to become scenic presence and to be manifest as personalised and efficient in the context of the individual’s own history (Taviani 258).

Taviani is referring, though, to the performers themselves, and their techniques and training, rather than the text the performer will perform, and the adaptation process proved elusive and dependent upon the theatre artist’s own desires and experiences. In the following pages, I will reflect on my search under the following sub-headings: 1) From the literature; 2) From the playwrights; and, 3) From the critical feedback on the draft playscript of *Vita Brevis*.

1) From the Literature

I looked first for any literature before interviewing the theatre artists, and I was predominantly interested in the adaptation of novels. With regard to theatre, I found no specific texts that presented any information about the process, and as I ultimately found, this was because there is no one generally accepted way to adapt material, particularly novels, for the stage. I was able to glean a little information from “Introductions” to playscripts as well as published interviews with theatre artists.

I did find some literature that took up the popular practice of adapting from novels to film. One text that proposed a “methodology” for discussing the transposition of novels to film was *Novel to Film* by Brian McFarlane. He begins by emphasising the difference in “seeing”: in novels you see with the mind, and in film, the eye. This applied, as well, to live performance. However, the immediacy of theatre engages the senses even more than
film. McFarlane explores the differences between the elements that can be transferred from novel to film, and then identifies those elements that need adapting. The transferred elements are those that transfer well from one narrative form to another. The adapted elements are those that require different equivalences in a film medium. By “equivalences”, McFarlane means “codes” that are used in reading a film (as distinct from reading a novel). McFarlane’s discussion is reflective, and he analyses the novels in relation to a completed work of film. Since many of his points, or principles, were brought up by one or more of the theatre artists when being interviewed, they are useful points of comparison. I will first discuss the transferred elements from novels to film: first person narration; the omniscient novel; and the mode of “restricted consciousness”. In discussing these elements, McFarlane draws a distinction between the kinds of narration and their cinematic practice. I intend also to draw a comparison in each case with the adaptation concepts identified by the theatre artists in their interviews.

**The First Person Narration:**

McFarlane identifies the transferral of two kinds of individual discourses from novel’s first person narration to film: the subjective cinema; and the oral narration or voice-over. The subjective, or what the characters themselves see and how they experience it, he says, is much less amenable to the presentation of a consistent psychological viewpoint derived from one character in film. The oral narration, in comparison, is “in relation to those films which employ the voice-over technique.” In this kind, one’s sense of the character to whom the voice is attributed is more likely to be the product of their involvement in the action directly presented than of their occasional comment upon it, whereas this is frequently not the case in the first-person novel (16). Examples from the theatre artists will help make this more explicit.
John Collins noted, for example, that his adaptation and performance of \textit{The Great Gatsby} was the first person narrative of the novel (Personal communication, 2005). Collins explained that this gave him, as director, the opportunity to have an actor be someone who is both the reader of the book as well as a character in it in his company’s production. This parallels with McFarlane’s discussion of subjective cinema where he observes that film may be more agile and flexible than a novel, in changing the physical point of view from which an event or object is seen.

Wynn Handman considered the use of first person and present tense one of his key principles of theatre making. If a novel he was adapting (having identified other dramatic potential in it) wasn’t written in first person, he would rewrite it. Handman said he believed that this immediacy of voice allowed the actor to “grab the audience early on.” Handman’s attachment to first person narrative as a principle of his work often narrowed down the material he would use, even within one novel. For example, in adapting the novel \textit{Dreaming in Cuban}, by Christine Garcia, he only used one character’s story from the novel. He explained this was:

...because Pilar is written in the first person—the other characters aren’t. And her story is obviously the author’s story. The author was a punk and so that was the easiest. And then re-arrange some of the time sequences. I just knew I wasn’t going to do the others at all (Personal communication 2005).

An example of Handman shifting the writing to the first person was his adaptation called \textit{Dorothy and Red}, which used several texts in third person. Dorothy Thompson and Vincent Sheean, the subjects of the performance, were reporters, and the material being adapted was journal writing and newspaper or magazine reports; they were relating events that had occurred to them and were in the past tense. Handman thought the
writing had such potential for performance material that he converted it, although he said he needed to “experiment” with some of it to see if it would benefit from staying in the past, in the light of the text providing historical information.

Finding a novel or piece of literature in first person is highly desirable for the adaptation process. In *Vita Brevis*, Floria is writing in first person about her relationship with Augustine. The character speaks about her life, and her thoughts and feelings. When a novel is in first person it is one of the key attributes that become immediately transferable to film and to performance.

**The Omniscient Novel:**

Again, McFarlane says there are two kinds of discourse for this type of narrative: “those attributed to various characters in direct speech and that of the narrative prose, the apparently authoritative ‘metalanguage’ which surrounds them.” McFarlane (17) cites MacCabe who is an authority on Realism and the Theatre:

> The narrative prose achieves its position of dominance because it is in the position of knowledge and this function of knowledge is taken up in the cinema by the narration of events. Through the knowledge we gain from the narrative we can split the discourses of the various characters from their situation and compare what is said in those discourses with what has been revealed to us through narration. The camera shows us what happens—it tells the truth against which we can measure the discourses.

This idea that the camera can show us what is really happening is akin to theatre artists finding theatrical devices and actions to tell more than the story to an audience in a piece of performance. Theatre Complicite is one company seemingly devoted to telling the story through more than the words spoken by the actors. Their artistic director, Simon McBurney, talks
of dedicating himself to giving the audience and the actors a transforming experience through theatre:

I am just interested in reclaiming that which is theatrical and trying to make that burn; to find what the centre of theatre is and what distinguishes it from other art forms; being able to recognise that and put it on stage and play with it... The text is not sacred. The only thing that is, is what happens in the room with the audience. You look at the text and might say this bit is really boring, how can we make it come alive for the audience (xi).

Giving the audience the opportunity to be “omniscient” has often been my desire as a director. Sometimes, since one can’t get all the information from a text into a performance, I like the audience to think about what’s happened and make up their own mind. I wrote about this desire in the Journal when responding to a point made by one of the critics of the playscript for Vita Brevis:

…they are all the questions I want the audience to ask. Maybe they will be answered in the performance, maybe they will make up their own mind what it all meant. Perhaps I am being selfish here, but when I get asked questions like that in a theatre production I have lots to talk about or think about afterwards. The male actor does reappear [in the play] as all the other male characters in the videos, so I want to give the impression that this might be a friend, or a fellow actor, a would-be lover—she says she promised Augustine to not be with any other man. Perhaps he is her support, a brother… I have my own idea—do I have to tell? (1 October 2006).

Probably the theatre artist I interviewed who most used theatre to adapt “the omniscient novel” was Greg Lissaman. Lissaman’s theatre company, Jigsaw, creates works for young people, and the work we talked about most was his adaptation of The Lost Thing by Sean Tan. Lissaman not only adapted the text of the book but also took a lot of information from the illustrations in order to expand the story, rather than contract, or edit, as
most of the other theatre artists needed to do. He talked about adding visual material and extra dialogue to tell the story:

Mum and Dad were watching TV. And Mum and Dad really represented the whole suburban viewpoint of ‘I’m safe in my little castle and if anything bothers me, I shall probably ignore it or try to get rid of it’. So we wanted to sort of draw parallels or references to Australian society and politics at that time. So while Mum and Dad were there, they were watching TV and it was just a game show. It was like *Who Wants to be a Millionaire*, and it was just ridiculous questions going ‘this is life’, and they’re so engrossed (Personal communication, 2005).

In summing up regarding the “omniscient” novel, McFarlane concludes that in a sense all films are omniscient: the viewer is aware of a level of objectivity in what is shown, which may include what the protagonist sees, but might also be quite a lot else. I think the theatre audience is in the same position. Indeed, they may see all that the actors and director wish them to see, but they may see other incidental things that may not happen again, or something may not turn out exactly right on one night. Such is the transience of the theatrical performance.

**The Mode of “Restricted Consciousness”:**

McFarlane gives *Daisy Miller* as an example of this narrational mode, where there is a “central reflector”. The drama, he says, is “essentially inner”. It is also “shown rather than told... The problem lies in deciding what exactly is being shown” (139). McFarlane (19) cites Cohen in explaining this narrative:

The reader, one might say, is constantly forced to pass through several foregrounds before he can make out clearly what is looming in the background...

McFarlane thinks that this mode of narration forms the nearest that film can come to either the first- or third-person mode; probably because it appears to include both.
In finding a comparative form for theatre adaptation, I think the “epic” novel or larger, more complicated play usually has a central protagonist who acts and reflects. The production will also include actions or story around the protagonist: providing story before they enter a scene, or continuing after their departure. One of the “epic” adaptations I witnessed was Tom Wright’s adaptation of *The Odyssey*. The work went through a lot of planning and redrafting. Wright describes one of the drafts, which is an example of this type of narrative:

…we go through a strange process of making the whole epic a meditation on post-colonialism. Odysseus becomes a Digger returning from the Western Front, dreaming, slipping in and out of a morphine-riddled haze as he nears home. The isle of the winds becomes an Edwardian Penang. Circe’s cave becomes a *hammam* in Cairo, the Cyclops a nightmare vision of industrial machinery and the underworld a sombre war memorial, names etched into granite. It’s sort of glib, but it works (“The song of life” 17).

These first three concepts are the ones that McFarlane identifies as easily transferable from novel to film because they share narrative characteristics. The following elements are also transferred but need some adaptation to the different medium of film: the story/plot distinction; the distinction between “distributional” and “integrational” functions; identification of character functions and fields of actions; and, identification of mythic and/or psychological patterns.

As he discusses the distinctions of “transfer”, McFarlane proposes he may be approaching a theoretical basis for the phenomenon of turning novels into films. I’m presuming he is keen, as am I, to find some recurring principles with which to approach a novel with the intention of adapting it.
Thus, I’ll discuss in turn what he defines as the elements of a novel that can be transferred to film but which require adaptation.

**The Story/Plot Distinction:**
In citing Terence Hawkes (23), McFarlane explains this distinction: “story” is simply the basic succession of events, the raw material, which confronts the artist. Plot represents the distinctive way in which the “story” is made strange, creatively deformed and defamiliarized. So, even though novels and films can share the same story, they are differentiated by plot “strategies” which defamiliarise the story. Altering sequences or emphasising different parts of the story could do this.

An example of this distinction is evident when Neil Armfield talked about his theatre adaptation of *Cloudstreet*, by Tim Winton:

> When we opened *Cloudstreet* in 1998 we had no idea of the need, the hunger of Australian audiences for this story of this country. Now we know that this need, in fact, is worldwide. The great English playwright David Hare said when he saw *Cloudstreet* “no one in Britain would dare to write a story of such innocence—it’s as if you have been given the right to start over again.” The experience of performing this work has been both humbling and thrilling.

Armfield and Hare both emphasise the telling of a story, but Armfield goes on to explain that he was drawn to dramatise “the moment of passing from isolation to community” and how one of the scenes—the image of Daniel silently farewelling his family—gave him one of his peak moments in theatre, which demonstrates that Armfield feels free to isolate a theme and choose incidents to dramatise in keeping with the theme. In so doing, he creates a plot that is in some respects different from the story told in the novel.
The Distinction Between “Distributional” and “Integrational” Functions:
In his structural analysis of narratives, Barthes (cited in McFarlane 12) makes the distinction between these two main groups of narrative functions. Distributional functions refer to actions and events, and integrational functions refer to things like psychological information relating to characters, “data regarding their identity, notations of atmosphere and representations of place.” McFarlane’s view is that distributional functions are mostly directly transferable to film because they are horizontal in nature and strung in linear fashion throughout the text.

This distinction seems to be exemplified in theatre in Humphrey Bower’s adaptation of Marcus Clarke’s For the Term of his Natural Life, which he said was really a set of instructions that were to be further interpreted in rehearsal. The director, Michael Kantor, used Bower’s script as a starting point with the actors because it used scene titles and descriptions of action from the novel: the distributional functions. The remaining processes of the adaptation—the integrational functions—were worked out through rehearsal, with character and identity becoming clearer to the audience as the play progressed. The new work, though, was called Natural Life rather than the full title because Kantor called it “rather a brief fragment of a novel that is a brief fragment of our history” (Director’s note v).

Identification of Character Functions and Fields of Actions:
The character functions are the part they play in the plot, and these functions are distributed among what Propp (cited in McFarlane 24) calls “spheres of action”. McFarlane claims, with regard to adaptation, that “one might isolate the chief character functions of the original and observe how far these are retained in the film version.” In the early to middle 20th
century, Propp analysed and reduced Russian fairy tales to determine eight broad character types. These types were the function they had in the narrative and were named to demonstrate their place in the structure. Murphy, in discussing the film *Don’t Look Now*, also explains how Propp identified combined character functions thus:

Due to the doubling-up or what Propp calls the “combination” of certain of these functions however, the number of characters may be as few as five. Examples of such doubling-up include the Heroine carrying out the function of the Helper; the Villain carrying out the function of the False Hero; and the Dispatcher carrying out the function of the Prince (154).

When discussing the 1946 film adaptation of *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, McFarlane notes, again citing Propp, that the film “has preserved to a striking degree those functions of characters which were as stable, constant elements in a tale, independent of how and by whom they are fulfilled” (McFarlane 24). So, in the film of *Great Expectations*, each of Dickens’s characters perform all the functions and fields of action they do in the novel. McFarlane says that “what the characters do is as amenable to audio-visual as to verbal manifestation” (24). In other words, the reader of the novel and the viewer of the film both receive the same information about what each of the characters do in the story of *Great Expectations*.

*Great Expectations*, in novel and film, is a good example of a chronological narrative, which exemplifies “competent plot management” (Murphy 166). A well-managed plot “requires the writer’s choice of a suitable skeleton Propp structure to organize the interactions among the major characters. The use of a suitable skeleton Propp structure helps explain why the plots of great writers succeed in satisfying their readers” and viewers (Murphy 166). Rosalie Higson (R21) agrees with this when she says she believes some literary eras were highly favoured by filmmakers adapting novels for the screen. It appears it is the transferable
elements of character functions and fields of action in the novels that make them so attractive to adaptors:

…works of 18th and 19th century writers including Charles Dickens, the Brontë sisters, Thomas Hardy, Choderlos de Laclos, William Makepease Thackeray and Leonard Tolstoy stand up to filming time and again. The episodic nature, excellent characterisation, clear-cut plots, heady romance and adventure of these novels, played out among gorgeous (or gory) historic settings…(21)

Elise Thoron agrees with Higson when she says that one of her main criteria when adapting a novel was that the novel needed a strong journey for a central character, “whose voice has urgency in telling their story.” She said it was important to work out what the primary actions, conflicts, and obstacles were for the main characters in order to create a satisfying adaptation.

**Identification of Mythic and/or Psychological Patterns:**

Mythic elements within novels are likely to be transferrable to screen, even through the “worst translation” (McFarlane 25). The psychological patterns identified in *Great Expectations* were successfully transferred to the film: “the relation between children and parents… the concept of regression… and the notion of young lives wrenched out of the natural courses” (McFarlane 24).

Earlier in this section, I referred to Tom Wright’s adaptation of *The Odyssey* and how one of the drafts fitted into the narrative form of “restricted consciousness”. However, it was the mythic attributes that finally transferred to the stage more successfully:

The idea of *The Odyssey* as a journey through key images of post-colonialism has died a natural death. Something much more mysterious, more mythic, has emerged. Michael and I discuss the underworld and what it means for a man to go among the dead, to look into the eyes of loved ones, unable to touch them (“Song of Life” 17).
I see mythic and psychological transfer for the adaptation of *Vita Brevis* and I pondered this in my journal:

I really want my performance to include something ‘mythic’. What I mean here is that Gaarder has written a story that will be the basis of the adaptation and performance. However, I feel this story is much bigger. It has elements of tragedy—so it will have a ‘classic’ feel, at least to some of it. I want to represent Floria as a woman from her time—on the other hand she could be ‘everywoman’—she might be me! (3 November 2004).

After identifying the concepts and methods that facilitate the transfer of novel to film, McFarlane goes on to look at what needs to be truly “adapted” or the “enunciation”, which is a term now commonly used in film theory. For McFarlane, the adaptation proper depends on how far the filmmaker seeks to create their own work in the areas where transfers are not possible. The discussion under the following headings refers specifically to the product of film. I am interested in reflecting on whether more of McFarlane’s identified features have applicability to theatre, and to the works referred to in my review of literature as well as those discussed by the interviewed theatre artists. The common key point to keep in mind, though, is that both McFarlane and the theatre artists are looking at, or thinking about, finished or completed works. They are not planning to undertake an adaptation: they are reflecting on the results of former work.

**Two Signifying Systems:**

Here, McFarlane draws attention to the novel being a verbal sign system and film being visual and aural, as well as verbal. He follows this train of thought by saying this is one of the main reasons that viewers of films of adapted novels are often critical: because the novel works conceptually, and the film perceptually.
Returning to McFarlane’s example of *Great Expectations*, which was deemed by critics to be a successful transfer of the narrative elements; with regard to the adapted fields, we find that McFarlane has a contrary view. The main character, Pip, is the narrator, and the director, David Lean, demonstrates in his film a desire to create a respectful adaptation of Dickens’s text in the film. One field of the adaptive process McFarlane says turns out to be less successful is the delivery of Pip’s thoughts, feelings, and sensations. He provides an extract from the novel and compares the text of the voice-over in the film, and remarks, “the effect is textually thin compared with what the novel’s narrator can intimate as he recalls his younger self on these two occasions” (26).

Reba Gostand (5) also remarks on these difficulties in translating text into another form and the need to augment the information given to the audience, even from the playscript to the live performance:

Adapting a script for a different medium is a translation of some magnitude, one that involves the use of differing proportions of verbal and non-verbal elements of communication… If the same play is produced on radio, communication must be entirely through the ear. Any visual elements of the original stage script that are essential to plot, characterization, creation of atmosphere or period, or to the presentation of the theme, must be translated into aural elements, for example by changing the dialogue to incorporate extra information, by introducing a narrator, or by devising appropriate sound effects.

Because theatre also works perceptually, adaptors encounter similar difficulties to those of filmmakers who adapt. Indeed, Nussbaum (101) puts these difficulties forward as a reason not to adapt novels. She explains that the inner dialogue in Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* takes up too much of the text, and that if this were live theatre there “would not be enough action to fill half an hour.”
The Novel’s Linearity and the Film’s Spatiality:
In order to explain these two concepts, McFarlane describes two situations: when viewing a film, even in one frame, we receive complex information; in contrast, a book gives the reader information in a linear fashion, word-by-word, line by line. Filmmakers, though, can only control what the viewer sees to a certain degree. If the director wishes to show a sequence of events described in a novel, there’s no guarantee the viewer won’t be distracted by some other element in the visual information and thereby not receive all the anticipated transfer.

McFarlane also brings up the capacity of film to mix or alternate long shots and close-ups, which doesn’t have a true equivalent in the printed word (nor theatre, for that matter). This effect in film can give the mixed messages of seeing and being seen, which he says is a key cinematic practice.

Theatre has its own spatiality: you can create spaces on a stage and by using them in a dramatic or theatrical way the audience will “go” with the actor(s). In film, this would probably be shown to be another place; in a novel, it would be described in words as another place. In the novel, Vita Brevis, there are no specific spaces. The action happens in the letters of Flora as she describes events from the past and feelings about the relationship she had with Augustine. In the playscript of Vita Brevis, therefore, Flora performs actions in the present time of the play, during which she describes the past actions for the audience and reasons her way through her feelings about reading The Confessions, and revelations about the truth of the relationship she held in such high regard. A place is designated on the stage for Flora to take up a mask and recite/perform some lines from Seneca’s Medea which channels and heightens her
feelings from what she has learned. There is also a virtual space created by the recorded actors on projected video or film, which facilitates the interaction with the male actor who plays both the friend of Floria and her fellow actor in the male roles of the play, *Medea*.

**Codes:**

Film’s enunciatory system (McFarlane 200) is more complex than can be created in novels. McFarlane explains this system thus: “the paradigmatic choices required of the film-maker embraces several codes (e.g. lighting, music, camera angle) at any given moment” (29). There are extra-cinematic codes involved in “reading” a film that McFarlane articulates:

- language codes (involving response to particular accents or tones of voice and what these might mean socially or temperamentally);
- visual codes (response to these goes beyond mere ‘seeing’ to include the interpretative and the selective);
- non-linguistic sound codes (comprising both musical and other aural codes);
- cultural codes (involving all that information which has to do with how people live, or lived, at particular times and places) (29).

I would contend that, even though theatre cannot present many of the filmmakers’ codes like camera angle or close-up, many of the extra-cinematic codes identified by McFarlane in this comment, are not only used in theatre productions, but the meanings from them often seemed magnified by their use or emphasis in this medium.

American Place Theatre, in New York, for example, professed to perform stories that were “strong on ideas and language and usually cut deep into American life... that illuminate our society, which provoke thought” (Handman, Personal communication 2005). Language would be an emphasised “code” in the cultural mix of their repertoire: *Black Boy* by Richard Wright; *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison; *China Boy* by Gus Lee; *Dreaming in Cuban* by Christine Garcia; *The Kite runner* by Khaled
Hosseini; *Manchild in the Promised Land* by Claude Brown; *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd.

During the interviews, the theatre artists often talked about the use of visual images per se, and the use of visual images as ‘codes’. John Romeril voiced themes he wanted to work on and explained his thinking about presenting visual material on the stage as he was working on his adaptation of *Miss Tanaka*, an adaptation of a short story by Xavier Herbert, set around the pearling industry in Broome at the end of the Second World War:

The physical damage that people often sustained was pretty horrendous. So people who limp, people who are missing the odd limb, people whose breathing was shockingly affected. I happen to think that’s the stuff the theatre can do well. I think it’s stuff that music can help supply. I think it’s good acting tasks in terms of physical depicting… (Personal communication 2005).

Elise Thoron considered the identification of visual and aural symbols to be one of her main principles for creating a stage adaptation. She said she preferred to use a fairly bare stage so the choice of objects and the few costume elements were key, and emphasised how she wanted the audience to interpret them. The atmosphere was very important and she asked herself “what does the world on the stage feel like? Sound like? What is the music”? (Personal communication 2005) Thoron made an adaptation of *The Great Gatsby* for a Russian audience and exploited the cultural “codes” in the stage presentation that was produced

…in 1995 Russia, when the country was transforming at a fast pace from a place where money had no value, to a place where money got you anything, and everything, and was beginning to be on display. *Gatsby* seemed like a cautionary tale and American classic, about the violence of our money culture and dreams that I could share (Personal communication 2005).
These examples show that “codes” are well used in theatre and are emphasised in an interpretive way when adaptors approach an original “verbal” text.

**Stories Told and Stories Presented:**

While this distinction includes some of the earlier points, McFarlane brings up as an issue in itself the way in which a film can present the novel’s metalanguage (29). The film’s story does not have to be told because it is presented.

Monaco talks about the general connection of novels and films and how well novels translate into film, but he also differentiates between the ways in which they each tell their stories:

The narrative potential of film is so marked that it has developed its strongest bond not with painting, not even with drama, but with the novel. Both films and novels tell long stories with a wealth of detail and they do it from the perspective of a narrator, who often interposes a resonant level of irony between the story and the observer. Whatever can be told in print in a novel can be roughly pictured or told in film (although the wildest fantasies of a Jorge Luis Borges or a Lewis Carroll might require a lot of special effects). The differences between the two arts, besides the obvious and powerful difference between pictorial narration and linguistic narration, are quickly apparent (N.pag.).

The differences that Monaco identifies that demonstrate the difference between the two media and why stories may be presented more often than told in film are: film operates in real time, whereas the novel finishes whenever the author likes; novels are told by the author, whereas while the film may also be told by the author, the audience may see and hear much more than the director intends; the tension in a novel is between the teller and the tale, whereas in film its between the materials of the story and the image the audience views; and, novels can manipulate many words, whereas film cannot contain the same profusion of words.
In relating this distinction to theatre, Chris Drummond had something to say about what the novel *Night Letters* contained as its story, and what he wanted to present on the stage:

*Night Letters* talks about a very special quality of experience in which a dying man has burrowed down into the essence of his situation and found meaning for himself in an age where meaning has lost its, well, meaning! I believe it also communicates something very profound about humanity’s relationship to nature and something new about Australia’s identity to the rest of the world (Personal communication 2005).

The metalanguage for Drummond was about living in the moment and this was something theatre could communicate very well and “say” in a way the book didn’t. Drummond explained that “it’s got something to do with what the novel doesn’t say that the theatre might reveal” (N.pag.) Drummond said he wanted to understand, at a gut level, the internal journey towards one’s own death.

McFarlane agrees that the differences between novels and films “are quickly apparent” but he takes the time to tease out, explain and question. Likewise, for me, finding correspondences in which novels can transfer and be adapted to theatre performance has meant re-examining the transcripts of the theatre artists to find the connections and further distinctions between novels and performance. The reflections on performances the theatre artists have completed are, of course, past tense. Theatre does have many of the attributes of film, but the immediacy of live actors means the adapters of novels are trying to find something else as well. Ganat touches on the different quality of the live performance:

The language experienced in performance has all the transience of an eavesdropped conversation, with no opportunity for review or back channeling (1).
Greg Lissaman emphasised the different nature when faced with the process:

…someone else has already essentially presented you with a lot of the characters. The imagination in the process of adaptation comes from ‘what will I do with it, how can I adapt it, how will I retain the story, how do I retain what it is about that that is special at the heart? (Personal communication 2005).

Reflecting on McFarlane’s theories and proposed methodology has helped me analyse the connections between the two forms of novels and plays. It also uncovered some of the principles for adaptation mentioned by the theatre artists. However, it has not allowed me to devise any steps or principles I could use as a template or scaffold to approach a novel, or literature, when “desiring” to create a performance from it.

2) From the Playwrights
Talking to the Australian playwrights and directors was affirming. It appeared to be good practice to desire to adapt a novel, and could result in an innovative and unusual production. However, hearing these professional artists talk about their work did not give me a process, or the courage to begin my own right away. It was only after sitting next to Wynn Handman for six weeks as he worked on two projects for American Place Theatre in New York, and hearing his Associate, Elise Thoron, talk to Teaching Artists-in-training, that I felt confident enough to approach a first draft.

I feel very ready to write my piece for the creative part of the Doctorate. There are some aspects from Wynn’s process—the nitty gritty bits—that appeal to me, since I have hesitated to begin thus far. But now I feel really ready (9 April 2005).

I’ve been thinking how Wynn would encapsulate what Dorothy and Red was ‘about’. Yes, it was about Dorothy Thomson and Sinclair Lewis, but he really stressed the point that it was about ‘a marriage’, and about ‘how women really are complex creatures and think very differently to men’.
Vita Brevis, in a nutshell, is about a woman wronged and forgotten—because the question remains—where is Floria in history?
Forgotten (26 April 2005).

Greeno talks about “connected knowing” involving relationships with others and how knowledge can be the outcome of joint constructive action. Greeno’s main summation is that it’s not only this joint action, but also through the reading of texts and other presentations contributed by other people, that “connected knowledge” produces concepts and methods of a subject-matter domain. This sense of connection is the point I came to in realising I’d absorbed a sense of knowing from interacting with the theatre artists and hearing about their expertise, and could use this knowledge combined with my own sense of knowledge from former experiences. As Greeno observes,

The idea is that knowing a conceptual domain includes knowing what resources are available in the domain, knowing where to find them, knowing how to use them, and anticipating the results of using them in different circumstances (Greeno 2006 543).

As I re-read the journal and witness my hesitation in beginning the writing of the adaptation, I see the hesitation stemming from the need for a beginning point, a way into solving the problem of adapting the text. In order to feel secure, I started in the way suggested by Elise Thoron, but since my physical needs for the adaptation were going to be different from the physical restrictions that both Elise Thoron and Wynn Handman place on their own adaptations, I was able to divert from their process and draft in innovations that occurred to me throughout the writing and re-drafting process. The Handman/Thoron rules were very good for starting me off because we were starting with similar physical needs; American Place Theatre intend that their performances will be for one, or, occasionally, two, actors. I, too, wanted to create a performance that would probably be
for me to perform, possibly with one or two others, or one or two others who could be presented “virtually” on video or film. So, creating a solo performance, or a performance where there is only one “live” actor on stage takes quite a bit of consideration. Kearns says that:

performing solo should be designated as a singular performing art. It is not traditional acting (many highly trained and highly skilled actors struggle valiantly with solo performing). It is not stand-up. It’s intended to look easy, relaxed, personal, and improvisational. It requires learning new skills and abandoning certain ‘rules’ of acting (12).

Each of the theatre artists interviewed went about creating their adaptations in different ways, and some expressed a joy in not really knowing how the process would come about the next time. John Collins, for instance, was keen that the answer to “how to adapt” would be different every time:

Part of me hopes that each encounter between theatre and literature in that way is something that happens from scratch, that starts from nothing, and is a completely honest response to the particular material of that novel, the particular situation of that theatre (Personal communication 2005).

Because he was already thinking about his next theatre production, Chris Drummond emphasised the unpredictability of a process of making performance from literary works:

Maybe you would start with a scientist, and an artist, that it would begin as clumsily as Night Letters did for Susan and I, where we would talk a lot and then something would suddenly become exciting, and then we would give one hundred per cent to that. The moment that that seemed to lose its energy, you change the direction, and not be concerned about that change in direction, trusting that eventually things start to reoccur and patterns start to reveal themselves. And I’m a bit Buddhist about that, I think that if you remain open and you remain a purist, and you have the time, those are all the elements that you need, and you have like-minded talented people. Eventually, a pre-existing form reveals itself. And once you become aware of it, then you know what the rules are—then you start to bring in all your practical dramaturgical skills and your technical skills.
But in the first vital phase, it’s about being naïve. It’s about being hungry and persistent (Personal communication 2005).

Hinchcliffe (cited in Papastephanou & Angeli 617) stresses that the context for each successful performance is very sensitive: “uncertainty, uniqueness and instability are defining features of many of the situations confronted by practitioners, which means there is no single method/procedure that can standardly apply to a particular situation”. It’s important, therefore, to acknowledge that it is repeated and sustained practice that enables any of us to take up the challenges of our project ideas and bring them to fruition.

Theatre project ideas are not usually completely organised and created in isolation. Throughout its many draft versions, the thoughts, influences, and ideas of others were important. I noted in my Journal that after assembling the first draft of the playscript I took up the offer of a colleague to read it through:

I asked a reliable colleague to read the playscript. This was without this journal—so that they were reading it as an independent script. I was very keen to see whether an ‘outsider’ could visualise the action and understand what was happening in the play (26 September 2005).

This was the first of several requested critiques, which I hoped would help form my process.

3) From Critical Feedback on *Vita Brevis*

The playscript in its various drafts was subject to criticism, as required by a doctoral study of this kind. In a similar way to reflecting on McFarlane’s theories and methodology to ascertain any applicability to my search for principles or processes for adapting, I hoped to find further guidance through this critical review from the different perspectives of the reviewers. I’ve noted in the journal in February 2006 that I received more critical feedback, organised by my supervisor, to assist with the adaptation.
Understandably nervous, I was very pleased to receive constructive comments. The noting of the difference in responses from the two critics did not alert me to any specific differentiation at that point:

...even though the male critic said that it wasn’t ‘really his thing’ he’s given really good criticism that is really useful. And the female academic went through page by page helping out with punctuation as well as comments. Extremely helpful—it will be quite exciting to do the next draft as reading through what they had to say actually inspired some thoughts to resolve some of the difficulties (21 February 2006).

The novel and the play have a woman as the main protagonist. Later, nearing the end of the study, and towards the time the playscript was reaching its final draft, it was given critical review by three theatre artists from Melbourne Writers Theatre: two women and one man. The panel members read the playscript independently and then they came together to discuss it before inviting the playwright to join them and discuss the work.

I was absolutely amazed at how much time the three members of the panel were willing to devote to the task—quite humbling, really. They each had read the play completely, and one of them had read it twice. I really appreciated this positive attitude to ‘the art’, and how sincere they were in their desire to be helpful… one member of the panel liked the play unequivocally, the other two had many suggestions about enhancing it, and, indeed, provided me with all their written documentation (7 August 2006).

I’ve noted in the journal how much I appreciated their devotion to the task and their goodwill. I enjoyed being able to talk about some of the aspects of the play they had questions about. Whilst promising myself to consider objectively all of their comments, my overall impression was that they were coming from a very conservative point of view with regard to what theatre is and what theatre should be:

I overwhelmingly appreciated their positive desire to help me—on the other hand, and I may be being too defensive, I believe some of the issues they had were with purposeful decisions I’d made in order for the work to
be a continuation of my previous Theatre work. So, even though I appreciated their feedback and comments I felt that they were coming from a fairly conservative place with regard to playwrighting, and that my previous experience as a Theatre Artist was excluded from the process—but this also is to be expected as they don’t know me at all (07 August 2006).

The case in point regarding this was the first female critic’s review remarks. She spoke the least of the critics when we met and gave unequivocal support for the script. When I looked at what she had written for suggestions, I answered them in the journal mostly in refutation. I suppose, since she had said least, I was unaware that she had those views until I read her words. Her support though, was captured in her concluding comment:

I personally really like the play. It has a lot of potential to be theatrically engaging. May need a couple more redrafts. As an actor, Medea is my signature role and I am more than interested in playing the female lead (26 September 2006).

The second female reviewer had read through the play twice in order to make sure she “hadn’t missed some of the information she felt she needed”. Similarly to the female reviewer from the first critical review, she had written on the text and given detailed feedback, even linking her remarks under headings. I was so grateful for the effort put into her thoughts and comments that I carefully made notes in my journal on: my responses to her comments; the thoughts she provoked in me; and, whether I took any actions in revising the playscript:

Staging:

“The idea of linking video with stage is worthwhile pursuing. It adds a dimension to the ‘other-worldliness’ of this play. The described setting seems suitable and would evoke a feeling of North Africa.

Sometimes, however, stage directions are too wordy, and contain too many alternatives, causing some confusion. Choose what you think
should happen, offer it, and then leave it up to the director to decide if they can make it work.

Technically, the movement forward of part of the set may prove difficult, but it would certainly be theatrically interesting.”

I went back through the stage directions and tried to make decisions where I could. I want to give the reader the opportunity to understand that those decisions are not fixed.

In my imagination, the set would be light in weight and could be created with wheels—like those on children’s pushers—so that even if the stage ‘hands’ were visible, the set at the end would easily be moved towards the audience (26 September 2006).

So detailed and considerate were her suggestions that it took me well into October 2006 to respond to them all.

The final reviewer’s contrast to the previous one was marked, and I included the entire review in my journal. At the end of the review and the reflection that accompanied it, I noted that I appreciated reading this as it made the issue of performability of the piece very clear. It seemed that this was both subjective and related very much to gender:

I really appreciated this response as it made clear some aspects of the play that I may need to accept as male interpretation of what is being viewed (imagined, in this case), and in the rehearsal process I would need to make modifications in order to address them, or, understand and accept that the view of what is happening probably can and will be interpreted differently from a male point-of-view (19 October 2006).

The following is an excerpt from the male reviewer’s text that shocked me:

Although there is no denying the horror of being dumped—a situation I am sure most people have felt at some stage in their life—there is no real sense of dramatic action in the piece (19 October 2006).

I felt this was a very shallow response in terms of development of my script, but perhaps I am unable to “know” how any, many, or some males feel about being abandoned. I was very encouraged recently to view a film
entitled *Fur*, directed and written by Steven Shainberg, where Nicole Kidman played the character of the female photographer, Diane Arbus, in an imagined section of the photographer’s life. At the beginning of the film the viewer is advised, in writing, that the entire film is an attempt to portray the inner thoughts or imaginings of “a woman”. I am very encouraged by this film as it offers a different idea of what the allowable subject matter of a film or play is. Women need to make manifest the thoughts, feelings, and responses to the male view of what goes on in women’s lives, even if this means that there might only be half an audience for the play; or that half the audience (if they be women) will find something strong to be said about the human condition for women, and the other half will say “nothing happened”. Perhaps this issue of what’s credible has something to do with what I interpret as the subtext of what Floria says in the novel and the play: that throughout the history of women, they have had to express themselves either inwardly or, as in the structure of the novel in *Vita Brevis*, in the private sphere in letters and diaries, because they haven’t had the opportunities for public expression. Further, men don’t always realise this is the case. Wynn Handman was very keen to present a work that helped the audience understand the inner life of a woman, but he had to find that material in the diaries of Dorothy Thompson, which wasn’t a novel, or a best seller. Handman and Shainberg, in my view, have taken the time to consider what the “other”, in this case, a woman, might think, or how she might feel, and have seen the value in exploring that in performance. Both also believe that the inner life of a woman can provide very engaging action and material for performance.

For Wynn Handman, though, it wasn’t only works about women. He felt that in the hands of the right actor, the words would carry the story. He said a good actor should be able to “be” on the stage and tell the story and the inner fire of the actor would produce theatre: he wanted the words to
live inside the person. My third reader’s response seemed to negate this possibility and leads me to re-consider some of the reflections in the section, “The desiring performer”, and what I think makes a text performable. Contrary to the male reviewer’s view that there’s no action, my view is that if the text has content that has something to do with my own experiences, or experiences of women of my body’s age and potential that can provoke thought or discussion, then I want to think about how to bring that to the stage. To most other theatre artists, neither *Vita Brevis* nor *A very easy death* by Simone de Beauvoir would be likely to make them say “wow! That would make a great play!” But I tend to create small-scale performances where the audience is very close to the actor. In that case, it is possible to “talk about what’s on one’s mind”. When I witness these types of performance, I begin to think, “well, that’s on my mind, too”. When I’m challenged as an audience member to think about deeper questions, I am more satisfied with having engaged in the performance. Hence, *Vita Brevis* and *A very easy death* are examples of the type of material that I will be attracted to for adaptation.

**The Process for *Vita Brevis***

The activities of considering the critical review, and of interviewing the theatre artists and talking about their work and how they went about creating their adaptations, as well as the nature of the theatre they were creating, allowed me to relate through the common experiences we all had of creating theatre performances. Stewart, in *Constructing Neonarratives*, refers to combinations of these types of data collection as “neonarratives”; combinations of autobiographical data and interview texts, “storied within the contemporary world” (223). Eventually, through hearing these authentic reflections, and working for a period of several weeks with Wynn Handman, I was able to gain confidence to create my own adaptation of *Vita Brevis*. I was at the introspective point that Metzinger describes as
“phenomenal subjectivity”, where information has the property of being integrated into one’s consciousness of self-representation and contributes to “self-consciousness”. He says, “information can be subjective by contributing to nonconceptual or to conceptual knowledge… Cognitive availability seems to generate a much stronger kind of knowledge” (Being No One 39).

Even though I agree with the previous comments by the theatre artists, John Collins and Chris Drummond, that there didn’t appear to be one clear way to go about adapting Vita Brevis, I was committed to trying. So, it is possible to go back through the Journal and work out what steps I actually took in order to reach the point of the first draft of the playscript. In the Conclusion to the “old” exegesis, I itemised the process I finally took. I’ve referred previously to needing a starting point and I found one in the articulated steps or process of Elise Thoron, Associate Director of American Place Theatre:

1. **“To only use text from the novel”**. Both Thoron and Handman only used text from the novel they were adapting. Handman, particularly, didn’t see himself as a playwright and sought the dramatic language of the novelist: This action was used in a modified way in the first draft of adapting Vita Brevis. I noted in my Journal:

   I will do this with Vita Brevis, although I’ve pretty well decided to integrate text from Seneca’s Medea too. I have also included some writing of my own in the Prologue, or what I would consider to be the ‘forward’ or 1st chapter adaptation. But when it comes to Floria’s words, they will be all Gaarder’s (25 March 2005).

2. **“Confine the performance to under an hour”**. This action makes the adapter consider which text from the novel is crucial to the performance and to edit accordingly. American Place Theatre created performances for one actor, or sometimes two. Keeping
the performance to around one hour still puts the actor under a lot of pressure to maintain the intensity of the text and the dramatic arc of the play. I noted in my Journal that I was aiming for this but wanted to unshackle myself from having to dwell on the performance only being possible for me to perform: If I am to perform the work myself, yes, I would need it to be an hour or less. However, I feel liberated enough to dream beyond my own lean performance possibilities. I will dream for a Playbox production with resources for lighting and set, and then if I need to perform it myself I will possibly adapt or ‘cut’ (25 March 2005).

3. “You will only use 1-2 actors, telling the story without relying on elaborate sets, costumes or lighting”. Vita Brevis, the play, is written in nine scenes with a film/video prelude, and is for two actors. One of the actors may only appear on projected video or film. The play is estimated to run for just over one hour, which is manageable for one actor with interactive video or film. This time length echoes the work Tom’s Women, by Geoffrey Sykes, which similarly was for one performer with interactive video intersecting the performance. Only having one live actor is very liberating in relation to finding performing spaces: I think I do only see Floria in this piece alone—or perhaps with a musician (25 March 2005).

4. “Strong journey for a central character, whose voice has urgency in telling his/her story”. This action was adhered to but necessitated reorganisation of the text, and then in contradiction to Step 1, weaving of additional text (that of Seneca’s Medea) throughout. Wynn Handman also did this when adapting Dorothy and Red by using the diaries of both journalists even though they were separate publications. Neither the publications containing the diaries of the journalists that Wynn Handman found, nor Vita Brevis, are immediately apparent as highly dramatic. It’s in the re-
structuring of the text and juxtaposing it with other elements that I see providing dramatic potential in the new work or form:

When I read Gaarder’s novel I don’t hear an urgent voice, but it could be made urgent. If I use my ‘silent’ script for a film or video at the beginning, then the sense of being wrongly represented, or Augustine misrepresenting their life and relationship could make her feel she needs to urgently rebut what he has written (25 March 2005).

5. **“Other characters with distinct voices, clear scenes of conflict”**

   Wynn Handman would sometimes write for more than one character for the one (or two) actor(s) to perform with the intention of heightening the drama. The *Medea* performance and the creation of “a friend” in *Vita Brevis* provides the scenes of conflict:
   
   Well, these I would create with the words from *Medea* to emphasise the inner conflict she feels. Particularly with regard to the loss of her child, and being left for a much younger woman (child). There is a speech that Jason makes about wanting to keep his children—they are very important to him—perhaps that will be included in some way, to give another voice (23 March 2005).

6. **“Lively, active language—good for spoken word performance”**

   Wynn Handman’s practice at this point would be to photocopy the pages chosen as possible selections, and to highlight with a marker pen those lines, sentences and phrases that would “roll off the tongue” and be “performable”. Further edits would happen through the process of transcribing and reading. *Vita Brevis* has been approached in almost the same way, but without the highlight pen. The text has been extracted to give Floria her voice, but one critic felt it would be better if it were re-written to not include Gaarder’s turn of phrase. The play is planned for a live reading in October, 2010 and this will be a key consideration:
   
   This will be an exciting and interesting part of the process. I understand the need to speak it out loud to assess this, and have looked at some parts to see if they will be included (23 March 2005).
Below is an example of text taken and re-organised from the prose of the novel and used for Floria’s first live entry to the stage and demonstrates “lively, active language”, where she is angry and dismayed at having discovered and read part of *The Confessions*:

I don’t understand how you can sweep away our secrets.

Was I nothing more than a woman’s body to you?

I don’t believe in a God who demands human sacrifices.

I don’t believe in a God who lays waste a woman’s life to save a man’s soul. I exist… I live… I love…

It is important to note, however, that even though I can agree that I managed to begin by following these directions in the adaptation of *Vita Brevis*, I can’t be certain that the process I took will be the way to approach another project. Each particular instance will require its own particular process. These appear to be reasonable principles and will stand some further testing since many of the requirements American Place Theatre have for their works I would also place upon myself as a predominantly solo performer. Several of their “principles” would not apply in the case of my desire to adapt a work like Dorothy Porter’s verse novel *Akhenaten* for a large cast in a contemporary circus.

Chris Drummond agreed that there was no specific “process” or set of principles that could always be provided for anyone wanting to work on an adaptation, and that was not a bad thing:

The process gives me the courage to be more ambitious, and it does give me a sense of ways of working. I think one of the things I’ve learned from that experience is, there is no process, and what you become better equipped at is surviving the rigours of working without a process.

(Personal communication, 2005)
The value of being required to write a Journal and reflect on the process, even though appearing to flounder, has resulted in a “mindful” summary. Along with Chris Drummond, I now have more of a “sense” of a way to work in adapting literature. Drummond’s quotation implies there will be many more attempts at adaptation, and in the next section I will reflect on the drive for finding performable material, and argue that the search for the “next work” is an integral part of reflexive practice.
Looking for the Next Project

Inspiration is not always predictable for theatre artists and so all are keen to be thinking about their next project. John Collins was nervous about feeling “open” and wondering what his next project would be, and whether the inspiration would “hit”. One of his company’s earlier works started with an idea of creating “something in the dark” and resulted in an adaptation of Henry James’ The Turn of the Screw. Even when beginning work on The Great Gatsby, the company weren’t sure about continuing, but they worked on the material and got to the point where they recognised this would be their next work.

Wynn Handman already had the next project he wanted to work on (after The Kiterunner and Dorothy and Red). A novel had been sent to him from publishers and he had been “grabbed” by the language, and how he might adapt it for the stage. Even when beginning work on The Kiterunner, which was the designated next project of the company, Handman felt an inner compulsion to explore the work for Dorothy and Red.

Next projects for theatre artists seem to be uppermost in their minds. Barely have they finished working on what has just “lit their fire” than they are already thinking about what next would provide something intriguing to work on, and would delight and surprise their audiences. Chris Drummond was happy to immerse himself in explaining the long process that had engaged him when directing and adapting Night Letters by Robert Dessaix, but he was also thinking about his next project, which was going to be about adapting scientific papers and material, something that no other playwright would be thinking about as performance source material. The ongoing urge and projection of ideas into the future also shows why theatre artists don’t stop to reflect very much on what happened with a project.
The need, either financially or artistically, propels the director, performer or playwright forward as soon as the finishing touches are done.

Prior to working on *Night Letters*, Drummond said he was “looking for a project”, and looked on his own bookshelf where his wife had collected novels she’d read and enjoyed. He was open to possibilities and he found Robert Dessaix’s novel. Earlier, I included his comment regarding the imagery that reading the blurb provoked, which made him decide to work on the adaptation. Drummond commented in his interview, that as a director of theatre, he was “hungry” for writers to have dynamic vision, but he lamented that there were very few plays that display such vision. Therefore, he now wanted to work more with writers, whether of fiction or of other forms in order to create his works. He felt that published documents and other material in the public domain would be good “seed” material for theatre projects.

Likewise, while Greg Lissaman talked reflectively about his motivations and inspirations for *The Lost Thing* by Shaun Tan, he noted that he was already working on his next adaptation of *The Velveteen Rabbit*. He didn’t want to create a direct translation of the book, but he said, “if you love the *Velveteen Rabbit* then I want you to love it more. I want you to cry more for it, if that’s what it made you do.”

Whilst in residence at the State Library of Victoria, John Romeril found May Gibbs’ (of *Gumnut Babies* fame) first storybook, which had never been published. He didn’t think the story was very good but the illustrations had the theatrical element he looked for in material for his projects and this, combined with Gibbs’ biography, was shaping up as his possible next project.
My study supports the argument that these compulsions, described by Collins, Handman, Drummond, Lissaman and Romeril, are akin to Loizidou’s questions regarding the figural/material bodies and life, and “the ongoing struggle that we have in accounting for who we are, what we need, desire or what we are running away from” (39). It appears to me that these questions are made manifest by continually seeking to express thoughts and ideas in “the next project” we might create as theatre artists.

A quick search of the Dow Jones database brought up nine newspaper articles about performing or film artists’ “next project”. Media, it seems, consider future projects of known artists newsworthy, so they too are engaged in the desire to make manifest the artist’s vision. Some of these news items included a sentence or two about the motivation of the artist. Here are three examples:

An adaptation of Ai’s novel would be a personal project for Zhang because his family was persecuted during the Cultural Revolution (Lee).

As Hancock watched the PBS documentary “Journey of Man”, which traces the human migration out of Africa through genetic markers in the population today, he started crying. He remembers tears running down his face as he watched, awed at the biological interconnectedness of mankind, and he immediately decided he had to explore this theme in his next project (Donahue).

The film features the story of a child who loses his relatives in the battle between the democrats and the Tudeh Party of Iran in 1949 in Tehran (Staff Reporter).

These artists are moved to adapt texts with the intention of moving their audiences to see things differently.
Whilst working on *Vita Brevis*, I came across a copy of *A Very Easy Death*, by Simone de Beauvoir, in a second-hand bookshop. Here, again, I found a female voice debating the issues of relationships and social institutions in de Beauvoir’s account of her mother’s death. I felt the excitement that is the beginning of thinking about the next project, the finding of something that could be performable by my body and me. I began to visualise this being performed in an art gallery: with abstract art works suspended from the ceiling; with the performer using the space abstractly with chosen sections of the text linked; presenting the audience with issues like the secret knowledge and power of doctors and hospitals, handling mother-daughter family relationships; and, with music, which might be played by a live musician and singer so that some of the text would be carried by original songs. It is rare to find extremely appropriate material, writing like *A Very Easy Death* that fits all the limiting criteria. This rarity factor could account for the openness of theatre artists to be ready to receive material when it happens along. Next projects could indeed be necessary to ensure there is always something possible to work on, and thus a way to keep at bay the fear John Collins noted he experienced in the absence of a next project, and his need to feel “open” to ideas and opportunity. It seems that part of the process of being a theatre artist is to be in a constant state of readiness for the next work.

*A Very Easy Death* is one adaptation I am keen to begin working on as a “next project” some time in the future. Another “next project” that has been waiting for a time and place for adaptation, for many years, is an adaptation of Dorothy Porter’s verse-novel, *Akhenaten*. Porter was a visiting writer to our regional community and was very interested in discussing my ideas for adaptation of her published work. Various and many obstacles have arisen to delay such a project, and finally when I thought some negotiations could be entered into with the Director and Manager of the Flying Fruit Fly Circus as a multi-media and contemporary
circus performance, complications of changing management along with, very sadly, the untimely death of Porter have, once again, put it into the category of a “next project”: or perhaps it is the project after the “next project”?

Once a new project has been settled upon, things seem to come into your path. Ideas abound and influences seem to come from all directions. John Collins agreed about the “inevitability” of finding ways of solving problems of creating the project on the stage:

So a lot of it’s just trusting that if I have, or I’m excited enough, about a thing to do on stage, that the rest of the content—we can sort of leave the door open and the right thing will walk in. It’s really operating on faith a lot of the time (Personal communication 2005).

Personally, I have to forbid myself from thinking too far into “next projects”, as they are too exciting. The Vita Brevis project had been at the back of my mind for a long time, as are the previously mentioned other “next projects” like A Very Easy Death, and Akhenaten: they remain there in their relationships and interconnections, and it isn’t until time is available to be devoted to the project that I begin the indulgence of thinking deeply about it:

I have been putting off the creative project—I’ve been telling my mind not to let go and be allowed to dream. To actually start the work is heaven—my mind is moving 100 miles an hour… (5 November 2004).

It’s difficult to articulate but there’s a certainty that you, as a theatre artist, can bring out something quite unique and remarkable from the material you’ve discovered, something that no one else could manage in the same way. Once that happens, because you’ve opened yourself up, a number of different things happen (or fall in your path). These happenings allow the performer or director to then turn the material into something original. A
playwright writes the play, or a novelist writes the novel, which has the potential to be a new “something” when the theatre artist takes it up.

For me, personally, once a work has been decided upon, the process is a way of opening myself up to ideas of how I might adapt the subject of the novel, play, letter or other piece of writing, for performance work for my “self”. Then, open to possibilities, things start to happen: preparing or looking at the literature for how a scene or relationship might look on a stage or performance space. These are things that I think any director would look into as they research the social, historical time period, the “world” of the play. These elements become a fascination during the reflection that absorbs you, until ultimately, a breakthrough happens to progress the project.

The preoccupation for the “next project” by all the theatre artists, and my own concern for appropriate material, leads to the conclusion that this anxiety appears to be part of the ongoing process of adaptation and creation of works for performance. The point of looking, keeping in mind certain works, being open to possibilities, is so there will be a “next project”, and to keep at bay the fear that John Collins acknowledged when there isn’t something waiting to be taken up immediately after the finish of the current project.

This re-emphasises the difficulty, discussed in the previous section, of identifying guiding principles for adaptation. The creation of “work” is an ongoing process. Each example seems always to suggest that only through the “doing” and making can performances be created, and any principles can only be gleaned retrospectively or, if during the process, only when earlier experiences are drawn upon. So, as working artists create their new work, they are continuously moving through their own prospective and retrospective process.
The propulsion into the next project also shows that theatre artists want to be “working” because that is where the process is. The keenness to get into another work is because the engagement is what drives them. Each of them stated they had enjoyed reflecting and thinking back on the processes and ideas that had moulded a project, but none of them expressed a desire to write about the process themselves. Writing is not as engaging as actually doing the work. What we all wanted to do was create and perform the next project, not write about or reflect too long on what is past.
Coda

The weaving of this metadiscourse has brought me, both as an academic, and as a practitioner to a new place. I now need to consider how to advance what I find is beginning to be illumined by Metzinger’s question: “What does it actually mean to speak about introspection”? (Being No One 15) It would seem valuable to return to the interviewed theatre artists to glean deeper reflections on the issues discussed in the preceding pages. Further reflection on the same questions as well as new insights into their practice during the intervening years since being interviewed, would achieve what Papastephanou & Angeli (619) deem a:

> successful course… that would generate… the feeling that something has changed positively in the way they relate to their self, the world, and others. It would create in them a sense of growing and more importantly it would help them develop more aporetic stances to life and knowledge.

Papastephanou & Agne cite Burbules (1993) who adds “practice growing out of communicative interactions in which the full play of human thought, feeling and motivation operates” leads to a more inclusive and multi-faceted conception of reason and practice (619). The resulting meta-narrative could be shared with the wider theatre community, with the view that such a document would help progress the discipline of the practising theatre artist.

In the future, a possible positive outcome for another theatre artist, reviewing my study prior to undertaking a similar task of interrogating or reflecting on their practice, could be their ability to work more efficiently, particularly if they have empathised with the uncertainties of the process undertaken and reflected upon here.

My own quest for principles for the practice of adapting literature for performance has advanced to the point of recognising some did exist, even though identified in retrospect. This recognition, at least, provides me with
a starting point in my next endeavour. I can be aware that the principles gleaned from this study have been identified as an existing structure, and present me a possible path to follow. Perhaps it is not so devastating that a larger set of principles cannot be identified, since the smaller stories of each theatre artist’s different way of working provides glimpses into the very elusive creative process each time an articulation is attempted. It is more likely that continuing to collect these stories of ways of working will provide illumination for those wishing to find temporary structures, or ways to begin. By reading others’ stories, intending adapters of literature for performance may choose to follow and deviate, in the same way I have done with *Vita Brevis*. The more stories we articulate the more confident we may become that we can trust the “bricolage” of our knowledge and experiences.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction to the Study

From the 1st entry in the Process journal—November 3rd, 2004

This work I am about to embark on will have many elements. I have been witnessing some of the events in the Melbourne International Festival 2004 and they have reminded me of some of the ideas I have thought, and then forgotten. It is important to keep looking at what is going on around me in the performing arts—ideas go through my mind when doing other things, when I have no chance to document them. I am reminded of these when I see something similar occurring on the stage. I am not ashamed of this—we know throughout history that ideas are constantly borrowed and reworked. Take ‘Variation’ form in music for instance—this was a very popular form of improvisation in Classical music times—Mozart and Beethoven were both highly developed artists in this mode of performance. They would take a folk song, or someone else’s melody, and then create or improvise variations—these could almost become formulaic, but I remember reading (many years ago) that a contemporary of Beethoven used to listen at the window to ‘steal’ his musical ideas from the performance of his improvisations at the soirees of the period.

This study looks at adapting novels for live performance. As a theatre artist, the decision to adapt a novel was, for the researcher, a forward step in the development of performance work that had previously been derived from various forms of literature and other artworks. Previous performances included monologues inspired by paintings of well-known visual artists along with documents pertaining to the paintings in the form of diaries, letters, critical essays, poetry, etc. The performance media of the works included solo female performances, projected (and interactive) videos, still image projections, environmental soundscapes, songs and music.
There have been several recent highly acclaimed adaptations of Australian novels performed by Australian theatre companies, for example: *Cloudstreet*, by Tim Winton, adapted by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo; *Night Letters* by Robert Dessaix, adapted by Susan Rogers and Chris Drummond; *Miss Tanaka* by Xavier Herbert, adapted by John Romeril. There have also been some fine adaptations of works that are not Australian, for example *Alias Grace* by Margaret Atwood, adapted by Caroline Lee and Laurence Strangio; Homer’s *The Odyssey*, and *Journal of the Plague Year* by Daniel Defoe, adapted by Tom Wright. Each production was highly individual and varied in size of cast, style of theatre, and differed in how closely the text of the novel was adhered to in the live performance. These examples demonstrate that adaptation is a repeated and successful phenomenon in current theatre practice and therefore needed investigation and research to discern why and how theatre practitioners created them.

The whole study, therefore, was divided into two ways of enquiring into the topic. The study into how contemporary theatre artists are adapting novels and other literature into live performance is part of a personal investigation into creating a theatre piece from a novel. While the interest in exploring adaptation was originally a personal concern, this soon turned into a wider interest in how other artists have approached the same task. The study therefore began as an exploration of the motivations and practices of adaptation as currently carried out by contemporary theatre artists and writers.

Therefore this study had two main objectives. The first objective was to research, adapt and write *Vita Brevis* as an example of a script ready for live performance, and to document the process. The adaptation used
aspects of dramatic performance; exploration of the use of technology; and experimental forms. The second objective was to undertake data collection in the form of interviews of playwrights and theatre directors in Australia and the United States who adapted literature for performance in order to ascertain why and how they produced their work. This included a ‘residence’ with American Place Theatre in New York, a theatre company that only produces theatre works and performances adapted from American novels.

Placing the Researcher in the Study
The researcher, although experienced in using various forms of literature as the basis for performance, had not previously followed any adaptation process with one novel for a finished stage production. Therefore the research undertaken was highly instrumental in informing the exploration and final performance product, the script, for the creative part of the study.

The researcher’s creative theatre work began at the end of the twentieth century and was influenced by performance art as well as absurd and physical theatre. Theatre companies like Complicite and The Wooster Group: directors like Elizabeth LeCompte and Simon McBurney; actors and artists like Robert Wilson and Legs on the Wall, who have used technology and multi-form theatre in their performances have directly influenced the researcher’s previous work. Several of these companies are termed to be practitioners of “Physical Theatre”. In a “Sunday Soapbox” presentation at the Victorian Arts Centre in August 2006, members of the Canadian physical theatre company, 7 Doigts de la Main, emphasised the difference between physical theatre and contemporary circus. They used the term ‘contemporary circus’ to describe their own work and that of other companies that use circus skills as vehicles for the theatrical language.

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1 The American Place Theatre: http://www.americanplacetheatre.org/stage/
presented on the stage. Physical theatre, on the other hand, emphasises the use of the body in an holistic way to present theatrical ideas, but does not necessarily involve acrobatics or athletic movements to communicate dramatic ideas.

The distinction made here between contemporary circus and physical theatre is very important, as it is the latter rather than the former that has influenced the researcher’s earlier work. There are several Australian theatre companies using the word “physical” in their title or in describing themselves. Some of these companies, like Zen Zen Zo Physical Theatre in Brisbane, and Kage Physical Theatre, have elements of dance and gymnastics choreographed into their performances and are very athletic. On the other hand, Dymphna Callery’s explanation of physical theatre in her text *Through the Body: a practical guide to physical theatre*, most resonates with the interpretation of the researcher:

…physical theatre accentuates the audience’s imaginative involvement and engagement with what is taking place on stage. There is a greater emphasis on exploiting the power of suggestion; environments and worlds are created onstage by actors and design elements provoke the imaginations of the spectators, rather than furnishing the stage with literal replications of life… …a pronounced emphasis on the alive-ness of the theatre event and the body-consciousness of the performers (5).

From the researcher’s point of view, the body must be able to rephrase ideas and representations to the audience, but not necessarily in an athletic way.

Other influential companies like Complicite and actors like Simon McBurney, who work under the physical theatre umbrella, draw their influences from many places, but were especially inspired by the teaching of Jacques Lecoq. A major 20th century choreographer, director and consultant, described Lecoq as one of the big French four (Decroux, Barrault, Marceau, and Lecoq) (Rolfe). Rolfe herself, learned from Marceau whilst studying at the Lecoq School, and later taught the Lecoq
techniques when she returned to the United States. Lecoq was an artist who influenced the theatre making of many contemporary innovators now pushing the limits of theatre. Lecoq’s school, the International School of Theatre, was in Paris where students learned many forms of physical theatre. Their work led them to create theatre through physical actions, exploring movement in characterisation and using visual aspects for creating and composing the performing stage.

For example, Complicite, in *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* (McBurney), had actors performing not only as characters from the story, but also as the land, animals, children, villagers, and the dead: these were elements that were important in translating or adapting the written word of the short story, written by John Berger, into the live stage performance. The actors also shared a storytelling narrative, which drove the story and the action.

Theatre that explored psychological and spiritual aspects of the human psyche through theatrical means was also very influential on the earlier work of the researcher. Playwrights from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have been keen to affect people with their work. Stephen Sewell says about his play *The Blind Giant is Dancing* (a production of which the researcher has directed):

...I want people to, in some kind of way, feel more compassion for one another. And one of the wonderful things when it works is to see an audience coming out of one of the plays holding one another, or being careful of one another and caring of one another (qtd. in Gifford 7).

Another Australian playwright and theatre artist, Chris Drummond, echoes these desires:

As an audience member I want to laugh and cry and scream and be delighted and disturbed, whatever it takes to really feel alive. I want it acknowledged that I am present there, that I have a brain and life experience and a whole lot of other baggage as well (qtd. in Oxenburgh).
These desires to affect an audience led theatre artists to explore the relationship between performance and audience and this has led to the change in the expectations of acting. Actors don’t always expect to play mainly one character or have slow transitions within a piece. The previously cited example of Complicite’s *The Three Lives of Lucie Cabrol* (McBurney) where the actors played many roles including acting as blackberry bushes and farm equipment and required the audience members to follow these immediate transitions; their imaginative senses were stretched. Whilst not having been challenged to play such a diverse range of roles as Complicite, the researcher acted most recently in *Tom’s Women*, by Geoffrey Sykes, a play that required thirteen different female roles to be enacted, during which the audience accepted an unusual play structure and identified the different roles through physical interpretations presented with minimal costume and stage setting.

Places for performance have also become more flexible. In the twenty-first century technologically advanced theatre spaces are capable of creating amazing spectacles. Also theatre has returned to the street and parkland, as well as workplaces, art galleries, quarries, and many other very imaginative places. For example, Peter Brook’s *Mahabharata* was performed in a disused quarry in Adelaide for the International Festival, and Legs on the Wall, a Sydney performance company, performed on ropes and tackles in shopping centres and building sites. This flexibility of setting and style was predominant in the researcher’s previous creative output, with performances being set and produced variously in art galleries, shop windows, parks, lounge rooms, train stations, and pubs; all spaces that were either site-specific to the text, or that took advantage of presenting performance in unexpected and new places.

When reviewing the existing literature in preparation for the study it was discovered that other researchers into adaptation were focussed on their
concern with the popular process of adapting novels for film—there was very little written about the process of adaptation from novel to live performance. The number of adaptations of novels to film is staggering in comparison to live performance. The online bookstore, Amazon, even has a “Listmania” page dedicated to the best book-to-film adaptations. In *Reading the Movies*, William Costanzo noted that it had been estimated that a third of all films ever made were adapted from novels. Nearly all of the classic works students study in high schools have been adapted for film, some several times in several different eras. Monaco says the reason that novels can often translate into film is because they are both narrative forms.

The narrative potential of film is so marked that it has developed its strongest bond not with painting, not even with drama, but with the novel. Both films and novels tell long stories with a wealth of detail and they do it from the perspective of a narrator, who often interposes a resonant level of irony between the story and the observer. Whatever can be told in print in a novel can be roughly pictured or told in film (although the wildest fantasies of a Jorge Luis Borges or a Lewis Carroll might require a lot of special effects). The differences between the two arts, besides the obvious and powerful difference between pictorial narration and linguistic narration, are quickly apparent.

Generally, the imbalance of novel to film adaptations in comparison to adapting to other forms is speculated to be due to the amount of money invested in the motion picture industry, and that large film companies have the ability to buy the required rights to any published novels.

Since there was an absence of research on the topic of adapting novels for live performance it was necessary to explore the work of playwrights, directors and theatre companies who successfully produced work that adapted from literature—some of these were in the form of reviews of
productions, and in other instances from interviews and observations of practice.

The outcomes of the literature and the research study made it evident that the two main areas of concern and interest that could inform an adaptation of a novel for live performance, as well as the theatre arts community for future adaptations of novels were 1) the motivations behind why theatre artists chose particular novels for adaptations, and what features of novels made them suitable for choice; and 2) the elements that theatre artists considered when undertaking any steps in order that a successful adaptation could be executed. These two topics have been taken up in each of chapters 4 and 5 of this exegesis.

The data collection was a qualitative study and included interviews with Australian and American playwrights and directors who have adapted novels for live performance. These included Australians: Chris Drummond, Associate Artist of the State Theatre Company of South Australia; Greg Lissaman, Artistic Director, Jigsaw Theatre Company, Canberra; and, John Romeril, playwright, and Fellow, at the State Library of Victoria; and Americans: Wynn Handman and Elise Thoron, American Place Theatre, New York; John Collins, Elevator Repair Service Theatre Company, New York; David Saar, Childsplay Theatre Company, Phoenix, Arizona; Pamela Sterling, Academic at The University of Arizona, and Playwright. The data also included a seminar on the topic of Adaptation given at Malthouse Theatre as part of the company’s *Things on Sunday* series—the participants were Tom Wright, Artistic Associate and Literary manager of the Sydney Theatre Company; Chris Kohn, co-writer (with Lally Katz) of *The Black Swan of Trespass* and director of Stuck Pigs Squealing; Caroline Lee, actor and adaptor of *Alias Grace*; Laurence Strangio, director and adaptor of *Alias Grace*; convened by Maryanne Lynch, dramaturge in residence at Malthouse Theatre.
The “residence” with the American Place Theatre in New York was very fruitful for the study. American Place Theatre is a highly regarded company that produces the adaptive work of the Artistic Director, Wynn Handman, under the umbrella of “Literature to Life”. Wynn Handman purposely chooses novels that are reflective of, and responsive to, American culture. The adaptations are presented as professional theatre productions and then “packaged” with educational drama activities and marketed to schools.

In assisting Wynn Handman and being present at rehearsals, the researcher witnessed the adaptive processes and methods Handman used with actors. The residency helped build a strong relationship with the Company that will result in further research beyond this study.

In order to explore the process of taking a novel through the stages for adaptation for a live performance an appropriate novel was needed that would not only make a good performance piece for the researcher, but also had possibilities within the text to experiment with ways to extend the elements in creations prior to this study. *Vita Brevis* by Jostein Gaarder was chosen because it could be presented as a solo (on stage) female performance, and had dramatic potential.

*Vita Brevis* was also chosen for the adaptation because Gaarder is a contemporary writer whose most famous novel, *Sophie’s World*, was very appealing and an international best seller. *Sophie’s World* has been translated into fifty-three different languages and involves an industry that includes a movie, a musical, a board game and a CDRom based on the book.
Both novels have strong philosophical references and therefore ‘had something to say’ to a modern theatre audience. Gaborro said that Gaarder “splendidly exhibits the timelessness, the universality, and the agony of filial, but repudiated love in That same flower”, the title the novel was published under in the United States. Merle Rubin also said, “In creating a novel that gives this forgotten woman her say, Gaarder invites readers to take a fresh look at some enduring issues of faith and morality (14).”

*Vita Brevis* uses a female voice throughout, which makes it most appropriate for adaptation for the researcher as the prospective actor/director/creator of the work. The novel consists of a long, grief-stricken letter from St. Augustine’s former partner, Floria Aemilia. She refers to many of Augustine’s writings and comments on them from her (fictional, but feminine) point of view. The female character also gives a critique of Christian dogma, particularly the ascetic tradition that Augustine embodied.

The subject matter of *Vita Brevis* is also interesting because St. Augustine’s writings have had an immense impact on society through the Catholic Church’s adoption of many of his ideas. Many writers and thinkers consider Augustine to be a great philosopher and admire the way he examined his own consciousness, mainly through *The Confessions*. Indeed, the Catholic Encyclopedia (Portalie) states:

> If Augustine occupies a place apart in the history of humanity, it is as a thinker, his influence being felt even outside the realm of theology, and playing a most potent part in the orientation of Western thought. It is now universally conceded that, in the intellectual field, this influence is unrivalled even by that of Thomas Aquinas, and Augustine's teaching marks a distinct epoch in the history of Christian thought.

Adolf von Harnack, one of the most highly regarded critical scholars on Christian thought, in his text *Monasticism*, emphasises the unique role of
Augustine and studies his place in the history of the world as a reformer of Christian piety and his influence as a Doctor of the Church.

No man since Paul is comparable to him… Even today we live by Augustine, by his thought and his spirit; it is said that we are the sons of the Renaissance and the Reformation, but both one and the other depend upon him (123).

Even from a point of view other than that of the Church, Dollimore agrees that the present society has elements influenced by Augustinian thought and writing:

…Augustine was the product of a Christian narrative, which he powerfully influenced and within which he has been scripted ever since; the synthesis, development, suppression, and innovation, which characterized his own work, has been continued with its subsequent transmission. It is in this sense that any account of desire, transgression, and deviation repeatedly encounters Augustine. If my own account seems hostile let me concede at the outset that I have read his writing with the awe consequent upon learning from it something about the world I inhabit now (131).

One of the verdicts from the research was that the adaptation of novels into any other art form provides many difficulties for artists, and attracts criticism on many levels. Toscan summarises these difficulties in his playwrighting seminars—the vastness of content and stories in novels make them difficult to condense into the time limit of a full-length play, whereas film is more able to handle the visual details integral to a novel’s atmosphere. Therefore, during the study, it became clear there were specific attributes that made some novels more appropriate for adaptation than others, and these are discussed in the chapter on “why” adapt.

The Review of Literature, whilst focusing on the topic of adaptation, by necessity of the usual theatre arts research required for producing performance work, also included research into areas that informed the
creation of the adapted script. Therefore a review of literature also looked at the “world” of the novel *Vita Brevis*, which was the novel chosen for study. This shorter Literature Review is included as Appendix A.

It was important to research literature related to contemporary practice in theatre arts, and particularly performances that used mixed media. This was because theatre companies, directors, actors and artists who have used technology and multi-form theatre in their performances directly influenced the researcher’s previous work. Published texts about their work were researched, and trends observed in their practices and techniques. This helped the researcher ascertain the style the new work was going to take, and informed the multimedia aspects of the work.

In collecting research data for the creative part of the study it was important to talk to directors and playwrights who were currently or consistently adapting novels as the source material for their practice, so their ideas and motivations could be related to the process undertaken for this study. Some theatre artists’ ideas were inextricably linked to their practice of theatre making which made the review of literature for this area of investigation also important to the study.

Dale McFadden (N.Pag.), in his videorecording on the directing process, lists all the aspects to consider when producing a good piece of theatre. Although McFadden refers to the most conventional of theatre forms it is very useful to review his main principles prior to undertaking the study. They were then compared to other theatre makers, particularly those of less conventional directors and performers like JoAnne Akalaitis and Elizabeth LeCompte, who use experimental or physical theatre techniques in their work. Deeper explanation of both these theatre artist’s ideas and work is included in the chapter on the review of literature.
The World of Vita Brevis

Whenever a theatre artist begins working with a new idea, script, novel or other form of source material in order to create performance, much research must be undertaken. Vita Brevis, by Jostein Gaarder was chosen as the novel for adaptation for live performance. The novel provides a number of areas for enquiry as several themes are involved within the narrative. This novel required investigation of literature that looked at fourth century Roman North Africa and the writings of St. Augustine.

Vita Brevis places the (fictional) author in an antique bookshop where he discovers letters written to St. Augustine when in the role of Bishop of Hippo, North Africa, from a former long-time partner/lover. The remainder of the text consists of these (fictional) letters that explore Floria’s (the name of the protagonist) point of view, and refer to pertinent writings in the Confessions, Augustine’s most popular publication.

The setting of the novel led to research into the possibility of the work being staged in the style of Roman theatre of the fourth century, or elements from the period being used. Therefore research into drama from the period was essential background material before and during the writing of the adaptation.

The historical person of Augustine’s lover did exist but there are no details or information about her except that Augustine mentioned her in his Confessions (VI, 15). Gaarder named her Floria and gave her opinions and ideas. However, it is completely legitimate for the character to be given the occupation of actor or entertainer in this period, according to Webb (282)—the identity given to her in the adaptation is an interpretation from the research.
The major Literature Review (Chapter 2) therefore, contextualised the study in relation to current forms and ideas from the theatre arts community affecting the researcher’s creative work, as well as the minor Literature Review (Appendix A) recognising the specific needs of this novel and the process of adaptation undertaken for this study.

The *Vita Brevis* adaptation therefore, is based on a Greek/Roman style—in order to depict a modern-day “tragedy”. Technological elements are used in new and experimental ways to extend existing practice in the researcher’s previous work where projected video, projected still images and soundscapes featured predominantly. The use of projected environments onto screens and surfaces, and interactive video became key dramatic components of the work. (These elements will be further explored when the play is performed.)

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**Outline of Chapters**

Chapter 2 is the Review of Literature that was undertaken in order to ascertain what had been written previously about the topic. It also looks at what has been written about the process of adaptation and looks at the body of work about adapting novels into some other art form. The information derived from the review led to the questions that became integral to the study. These are the questions of why artists choose to adapt material; and the processes they undertake in order to create adapted performance material.

Chapter 3 is the playscript of *Vita Brevis*—the creative product from the study.
Chapter 4 describes the methodology for the study and introduces the first question discussed and researched—why do theatre artists choose to adapt novels for live performance? The motivations why theatre artists adapt novels and the attributes of good material for adaptation are presented through the responses of the theatre artists interviewed for the study.

Chapter 5 explores the more varied responses to the elements the theatre artists considered when undertaking processes of adaptation and the strategies and problems that they thought necessary to keep in mind when undertaking an adaptation. The responses from the interviews with the theatre artists are organised into common themes. An interpretation of an observed process of adaptation from the residence with American Place Theatre presents findings often difficult to extract from the process of directing (Appendix C).

The final chapter overviews the findings of the study and considers the value of the research to the field of theatre arts.
Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Introduction
In the first chapter an overview of the researcher’s previous work in the performing arts was presented with an explanation of how this study is a direct progression from the creation of earlier performances. Even though adaptations of texts and forms of literature were intermixed in previous performances of the researcher, one entire novel had not been adapted for live performance. A review of the work of theatre artists whose ideas and accomplishments had directly influenced and informed the researcher’s earlier performances and productions was also covered. These theatre artists used literature, short stories, films, and other text types in their adapted creations.

It was also noted that adapting novels is a regular occurrence in the performing arts community. As evidence of this, in 2006 two Australian Broadcasting Corporation programs (Miller, 29) put emphasis on both the adaptation of novels for live theatre performance, as well as the adapting of either a part or a complete novel as the basis of other contemporary types of performing arts works.

In undertaking the Literature Review the following questions were always kept in mind:

- Why do theatre artists choose to adapt a novel for live performance rather than write a new work?
- How do theatre artists proceed after choosing to adapt a novel for live performance?
- How do theatre artists adapt different styles and types of literature and novels in order to come up with contemporary new works?
(This question evolves from the previous work of the researcher in using short and different literary sources to create live performance works).

Undertaking the Literature Review enabled the researcher to ascertain what was already known about adapting novels for live performance, as well as the key reasons given for choosing to adapt a novel rather than write an original work. In the following pages these reasons and the existing theories will be explained. It will be shown that there is insufficient evidence in the literature to comprehensively answer the questions noted above without further specific investigation.

**Current Situation**

Initially, the literature review was difficult to undertake because very little has been written specifically on the topic of adapting novels for live performance. Historically, the term “adaptation” has been used in several different contexts and these need to be identified and considered as other ways to define a process, as well as a product, of adaptation. The terminology has been confused—theatre artists have talked in various ways about processes that result in the transformation of written words into performance material. The main terms used will be looked at in turn: translation; interpretation; the use of varied texts; and adaptation. Adaptation is placed last as this is the term used for the process of creative work in this study.

- **Translation:** The term “translation” was used by Reba Gostand in the literal sense of translating a playscript that was originally written in another language into English in order for it to be performed. Gostand also uses the term in a more metaphorical sense to mean the process of bringing playscripts from the page to the stage:
Adapting a script for a different medium is a translation of some magnitude, one that involves the use of differing proportions of verbal and non-verbal elements of communication... If the same play is produced on radio, communication must be entirely through the ear. Any visual elements of the original stage script that are essential to plot, characterization, creation of atmosphere or period, or to the presentation of the theme, must be translated into aural elements, for example by changing the dialogue to incorporate extra information, by introducing a narrator, or by devising appropriate sound effects (5).

Thus the process of translation may be seen as the act of taking an existing playscript and bringing it to realisation in some other performance form. The terms “adaptation” and “translation” have been used interchangeably, and the elements of performance either on the stage, or on radio as in the Gostand comment, have been added for the audience to appreciate and understand the experience as fully as possible.

This loose interchange of the terms “adaptation” and “translation” was also demonstrated by the German theatre director, Walter Asimus—regarded as the foremost interpreter of Samuel Beckett—when he discussed a production brought to Australia for the Melbourne International Festival. Asimus explained that his adaptation was a personal interpretation of a Beckett text. He emphasised that it wasn’t just the original text; it presented something different from Beckett’s own work and it was his own translation, even though he and Beckett had worked together on many previous productions (Trioli).

- **Interpretation:** In the previous paragraph we see the use of the term “interpretation” as a personal way of thinking through the problems
of bringing a playscript to a live performance. Several authors use this term for a process of adapting various forms of literature for live performance (Bacon; Breen; Lee and Gura). For example, Bacon argues:

The creation of the presence of literature is taken to be the distinct task of the interpreter, as distinguished from the silent reader. Interpretation is seen as an art comparable to the other performing arts, in part re-creative and in part creative. It is seen, furthermore, as carrying out the primary need of a work of literature to be experienced, not simply analysed (Preface v).

The “interpretations” referred to by Bacon were performances of sections of novels, poetry, and other written materials, and thus adaptations, or indeed, translations of text-to-performance. Generally these were for short presentations, usually without all the elements of a total theatre production. Here, though, we see the distinction Bacon makes between the silent reader of a piece of literature and the performer who brings their own ideas of interpretation to embody a character or idea they want to communicate to an audience. The silent reader will read for storyline and explanation of character enfolded within the life of the piece of literature. In Bacon’s explanation of “interpretation”, the performer embodies the words of the section of a novel, the stanzas of poetry, or a section of playscript, which may be more than character, more than one character, or even the evocation of abstract ideas or descriptions of landscapes—the desire being to bring the personal ideas of the performer to the audience member to be experienced as living words.

- **Varied pieces of writing as the basis or beginning of performance-making**: This form of adaptation has been used by
the researcher in earlier performance works, and is a way of working used by several well-known theatre artists and companies like Complicite from Great Britain, and The Wooster Group from the United States of America. The difference between this form and the previous one is the length of the performance. In “interpretation”, generally, the adapted works are short pieces extracted from larger works of literature and may be presented as a series of short, but self-contained, pieces of performance. The difference in this category is that the shorter or longer pieces of literature have been synthesised into one performance piece or theatre work, either on the same theme or integrated into the whole. This can be more clearly explained by giving examples from theatre companies who produce this type of adapted and synthesised work.

As mentioned, two companies who have used combinations of literary forms within their theatre pieces are Complicite and The Wooster Group. Complicite is an English company described as a collective of actors who often devise their shows together around a performance text (Ratcliffe), “through months of argument, rehearsal and research”. Freshwater (214) describes a work, Mnemonic, that the company took eighteen months to create. The work was about ideas of memory and perceptions and used a text adaptation of Spindler’s The Man in the Ice, along with interlocking stories of Virgil. The company kept parts of the text in the resulting performance as well as bringing their own ideas and stories into the rehearsal process. This resulted in a performance piece that could be seen as an original work even whilst fragments of the original literature were incorporated into it.
In the description of their creative work in their web archive, The Wooster Group summarises their theatre pieces as “assemblages of juxtaposed elements: radical staging of both modern and classic texts, found materials, films and videos, dance and movement, multi-track scoring, and an architectonic approach to theatre design (n.p.)”. This sounds like a cacophony of sights and sounds, which is the company’s response to modern life and culture, and draws on many types of texts and tools in order to design their creative work. For example, a performance of Eugene O’Neil’s *The Hairy Ape* was toured to the Melbourne International Festival in 2001. O’Neil’s text was heavily integrated into a performance that exploited and emphasised the collision between actors physicality and glaring types of theatrical technology. So, even though much of the text was used to initiate the piece other unique qualities were added in order to complete the work for performance.

These varied elements of technology mixed with performance material from many sources were very inspiring influences in the researcher’s earlier work. The two examples given above, when performed for an audience, showed evidence of a form of interpretation and amalgamation of material that demonstrated the companies’ processes, where experiences, texts and ideas were all brought into the mix of creation for one performance event. An earlier work of the researcher, *Performance Promenades*, created for the Murray River Performing Group, used a speech from *In Australia, or, The Old Selection* by Steele Rudd, as the initiating point for a site-specific work that also used pieces of historic legislation, circus, theatre games, and poetry to explore the history and social mores of earlier generations of Australians in the local Albury-Wodonga region. This influence of combining texts continues to be demonstrated in the decision to juxtapose classic
Roman drama with the adapted text from the novel *Vita Brevis* for the creative work for this study.

- **Adaptation:** None of the above terms clearly described the process undertaken for this study. Nor were they appropriate for the theatre productions cited by Trioli in the Introduction to this chapter. These were clearly called “adaptations” and therefore, for this study, adaptation is defined as the intention and process of taking a literary novel or fictional work, that would normally be read privately over varied time periods, and transforming it into a live theatre performance of one or more Acts, normally using all or part of the text verbatim.

**Key Factors from the Literature Regarding “Adaptation”**

After differentiating “adaptations” from other forms of adapted works it became possible to address the proposed questions for the Review. This section develops the key ideas about adaptations that respond to the three questions.

Within texts that document and discuss theatre productions, it was possible to glean some reasons why theatre artists choose to adapt novels in preference to writing original material. These reasons were sometimes given as motivations for choosing novels to adapt, and at other times reflections after the idea had been put into practice with regard to why it had been a good idea to use the novel as source material.

The first, and most common, reason for choosing to adapt a novel was the popularity of the story, or characters, or cultural aspects that were fashionable at the time. One major reason the researcher desired to adapt *Vita Brevis* stems from the popularity of the novelist, Jostein Gaarder, who
had a worldwide best seller with his novel, *Sophie’s World*. This desire resonates, historically, with an example given by Rose (146) of the Salome story, which was adapted and retold by many artists, playwrights and musicians in the nineteenth century. Rose says this choice for the adaptation of Salome’s story was due to newly available information regarding North African culture in the mid-to-late 1800’s, which boosted interest in Middle Eastern studies. The Middle East became fashionable in the Decorative and Fine Arts and artists used the Biblical story as a piece of exotica to entice and interest their audiences.

Doniger (114) agrees and suggests that some stories that have been adapted and re-adapted often are popular because they have some aspects of social or psychological fear attached to them. She gives an example—that the use of twins in stories ignites our social gut reaction to cloning, that there should not be two identical forms of anything, and we have a fear of encounters with two antithetical characters, which is what we imagine when confronted by twins. Twins are only one example of social or psychological fear but reinforced as a good example by John Moore, who says in his article on multiple births, that as a society twins and multiples fascinate us because their complex relationships give unique material for stories in literature (e9). Bryan suggests that historically, cultural and religious beliefs about twins engender attitudes that vary between fear and awe:

…and belief in their supernatural powers (for example to induce fertility). Twins were routinely killed in some parts of Africa and their mothers made outcasts. Misconceptions about the biology of twins have been rife: two children meant two fathers; or infertility was inevitable in the female of a boy-girl pair… Fear of twins could have been rooted in their believed origin whether in their animal like nature, or from an adulterous relationship, an evil spirit or deity (169).
Doniger gives other examples of fearful, yet popular, topics like: the use of cadavers and galvanisation to create a human clone; the use of psychotropic drugs; vivisection; blood transfusion; and hypnosis.

In support of the factor of popularity, Nussbaum, in her discussion of the novel *Invisible Man* by Ellison in her text *Upheavals of Thought* (431), says that narrative art “has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist’s interest—with involvements and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society’s refusals of visibility.” Nussbaum (*Cultivating Humanity* 89) reminds us that telling stories together as a community engenders wonder and a sense of mystery and that narrative imagination leads us to moral interaction—which is necessary preparation for citizenship and community. She expresses the belief that it is important to members of a society to see themselves connected to each other by similar weaknesses and needs. Indeed, she argues it is impossible to relate to drama or literature without having some interests awakened within you.

Another reason, or driving force for undertaking adaptation, was the desire by theatre artists to take up large themes that challenge audiences to explore elements of their own lives and emotions through sharing the medium of performance. Neil Armfield (Belvoir St), the director of Tim Winton’s novel, *Cloudstreet*, explained that the theme he was drawn to dramatise was the passage of humans from isolation to community, but that he didn’t realise the impact he would finally have on an audience with this adaptation:

> When we opened *Cloudstreet* in 1998 we had no idea of the need, the hunger of Australian audiences for this story of this country. Now we know that this need, in fact, is worldwide. The great English playwright David Hare said when he saw *Cloudstreet* “no one in Britain would dare to write a story of such innocence—it’s as if you have been given the right
to start over again.” The experience of performing this work has been both humbling and thrilling (N.Pag.).

Tim Winton is a highly regarded Australian novelist, and *Cloudstreet* is an award-winning novel, which means the appeal of the popularity of both the author and the book were additional drawcards for the adaptation along with Armfield’s desire to bring the previously noted themes to an international audience.

The idea that adaptation can be employed to explore significant ideas and themes relevant to the human experience is an approach shared by others. For example, Rosalie Higson believes that shedding light on how people have lived in the past can encourage audiences to sympathise with characters and encourage them to rethink attitudes and positions on issues in the present as well as the past. She claims that the works of the 17th and 18th century writers such as Dickens, Hardy and Tolstoy are particularly favoured by adaptors as they evidence strong episodic qualities “…excellent characterisation, clear-cut plots, heady romance and adventure… played out among gorgeous (or gory) historic settings (21)”.

The added advantage of these period dramas is that they are out of copyright. Higson’s article also makes the point that some previously unfilmable “problems” have been solved by the advent of technology, thereby widening the possibilities for novel-to-film adaptors.

In his interview with Lawrie Zion (21), Andrew Bovell agreed that one of the main reasons to adapt novels was the popularity of the novel, but as a practising playwright and screenwriter of both adaptations and original work he also lamented the practice. However, despite the advent of technology, according to Bovell, the process of adaptation is often too problematic especially when key elements of the story appear impossible to realise:
…[we] face an interesting adaptation problem with one of the more notorious episodes in The Books of Revelation, where the protagonist is forced to dance while chained to the wall by the foreskin of his penis (21).

Others share this view that some novels are wholly inappropriate for adaptation. For example, in her text Sex and Social Justice, Nussbaum (357) describes the interchanges and dialogue in Virginia Woolf’s To the Lighthouse, explaining that inner dialogue and conflict take up much of the text, and that if this were live theatre there would not be enough happening—hardly enough action to fill half an hour. Higson agrees that some stories are unadaptable to theatre and she cites the example of James Joyce’s novel Ulysses, explaining that “Joyce’s high-falutin’ intellectualism and experimental word play have defeated attempts at adaptation (21)” thus far. She goes on to contend that some novelists will never release the rights to their books:

_Catcher in the Rye_’s famous…author, J.D. Salinger, is a case in point. Producers would sell their infant children for a chance to adapt his immensely popular coming-of-age novel. Instead they have to be content with writing their own Salinger-esque tales…(21).

As will be further discussed, these stated reasons and problems provide the starting points for processes or elements that need to be considered by theatre artists when undertaking the adapting of a novel for live performance.

The question relating to the how, or process(es), the theatre artists undertook in order to create a complete theatre performance appeared quite difficult to articulate. In many ways, this question of process can relate to the equally difficult question of a theatre artist’s process of creatively directing or producing a new work. There were no easy explanations or formulae: those who created adaptations did so in their own ways and usually these were not articulated as a process or method.
For instance, Chris Drummond (Rogers and Drummond) doesn’t elaborate on any process or method for making the acclaimed theatre piece *Night Letters*, which he declares is inspired by Robert Dessaix’s novel, but he clearly articulates the visual image that led him to begin the process of adaptation:

> There is nothing overtly theatrical about the blurb but I immediately “saw” that Venetian hotel room as a theatrical space with the figure of a dying man in exile surrounded by his ghosts and demons—a magically metaphorical space… I felt I knew what such a theatre show could be—it was a kind of epiphany—all before I’d turned the first page (vi).

It seems that Drummond is referring to the Gestalt in the creative process—the “epiphany” or creative spark that is so difficult to define or describe. *Night Letters* was substantial viewing with three acts and simultaneous stories: this ability by the theatre artist to visualise the action, or imagine the look of a stage set, or how the characters behave, seems to be a necessary first step in order to instigate a process of adaptation.

The inability of theatre artists to define a process doesn’t mean that adaptation is process-free. Approaches to adaptation might be articulated for the artist even when the artists can’t, or don’t, articulate it well or publicly themselves. Such an articulation was an aim for the wider study.

Collaboration might be seen as a critical part of the process of adaptation for some theatre artists and needs to be a point of enquiry in the wider study. Drummond and other playwrights and theatre artists talk about the process of workshopping the performance material once the novel has been chosen for adaptation. *Cloudstreet*, another large three-act play, was workshopped to its conclusion. In the *Adaptors’ Notes* to the playscript (N.Pag.) the adapters, Nick Enright and Justin Monjo, acknowledge that
the process was collaborative amongst the adapters, the director and the
actors. The design and staging evolved along with the text during a two-
week workshop. Of course, workshopping performance material is not
exclusive to adapted material, but it is interesting that in these two
monumental productions the theatre artists emphasised the value of
collaboration in taking the even larger (or longer) product of the novel
through a directed collective process to the highly acclaimed theatre
productions they became.

The echoes of this principle of collaboration can be seen when Humphrey
Bower says that his adaptation of Marcus Clarke’s *For the Term of His
Natural Life* was really a set of instructions or intentions that were to be
further interpreted in rehearsal. The director, Michael Kantor, used
Bower’s script as a starting point when working with the actors to create
the performance. The play script uses scene titles and descriptions of
action from the novel, and all the dialogue has been extracted from the
novel. The new work was called *Natural Life* and in the Director’s Note,
was credited as directed and devised by Michael Kantor, based on a script
by Humphrey Bower. Kantor calls it “…rather a brief fragment of a novel
that is a brief fragment of our history (Director's Note, v)”.

This highlights a major problem that confronts theatre artists determined to
adapt a novel: the size of a literary work necessitates that choices be made
about what to include and what to leave out. Indeed, this problem led the
researcher to ask explicitly from practising theatre artists how they make
their first steps in adaptation, This problem appeared to be the obstacle to
beginning the adaptation of *Vita Brevis* for the creative part of the study.

In order to explore possible processes of theatre artists who used adaptation
of varieties of texts to build their theatre performances from forms of
literature, it was found necessary to explore the earlier and influential
performances of theatre companies who were precursors of Complicite and The Wooster Group. Shank (112) describes the work of two groups who influenced The Wooster Group: The Bread and Puppet Theatre, founded in 1961 by Peter Schumann, who created all their work; and Spalding Gray and Elizabeth LeCompte, whose work became the beginnings of The Wooster Group. For example, Schumann created his productions by adapting stories, images and characters from religious sources. He was interested in myths from different cultures and he used archetypal characters in his works, and believed that “…Art is by now what religion used to be (112)”. According to Shank, Spalding Gray and Elizabeth LeCompte were both members of The Performance Group, which was formed in 1967 by Richard Schechner. The company experimented with working in the environment and explored different group processes and training techniques. They were very interested in the relationship between performer and audience. Gray and LeCompte developed their own work around Gray’s autobiographical material. Shank goes on to explain how innovators in the earlier years of American experimental theatre moved in and out of mainstream and effected changes. New theatre creators adopted influences from these companies too. For example, Julie Taymor used puppets and masks in the style of Bread and Puppet Theatre in her work, which found mainstream approval in her stage production, The Lion King, adapted from the Disney film. Shank also discusses another historically important artist who used texts, JoAnne Akalaitis. Akalaitis worked with the 1970s theatre company, Mabou Mines, which was formed by the musician Philip Glass, with Akalaitis as a performer. In 1977 Akalaitis initiated a major work for Mabou Mines called Dressed like an egg, which was based on the work of Colette. The piece included images drawn from Colette’s life and writings. In her recollections of the process of adaptation of this story for the stage, Akalaitis claimed that her approach to scene building was to “…close her eyes until a picture came and then write it down (310)”. Akalaitis’ approach clearly demonstrates how an adaptor
may go from text to stage performance in a highly personal, private way. Such approaches stand in stark contrast to the more collaborative and public approaches to adaptation reported by Enright and Monjo, and Kantor above.

Since there are no texts that specifically describe the creative process of making theatre pieces that adapt or adopt literature into plays or playscripts, it was a step closer to witnessing the gathering and intermixing of various texts in a piece in *The New Radical Theatre Notebook* (Sainer). This book contains the text of *Commune*, an early work from The Performance Group (members of which, formed The Wooster Group). The production notes, written by Richard Schechner, provide the various literary sources used for the dialogue, as well as a map to describe possible locations, explanations for audience participation, and variations if events changed in the process of performance by chance or by audience reaction. While it can be agreed that a playscript contains only the beginnings of a performance, this particular text is accompanied by some journal entries that show the decision by the director to use “the words of Melville, Shakespeare, Thoreau, the Bible, The American colonists, the Brook Farm communards, Charles Manson, Roman Polanski, Susan Atkins (162)” along with major accomplishments and obstacles in the collective work of the group. These extra items help understand the “avant garde” playscript, but still do not explain how the literature transposes from its original form into its new “adapted” place in the play.

Another text that attempts to illumine the work of experimental theatre groups, like The Wooster Group, by publishing the playscripts is *Plays for the End of the Century*. In her Introduction, Marranca explains that The Wooster Group “made its reputation by radicalising the literary heritage in a special dramaturgy of dispersed texts which replaced the play with the anthology and the text with the fragment (qtd. in Sainer xxii)”. This
fragmented approach to the whole work is demonstrated by the source texts used for the play entitled Frank Dell’s *The Temptation of St. Antony*. They included *La Tentation de Saint Antoine* by Gustave Flaubert, *The Magician* (1958) a film by Ingmar Bergman, *Ladies and Gentlemen, Lenny Bruce!!* (1974) by Albert Goldman, *The Letters of Gustave Flaubert, Channel J*—a cable television talk show, *Learned Pigs and Fireproof Women* (1986) by Ricky Jay, and *The Road to Immortality* (1932) by Geraldine Cummins. It needs to be repeated, though, the playscript cannot really describe the ultimate performance—here the event of theatre and the written words are poles apart. This demonstrates the critical process of rehearsal and workshopping of texts that results, for an audience, in something quite different than the impression of the playscript for the reader. As Marranca comments:

> The actors in this narrative within narratives which never comes to an end are making a film, replaying audio tapes, performing, and rehearsing—cutting and pasting, rewriting and recontextualizing—a text divided into sections, parts, and episodes alternately recounted and dramatized in monologic and dialogic form (xxii).

Although viewing of the playscripts did not provide any real clues to the process(es) undertaken by the director, playwright, or theatre company to adapt the literature into the work, the formatting of the plays demonstrated possible ways to structure the writing, and the journal entries and explanations for action that were embedded within the text in the Sainer example were quite helpful for structuring the writing of the playscript for *Vita Brevis*.

**Tensions Found in the Literature**

There is no doubt that the form of a theatre performance is an entirely different form from that of a novel, but it became apparent that this difference provided a tension between the two impulses: on the one hand,
there was the need for contemporary theatre artists who were adapting literature to produce a new work very different from the novel, and on the other hand, there was the need to stay true to the novel. Before beginning the adaptation of *Night Letters*, Susan Rogers wondered how to capture the essence of the literary work and what to do about condensing the work for the stage by asking herself: "would it be possible to make a piece of theatre as satisfying as the book? How can one include all the worlds and ideas and still protect the language of the novel? (Writer’s note, V)". These are central issues the adaptor faces when condensing work for the stage. The fear of not being able to live up to the complexities within the text and not trivialising the ideas and issues were very real ones for the researcher. Choices need to be made, but the fear of not making the most effective ones faces an adapter at the beginning of the process.

Some theatre artists purposely acknowledge the need to steer themselves away from the literary form of the novel in making the new work fit for stage performance. Jonathan Hardy illustrates this by explaining in his introduction to the playscript *Jungfrau*, adapted from the novel by Dymphna Cusack. Hardy says he avoided using a narrative style for his play by putting it through the “biocomputer” of another artist—himself—and thereby being able to make choices about changing the style and form. By doing this, he expressed the wish to “continue and enhance the insight of Dymphna Cusack”. He explains a desire to create impressions that in the action of his play “intersect” the moments between Thea, Cusack’s main character, going to answer a knock at the door, and a following action of answering the door. Hardy’s play uses the themes and characters from the novel but he declares he has written a new work. He emphasises the creative process between the playwright and director that culminates in the event of theatre. Hardy states he doesn’t consider the play literature but a living work that is retold by the actors in performance.
Here, the distinction is between the so-called “dead” printed word of the novel, and the “live” performance of the theatre.

Existing Theories
Texts were found that looked specifically at the process of adapting novels to film. Even though film is a very different medium from live performance, there were some ideas regarding the process that could be quite pertinent to adapting novels for the stage. For example, Portnoy, in Screen Adaptation, whilst not proposing a specific method or theory, does give practical advice to potential adapters on problems of length, characterisation, time periods, cost of rights, and dramatic writing.

Brian McFarlane’s text, Novel to Film, provoked some interesting thoughts that might be further explored by extending his analysis to include the extra mode of live performance. For instance, McFarlane talked about novel and film as two ways of “seeing”—in novels one sees with the mind, and in film, the eye. This, McFarlane claims, led to the major criticism of films when their makers produced adaptations of novels that didn’t satisfy the lover of the novel. Although the elements of his analysis were interesting, the retrospective nature of his study, that is, looking at works that were already adapted into film, meant that the research questions of this study regarding the process of adaptation were not addressed.

An interesting proposal McFarlane makes is that after the advent of film adaptations of novels, the particular ways film can “see” began to influence the ways that novels were written. He gives the examples of James Joyce and Henry James who wrote novels that expect the reader to “see” beyond the language and narrative. Due to these psychological inferences and unspoken intentions being adopted in some novels, McFarlane’s proposal is that these novels that have been influenced by film become unfilmable
as adaptations. Whilst understanding this idea of McFarlane’s, the researcher deems this a dated proposal—a 1997 film adaptation of James’ novel *The Wings of the Dove* directed by Iain Softley, provoked much discussion, thought, and reflection on the subtext skilfully woven into the production.

Mainly, McFarlane discusses an approach for analysing the adaptation of novels to film in which he offers and tests some criteria for the process of transposing novels to film and chooses five adapted novels as case studies—the film adaptations range from *The Scarlet Letter* filmed in 1926 to *Cape Fear* in 1991. He explores the differences between the elements that could be transferred from novel to film, and others that will require adaptation. The transferred elements are those that transfer well from one narrative medium to another. The adapted elements are those that require different equivalences in a film medium. By “equivalences”, McFarlane means “codes” that are used in reading a film (as distinct from reading a novel):

These include: (a) language codes (involving response to particular accents or tones of voice and what these might mean socially or temperamentally); (b) visual codes (response to these goes beyond mere ‘seeing’ to include the interpretative and the selective); (c) non-linguistic sound codes (comprising both musical and other aural codes); (d) cultural codes (involving all that information which has to do with how people live, or lived, at particular times and places) (29).

The lack of applicability of McFarlane’s analysis to this study can be explained by saying that both novels and films are fixed documents and can be endlessly explored in a way that stage performance cannot. Even though the playscript is a document of a proposed performance and can be explored in a similar way to the film script, the performance of the script is ephemeral and even filmed documentation of an event cannot fully describe the nuances and subtle differences that occur from one
performance to the next. McFarlane identifies the shortcomings of his research with “all five novels… broadly categorized as “realist”… it has not been possible to include every kind of novelistic procedure (33)”.

Even so, McFarlane’s critical approach to a sustained study of the two forms could be further analysed to ascertain whether film adaptation in the 21st century continues to reinforce his findings. McFarlane himself proposes: a “further volume might well focus on the extent to which modernist or post-modernist texts have shown themselves susceptible to film adaptation.” Therefore, there may be some worthwhile future study in making documents of stage performances to judge if, in retrospect, his analysis can be extended to the enterprise of adapting novels for live performance. McFarlane’s approach to analysing the transposition of novel to film, coming as it does after the event of the adaptation, does not shed very much light on the question of how to adapt a novel to live performance—there being no enquiry in his study into the director’s thoughts or processes prior to the execution of the adaptation.

**Shortcomings in Current Knowledge**

Since the only theory of analysis for adapting novels proposed is that of McFarlane, some future reworking and consideration of its applicability to the different medium of live theatre performance could be undertaken. This undertaking would require an enquiry into the thoughts and intentions of the director and/or screenwriter to help with what McFarlane would term “equivalences” to the roles of the playwright or theatre artist who intends the adaptation of the novel for live performance.

Neil Sinyard’s text, *Filming Literature*, contains a chapter on Film and Theatre, and even though he is mostly referring to the filming of plays, he expresses the differences between the two media that could illustrate the understanding and use of McFarlane’s codes. When describing theatre he
says, “Theatre has artificial light and illusion… [theatre] is verbal, stasis, live, performance… [theatre is] an elitist form… requiring attentiveness (157)”. If these descriptors could only be applied to theatre and never to film then possibly McFarlane’s codes could have viability to anyone applying his methodology of analysis for adaptation. Forms of theatre have also advanced to include a much bigger array of possible features than those proposed by Sinyard. Sinyard’s text was written in the mid-1980s, which could explain the inadequacy of these features to capture all forms or elements of contemporary film and film-making as well as contemporary theatre. With regard to film, Sinyard says, “on the other hand [film was] open-air and realism… [film was] visual, movement, canned, photography… [film was] democratic, yet private, continuous and solitary (157).” Here again, the descriptors are constrained when considering the wide gamut of contemporary film. His point, though, about the audience possibly being private and/or solitary, is more pertinent to film outside the cinema with the easy availability of video and DVD for use in the home or other private settings. Theatre audiences, by contrast, do need to attend to the continuousness of the event. This ability to stop and start a film when viewing it privately returns the viewer to the choices one has of varied time periods when reading a novel. And perhaps, then, it is the immediate event of theatre that the audience usually experiences only once, that truly distances it as a distinct form from that of contemporary film.

**Other Views**

Since the literature presents some common elements, it is pertinent to ask if they could be used as criteria that might inform the choice of novels for live performance. These elements are: a) popularity of the story, characters, or cultural aspects; b) exploration of social or psychological fear; and, c) the taking up of large themes that challenge audiences. There
is evidence of these common elements in a newspaper article that was published prior to the performance of Tom Wright’s adaptation of *The Odyssey* for Malthouse Theatre’s contribution to the 2005 Melbourne International Festival. The article was presented in a diary form that chronicled an amusing, but truthful, broad working process of the adaptation. The first entry is dated December 2002 and gives Wright’s motivations for choosing this story—a story that will be would known to an audience:

Homer and *The Odyssey*. Everyone knows it: no one knows it. The original story of home and post-traumatic stress from the dawn of the West. I go back to Calvin’s essay *The Odysseys Within the Odyssey*, a beautiful piece of writing that first made me think of the Homeric saga as a piece of theatre (Wright 16).

Wright says he was drawn to the myth because the stories were full of images and stories that stay in the memory:

…I’m thinking that the children’s storybook version of *The Odyssey* contains the best-known stories for good reason. The elements of the story we all remember are the Cyclops and the Sirens, Circe turning sailors into pigs and Calypso imprisoning the human flotsam that washes up on her beach. These parts of the story are famous because their imagery lingers in the mind: that sounds like the basis of theatre to me (16).

After rejecting a draft of the adaptation that had Odysseus as a digger returning from the western front who dreams the stories as he slips in and out of morphine episodes, Wright talks about raising the stories in his script to a level that we saw Nussbaum emphasised earlier—of stories engendering wonder and a sense of mystery that leads an audience to consider moral questions:

The idea of *The Odyssey* as a journey through key images of post-colonialism has died a natural death. Something much more mysterious, more mythic, has emerged. Michael and I discuss the underworld and
what it means for a man to go among the dead, to look into the eyes of loved ones, unable to touch them (17).

This article, along with some of the earlier literature, reveals other issues for theatre artists who instigate an idea of how to adapt for live performance. The possible length of a process is demonstrated by the diary entries in Wright’s article—he started in 2002, and the production finally came to realisation in 2005. Another issue that was shaped by the length of the process for The Odyssey was that the enthusiasm of the playwright is often not sufficient—similarly committed Artistic Directors and other companies or funding bodies need to be willing to support the process. The reference to discussion in the last quotation also supports the proposal stated earlier that collaboration is often part of the process of adaptation.

In the qualitative research study it will be helpful, when asking theatre artists specifically about their process, to compare these reflections from theatre artists that strongly informed or drove an adaptation.

**Lack of Evidence: Devising the Qualitative Research Questions**

Since the thoughts and opinions of theatre artists that referred to either of the first two questions were gleaned from playscript introductions, theatre reviews, theatre artist interviews, and similar shorter forms of text, this made it necessary to ask theatre artists who regularly, or recently, adapted novels for live performance to substantiate or refute the noted motivations from the literature. Therefore, the wider qualitative study aimed to substantiate what was suggested in the literature surveyed as well as further define the motivations and processes of theatre artists when they adapted novels. Questions relating to the “why” of adapting a novel for live performance were:
1. How did you find, or come across the novel recently adapted for live performance?
2. How much did the original story affect the writing/adaptation process and the final production?
3. What other novels have you adapted?
4. Why choose to adapt novels rather than write an original play? What features of the novel make it appropriate for adaptation?

Since methods or processes, as distinct from motivating ideas like visual images, seem difficult to express, this was also a field of enquiry needing to be undertaken. As well, the second research question has a specific bearing on the researcher’s need to undertake an adaptation of a novel for the arts practice in this study. The need for a model of practice or a successful process to follow was deemed necessary before beginning the adaptation of the novel *Vita Brevis*. Therefore, the following questions relating to the ‘how’ of adaptation were asked in the qualitative study:

1. Do you follow the same process each time? What step comes first? What is your process of adapting novels?
2. Are you working on an adaptation presently? Or do you have ideas for future novels to adapt?

**Reason for the Study**
The adaptation of novels for live performance is a step forward in the performance work of the researcher, as well as a regular occurrence in the theatre world. It seems logical that further adaptations will be undertaken by the researcher, and that interrogating this form of practice can enlighten the practice for further adapted performances as well as other theatre artists’ work.
As there are no texts specifically addressing the adaptation of novels for live performance, this study is the first step in putting forward theatre artists’ ideas and motivations that will help the theatre arts community to articulate more clearly their ways of working when creating live performances of literature adapted from print. This will inevitably lead to clearer insights into the creative practices of theatre artists, practices that due to their personal and often hard-to-articulate nature are always in need of further explanation.

**Post-Note**

This study is designed to explore the motivations and possible processes that emerge: a) when asking theatre artists what they think and reflect upon a recent adaptation; b) when observing a professional theatre artist in the process of adapting a novel for live performance; and c) the process undertaken by the researcher in adapting a novel to be prepared for rehearsal and live performance. The limitations of the study should be apparent. For example, when asking theatre artists to reflect on their experiences the event has already occurred and explanations in retrospect will be merged with intentions prior to the event. Even though the study includes observation of a theatre artist in the creative process of adaptation, the creative process of directing merges at an indistinct point. Creativity, though an absorbing research topic, is beyond the scope of this exegesis. Even though the Journal chronicles and collects the researcher’s thoughts about reading, planning, and processing through the adaptation of the novel *Vita Brevis* ready for rehearsal and performance, this was the first attempt at adapting a novel and the researcher must admit to being a novice in this process since earlier work had only included smaller types of writing and literature. Therefore, reflection on this first clumsy process may indeed reveal practical steps that will inform future adaptations, but it is that first way forward that is being attempted here, rather than a practice derived
after several attempts and further works have been completed. These other avenues may have added dimensions to the findings of the study, but to pursue these directions in any depth would have been to undertake a different kind of study reflecting different purposes.
Chapter 3

Playscript for Vita Brevis

Vita Brevis (Life is short)

(Adapted from the novel of the same name by Jostein Gaarder)

by Jennifer Munday

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Jennifer Munday
Unit 3,
36 Batt Avenue,
Wodonga,
VIC 3690
jmunday@csu.edu.au
Mobile:0449780372
INTRODUCTORY NOTE:

Initially, this play script was written for one live actor on stage that could be the director too. Therefore there are words and instructions in the text that are imagined solutions to problems prior to the rehearsal process. Although there are more directions and informative notes than might normally be found in a script, interpretation and new inspiration would be expected in preparing the work for performance during rehearsals.

SYNOPSIS

Floria, a woman living in Carthage, Roman North Africa, in the 4th century is emotionally devastated by her former lover, Augustine’s, religious reasoning in a publication about their relationship. Hurt and angry, she remembers and reflects on her perception of the betrayal. She had been clinging to the expectation that he would return to her—she recounts events and memories from her point of view. She finally comes to an understanding of human nature and her ‘place’ in the wider world through responding to him in a letter and exploring ideas in the same style of rhetorical response he would have used.

During the play she enacts sections of Seneca’s Medea, through her work as an actor and orator of the classics—these allow her to vent her previously withheld passions and discover emotions she had buried deeply. (Jason, husband to Medea—a half-goddess in Greek mythology—betrayed her when he agreed to marry the young daughter of the king, Creon, in the country they had travelled to. Creon banished Medea from the country in order to facilitate the politically advantageous marriage. Jason wanted to keep their two sons with him. However, Medea revenged herself for
Jason’s betrayal by killing the children, before being lifted to the heavens by a winged chariot).

The play preludes with projected video of the (fictitious) playwright being interviewed about how she came to write the play. There is also projected video of a friend—he is a fellow actor who takes the roles of both Creon and Jason in the Seneca excerpts.
CHARACTERS

The play has been written to be performed by one female actor on stage and video, and one male actor on video.

**FEMALE** actor plays:
PHOEBE, female, the playwright, 21st century clothing (video only)

FLORIA, former concubine of Augustine, and mother of Adeodatus—a woman in her mid- to late-forties, dressed in ‘classical’ Roman costume (live and video).

MEDEA (live and video), a mask is added to Floria’s costume.

**MALE** actor plays:
INTERVIEWER, neat casual 21st century clothing (video)

FRIEND of Floria, fellow actor, about fifty, classical Roman attire (video)

CREON (video), a crown and mask are added to the Friend’s costume.

JASON (video), a sheathed knife or sword and mask are added to the Friend’s costume.

(Musician—percussion, or other instrument evocative of North Africa provides interludes, and where decided upon in rehearsal may provide an accompaniment—for example, during Scene 4).
SETTING

The set is an array of hanging and intersecting white or cream coloured cloths, arranged to be available for projection, but depicting an interior in Roman North Africa in the 4th century—suggestive of a tent, as well as Roman white marble, and the lightly coloured dwellings in North Africa. The hangings need to be able to be moved physically forward for the final scene, the ‘ascension’, so that the whole contraption moves closer to the audience creating a feeling of the set crowding them in—quite claustrophobic.

Through an opening (window), or on rotated projection, we are aware that the desert landscape is not far away—there might also be a fig tree (referred to by Augustine in the Confessions).

There is an entrance covered by a projection so that the video of Floria in Garden Bench, which is filmed in an outdoor setting, can show on film the exit that becomes the physical entrance of the female actor to the stage. (This is an interest of the playwright—to experiment with the engagement of film with the “real time” of the play.)

There is an altar set up in one space - not a Christian one, to a pagan Carthaginian goddess - with the ‘sign of Tanit’. 

![Sign of Tanit]
This is a cone at the base with horns to provide the shape above it, topped by a solar disk: the colours are meant to be red and white.

There is a raised platform for Floria’s performances of Medea under spotlight, on which are placed her mask and a dagger. There is a table nearby with other leather-bound books, or scrolls and codex: these would be Floria’s copies of classic works for performance or writings of the philosophers. This would be where she comes to find the copy of the Confessions for Scene 1.

There is a statue, model, or a way of draping a piece of clothing that would have belonged to Augustine, her former lover. Floria refers to this when she is talking to him, and will use the clothing in her lovemaking scene. This is a piece of clothing that Floria keeps in the hope of his return and is her embodiment of him.

A live musician will accompany the performance: a drum with a ceramic base would be the most appropriate for the geographical location. The music will indicate the move from one scene to the next, and underscore some of the text, although this needs to be determined during the rehearsal period.

I refer to the Berber’s dance in Scene 4: this is video footage I possess of male camel drivers who drum and dance in the Sahara desert at night around a campfire, which would be available for the production.
The play contains one Act divided into several scenes:

Prelude

Scene 1: Learning the news

Scene 2: Poetry and beauty

Scene 3: Lessons/Medea

Scene 4: Sensuality

Scene 5: The mother

Scene 6: The son

Scene 7: Death

Scene 8: Reply

Scene 9: The ascension
NOTE: The first video is to be played on a monitor in the foyer whilst the audience are waiting to enter the theatre space. This is to ‘mirror’ the prelude in the novel, by giving some information about how the play came about. Audience members can pay attention to the video in the style of learning more about the play, or they may just be aware of it as they socialise before the event.

VIDEO 1 - a television interview of the playwright, Phoebe. The back of an interviewer can be seen (Male actor)—both should be in chairs typical of television settings.

PHOEBE: [As if in response to a posed question.] When you explain how you start things it doesn’t seem to make sense—it’s pretty crazy, really. The seed for my play began years ago—I mean, that’s how long something can stay brewing. It’s not even an idea when it starts.

Way back at the beginning it started with me sitting up all night talking crazy stuff—you’ve done that haven’t you? Anyway, we were demolishing some good wine and peering into the future. As friends, we both valued travel—did you know that St. Augustine actually said that ‘life is a book, and those who don’t travel read only one page.’ Like, well—but I’m getting ahead of myself.

We talked about places we’d been to and places we intended to go. My list consisted of one item—everywhere: places I wanted to go, that is—everywhere I possibly could. Oh—but where to first? How do you make the decision about where you want to travel when you want to go everywhere? Easy, I decided I would start at the beginning of the index
in the Atlas. Whatever the first city was, I would go to that country and visit that city and then whatever happened afterwards was fate.

And where was this first city? I bet you think it will start with A. But it doesn’t—well, it does… but the first city has an apostrophe. The first city in my little atlas was ‘Annaba.

That’s a fishing port in Algeria. The wonderful thing about my new system of travel was that I considered countries I didn’t know anything about. Algeria—I’d never really thought anything about it before. But I decided to find out—well, it was pretty dangerous to travel there at the time. They were embroiled in a Civil War, and tourists and foreigners were likely to be kidnapped, ransomed and killed. But I bought a travel book about North Africa and found mention of my little town. It said that it was close to the Roman ruins of Hippo, the place where St. Augustine had been Bishop of North Africa.

Not being a Catholic, I didn’t have much idea about St. Augustine. But I’d been in a strong relationship with a man who was a “lapsed” catholic. Can you believe it? St. Augustine is to blame for a number of really important elements of Catholicism in our society—like the attitude of “sins of the flesh” and the practice of confessing—because he wrote the famous *Confessions*. But he had a lover with whom he lived for more than 10 years, and had a child with her, before he left her for a society marriage that his mother, St. Monica, arranged for him. Then he “saw the light” and converted—this is how Monica became a saint. She prayed for her son to be ‘saved’ and he was, so she became St. Monica.

Augustine began to express himself quite beautifully and emphatically in words—writing essays, lectures and books—and was one of the
founding “fathers” of the Catholic Church. And before this, I didn’t even know who he was! Now I know he is considered one of the great philosophers. But what about his concubine—what happened to her?

All of this was interesting of course, but nothing more. I wasn’t travelling to Algeria while it was so dangerous. But it made me curious enough about North Africa so I travelled to Tunisia and saw Carthage where Augustine lived when he was studying—where he would have lived with his concubine—saw the Roman ruins, and the desert, and the landscape that he and his woman lived in.

I’d been thinking about St. Augustine all this time, how as a playwright I could use his story, because it’s such a juicy one. And his lover, that he betrayed—how would you feel being left behind like that—and losing your child… And then to think that the only story the world has about your life is his story, his point of view… What about her?

VIDEO 2/3 - Garden Bench

NOTE: As the audience enter the theatre space two videos will be projected on walls of the theatre and run simultaneously whilst the audience take their seats. One video will concentrate on Floria’s face, the other of her male friend. The videos will run simultaneously to give the impression they are happening ‘in time’. At the bottom of the videos, text will run – the text will be quotes of St. Augustine from the Confessions concerning his relationship with Floria to give the impression that these words are going through the minds of the two actors – either reading them, or thinking them. (Note: the quotes can be found at the end of the Journal supporting this adaptation).
Floria enters the garden engrossed in reading a letter. Moving towards a bench in the garden.

She looks up and stops momentarily when she sees her Friend sitting on the bench – also involved in reading, but he has a leather-bound book or scroll. She quickly moves across space and off.

PAUSE

Floria enters again but further back behind the bench and moves behind a tree. She looks about the garden to see if anyone has seen her or the Friend.

She stares hard at the back of the Friend and looks uncomfortably around. She leans against the tree and stares into the distance as if deciding what to do. Then looks back at the Friend with a concentrated frown.

The Friend (purposely) stretches and lounges more comfortably on the seat. The woman ducks behind the tree in fright at this movement because she is uncertain how to act. She finally reappears cautiously.

She unfolds the letter (still in her hand), careful to make no sound, and reads intently.

FRIEND: [without moving] I knew you would come here.

[Floria stands straight, as if caught in a guilty act, holding her breath.]

FRIEND: [still very still] I knew this would still be your “quiet” place.

[Pause – they are both absolutely motionless.]
FRIEND: I’ve been reading his words. [Very slight gesture to the book or scroll]

[Longer pause – held breath]

FRIEND: [He sighs] Somehow he makes you seem very small in his wide universe of principles.

[Floria, visibly shaken by these words, struggling to hold in her emotions, leaves at a run.

The Friend sighs again and closes the book or scroll. He looks, sadly, in the opposite direction from the woman’s exit.

PAUSE

FRIEND: [as he rises and follows her] Floria….

Note: Where we see Floria exit/go to on the video needs to be the other side of the on-stage space she will enter - so that we see “he” move from the video space to the stage space “in time”—as if it is happening.
SCENE 1 – Learning the news

[Floria throws herself into the room, screws up the letter, throws it to the floor, and moves to take up a large leather-bound book or scroll or codex and bashes it against the letter, the wall, the floor… She flings it wildly in anger and frustration]

FLORIA: No!!!!

I don’t understand how you can sweep away our secrets.

Was I nothing more than a woman’s body to you?

[Despair and near hysteria. She goes to the letter on the floor and flattens it out…]

I don’t believe in a God who demands human sacrifices.

[Weeping on her knees, and beating on the book and against herself. She’s angry and upset with herself too].

I don’t believe in a God who lays waste a woman’s life to save a man’s soul. I exist… I live… I love…

[Now she sees what she has done to the scroll—the following is as if she regrets her actions]

It is true that I made a promise. But I did not make that promise to God. Wasn’t it you who made me make you that promise? And “perhaps” your mother—Monica—would change her mind; “perhaps” we two would put our arms around each other again.
[Now anger and frustration rise again].

But it was the two of you who sent me away. Twice I was sent back to Africa, like a piece of merchandise.

You thrust me from you because you loved me too much, you said. You thought I bound you to the world of the senses so that you had no peace and quiet in which to concentrate on the salvation of your soul. I have no faith in a God such as this.

[She tears the letter to shreds. She is physically and emotionally spent].
FLORIA: [Recovering and going to a text, a codex or scroll, that would be a copy of the Confessions. She reads… (All her words are directed to a piece of clothing that represents Augustine hanging in a prominent place.)]

Augustine, Bishop of Hippo. Confessions, Book 9. “The fruit of my sin… has power to make something beautiful out of our abomination…”

Throughout the rest of this scene she prepares for a ritual: lighting candles, preparing the altar. She could proceed with the ritual which consists of an offering of dark wheat and red poppies, wine poured into a silver bowl, honey into a gold bowl, and then holding her arms in the same way as the icon on the altar as if she is embodying the image.

We two were once bound so closely together. We lived faithfully together for more than twelve years and had a son together.

In your heart you cleaved to me. We were two souls who were torn from each other, or two bodies if you wish, or in fact two souls in one body.

It is a long time since we two had our arms around each other. But it seems as if you let Truth ride like an untamed foal through your confessions. And let it run—let it run all the way home to me. It will find rest there, for I am the only one who knows it.

[Remembering her peak experience.] On our journey north toward Milan we rested at the River Arno. You stopped me with an affectionate hand on my shoulder and asked if you could smell my hair. “Vita
Brevis. Life is so short,” you said. I said: Hold me close. Life is so short, and we cannot be sure that there is any eternity for our frail souls. Perhaps this is our only life.

Then you seized my wrist and held it tightly—as if you had decided that this moment was one you would never forget. It was then you asked if you could smell my hair. I felt your breath on my neck while you untwisted my long hair and breathed in its scent. It was as if you wanted to draw the whole of me into yourself, as if I had my home within you. It felt as if you wanted to express something of how I would always belong with you because our souls had fused together.

On the other side of the bridge we passed some vendors, and I stopped to look at a beautiful cameo.

[As she speaks this, she ceremoniously unties a cameo from around her neck and takes it to the altar].

Then you bought it for me, and now, now I have it in my hand. I clasp it, tightly. It is all I have.

[Kneeling before the altar]

Oh, Tanit! I haven’t seen a radiant vision with my inner eye, nor have I seen anything supernatural or heard voices either, in that way I am still a simple woman.

Vita Brevis. Life is short and I know so little.
What if there is no heaven above us—imagine that this life is what we were created for, my love! Then, may our souls soar above the Arno for all eternity.
SCENE 3 – Lessons/Medea

FLORIA: [She addresses the clothing that represents Augustine. She goes to it, smoothing it before beginning to rehearse and preparing for her ‘work’/ performance at the table that holds the books. As if she has continued to talk to him in this way since their separation].

Ever since I came back from Milan almost fifteen years ago, I walk in your footsteps. I retrace our old paths in Carthage. Now I give private lessons in poetry and theatre to earn my living. I can inhabit these classic women – I can search for Truth.

Since we were torn apart, I devote my life totally to Truth – as you once set out to devote yourself to Chastity.

My rival is not another woman I can see with the naked eye; she is a philosophical principle, Chastity, or Abstinence. What unfaithfulness! What a sublime betrayal you were guilty of when you sent me away!

I cannot deny that my heart boils with jealousy. Medea was jealous… and betrayed…

[NOTE: She needs to be paralysed by this admission of emotion, as if for so long she has been disallowed to feel deeply – and the way she succeeds in displaying the emotion is to put on the mask, so that she can embody and channel the character of a woman who herself states “she becomes Medea”].

MEDEA: Gods of marriage, and you, protector of the ancestral wedding-couch, Lucina; you who taught Tiphys to bridle the new ship that was to tame the ocean; you, Titan, who ration bright
daylight for the earth; you who provide conspiratorial radiance for hushed rituals, triple-formed Hecate; gods by whom Jason swore to me; and those to whom I, Medea, more rightfully prays; Chaos of endless night; realms opposed to the gods of heaven; unholy spirits of the dead; master of the grim realm, and mistress carried off with greater faithfulness than I—to you all I pray with inauspicious words! Now, now, come to help me, goddesses who avenge wickedness, your hair defiled with dishevelled serpents; grasping black torches in bloodstained hands, come to help me, as grim as you were when you stood outside my wedding chamber. Put the new wife to death, put to death the father-in-law and the royal offspring!
SCENE 4 - Sensuality

FLORIA: [Being Medea has given her some confidence. During this scene she moves to the hanging costume—the clothing is something that belonged to Augustine. She smells and embraces it, gradually putting herself into part of the clothing and wearing it, and putting it on, as if (remembering) making love with him].

There isn’t much humour in your confessions, my Love. It wasn’t like that with the two of us. We could laugh and joke from sunset to sunrise. Today you’d probably say humour is the same as “sensual passion”.

[Sensuous music begins midway through the text, and gradually gains in climax—this is when the Berber’s dance video is projected, along with drumming and singing from the live musician. Floria may take the lovemaking into a form of (belly?) dancing that reflects the Berber’s dance. It needs to be earthy, sensual and beautiful and builds to its climactic point].

I shall not forget your playful hands and your witty repartee. We are created man and woman. Was I nothing more than a woman’s body to you? Oh yes, my own faithless tiger—when you clawed me with your sharp caresses, you were also tearing at my soul.

Sparks were struck between us, which not only set our souls on fire but also ignited our bodies. You gave me body and soul, just as I pledged myself body and soul to you. Where you were, I was, and where I was, there you wanted to be.
Were you and I not two sides of a body that fused together as a bridge joins the two sides of a river into one body?

Can you still remember how you stroked me all over and seemed to tighten every bud before it opened itself? How you enjoyed plucking me! How you allowed yourself to be intoxicated by my perfumes! How you nourished yourself on my juices!

It was my embrace you could not do without.
SCENE 5 – The mother

FLORIA: [She is entwined in the clothing of Augustine on the floor. She begins this speech whilst in that position, very gradually extricating herself and putting the clothing back in its hanging position].

[Still talking to the clothing as him...] How hard it was for Monica, your mother, to have you living in her house with our son, Adeodatus, and me. Already, then, I felt that you and Monica were bound together by ties that are unnatural between mother and son.

So… we fled to Italy…

But she followed us… followed you, over land and sea.

I ask myself over and over whether in reality it was your own mother who stole from you the will to love a woman. Wasn’t it because you loved me that from the start Monica showed her reluctance to live in the same house as me and eat at the same table?

When she arrived she placed herself facing you with her back to me, although she knew we were one. She had two aims, one was to have you baptised, the other to get you married to a girl of standing. I think getting you married was the most important. You yourself were in doubt about everything.

[She goes to the scrolls and codex and finds the place and reads...] Augustine of Hippo. Confessions, Chapter 2. “The chief thing that gave me pleasure was loving and being loved… But from the mud of physical attraction and from the source of youthful urges foggy vapours rose and felt my heart in darkness and fog so that I could not distinguish
between pure love and impure lust. Both feelings raced within me in blended confusion and dragged me, unsteady youth, down into an abyss of passions and pulled me under into a maelstrom of vices.”

What in reality plagued you was that a marriage— for which I was unfit because of my lack of worldly goods—would entail your betrayal of me. For were we not twin souls? Hadn’t we grown so close both in body and soul that to divide us would be better left to a surgeon than to a mother playing the part of suitor? And didn’t we also have our son to think of? He was twelve by then.

You write of your grief when Monica later died at Ostia. You felt a void in your life at that time. It didn’t take you long to put God in your mother’s place. It seems he was the only thing left to you after her departure, a new mother. For to begin with, Monica was with you in place of God, and now you seem to have God in her place. It was she who came between you and me, later it was the God of the Nazarene who held that place.

[She moves to the Medea space—again in mask. During the first speech the image of Male actor is projected, as if he is part of the audience viewing her performance of Medea].

MEDEA: Yet what could Jason do, finding himself under another’s sway and authority? He ought to have exposed his breast to face the sword. Don’t say that, ah, don’t say that, mad anguish! If he can, let him live as he was, as my Jason; if not, still let him live, let him remember me and be gentle with my gift.

The fault is entirely Creon’s; using his kingly power without restraint, he unties marriages, he drags a mother away from her children and
tears apart faithfulness that was bound with tight pledges: let him be
the target, let him alone pay the punishment he owes. I shall bury his
house in deep ash; a black plume driven up by flames will be seen from
Malea whose curving coast causes long delays for ships.

[The Male actor (projected image) applauds. Medea turns to him].

As a suppliant, I make this final plea as I depart: let their mother’s
guilt not drag the innocent children down.

[The Male Actor (projected), placing on a mask and crown—he
plays the part of…]

CREON: Go on your way; like a parent, I shall shield them in a fatherly
embrace.

MEDEA: I pray by the royal marriage-couch, attended by good omens, by
your hopes for the future, and by the condition of the kingdom, which
wavering Fortune buffets with her fickle changes: grant me, as I flee, a
short delay, while I, their mother, kiss my children for the final time –
maybe dying as I do so.
SCENE 6 – The son

FLORIA: Remember in the early years—when our little boy was just two, we moved to Tagaste—your birthplace.

[Floria collects a small washing receptacle and pours water into it with a pitcher—she mimes the memory of washing her child, and then washes herself].

We took him with us when we journeyed—he hopped and danced around his father and mother. We were so happy in those years, as we watched him grow.

[She might sing, as if to a child, splash and play].

But when Monica came… she chose her time to seek me out. I can’t forget the morning she suddenly appeared in the room as I was washing. I was told to pack up—everything was arranged for the whole journey to Africa for you had proposed to a girl and been accepted. But her parents had demanded that I should be removed from your side as fast as possible.

She said you had left it to her to get me out of the way because you couldn’t bring yourself to do it. And I believed her.

You had taken Adeodatus, our beautiful boy, with you to the school of rhetoric that day; I wasn’t even able to embrace him one last time before I had to pack up my possessions and part from man and child.
[As she stands stunned by the memory a projected image of Jason (played by the Male actor) and Medea (played by the Female actor) flows over her]

MEDEA: My mind is strong enough, and is accustomed to despise kingly wealth, as you know; may I simply be permitted to take my children to accompany me in exile, so that I may pour out my tears in their embrace. For you, new sons are in prospect.

JASON: I admit that I want to obey your request; but fatherly love forbids it: for not even he, both king and father-in-law could make me able to endure it.

This is my reason for living; this is my solace for a heart burnt out with anxieties. I could sooner do without breath, limbs, and light.

[The video image freezes and Floria steps forward with the projection still on her].

FLORIA: I did not burn myself to death as Dido did. If I had had my son with me I could not have done what Medea did either. But I went away.

For me the birds ceased to sing. The flowers were not as colourful as before, no one smelled my hair. And no one embraced my body. So I did share some of Dido’s fate after all. But I shall not let go of the cameo I hold in my hand.
SCENE 7 – Death

FLORIA: [Directly addressing the clothing of Augustine. As she speaks each line of dialogue it begins to dawn on her how badly she has been betrayed and it leads to the “indecisive” stanzas of Medea]. Did my poor son allow himself to be embraced by Chastity as well? Or did you no longer consider him your son? Oh, he was a bastard, of course, and we have not yet reached the last act of the tragedy.

[She goes again to the scroll or codex…]. Augustine of Hippo. Confessions, Chapter 9.

“We took with us Adeodatus, my natural son, the fruit of my sin. You had endowed him well. He was about fifteen years old, but his intelligence surpassed that of many worthy and learned men. I praise you for your gifts, Lord my God, you who created all things and have the power to turn our vileness into something beautiful. For I had no other part in that lad than the sin. And the discipline we raised him with from early childhood was due solely to your encouragement. I praise you for your gifts… There is a book I wrote entitled The Teacher. It is a conversation between him and me. You know that all thoughts expressed through the mouth of the person conversing with me are real thoughts Adeodatus had in his sixteenth year. I heard many other things too from him that were more remarkable. I trembled with awe at his intelligence. And who else but you can perform such marvels? You took him early from this life here on earth. So I can think of him all the more confidently without anxiety for childhood or youth or the whole of his life.”

I don’t know whether it was God who took our son away from life here on earth; I have no opinion to give on that. I know only that it was you who took him away from his mother.
No mother deserts her only son without suffering the most agonising grief.

You thrust me from you because you loved me too much, you said.
It’s normal, of course, to stand by a loving partner, but you did the opposite. You thought I bound you to the world of the senses so you had no peace and quiet in which to concentrate on the salvation of your soul.

My own spouse for the sake of heavenly love betrayed me!

Then there was our son. It was I who bore him, and it was I who fed him at my breast.

[Floria finds the mask of Medea and wears it again].

MEDEA: Why, my soul, do you hold back? You are in love still, mad soul, if you are satisfied now that Jason is unmarried. Look for a form of punishment out of the ordinary, get yourself ready now, like this: let all morality depart, let honour be expelled; it’s a trifling retribution that pure hands achieve. Work at your anger, rouse your feeble being, and savagely draw up old impulses from deep in the well of your breast… what mighty deed could unskilled hands, could the madness of a girl dare to achieve? Now I am Medea…

[She places the mask on the floor, and grasps a heavy tool, raises it with confidence as if to smash the mask, holds an instant before bringing it slowly down as she speaks. She is still Medea]
Shudders have rocked my heart, my limbs are going numb with cold, and my breast has been trembling. Anger has deserted her post, the wife in me is driven out, and the mother is completely reinstated. Should I spill the blood of my children, of my offspring? Ah, insane madness, better to let that unheard-of crime and terrible wickedness remain remote even from me. For what crime will the poor boys atone? The crime is having Jason for father, and a greater crime is having Medea for mother [She pauses] if they are not mine, let them die; if they are mine, let them perish. They are without sin and guilt, they are innocent, I admit... Why, soul, do you vacillate? Why do tears water my cheeks and, as I waver, why does anger now drag me off in one direction, love in another? An undecided tide sweeps me along in my uncertainty just as, when violent winds wage cruel war, the quarrelling billows drive the sea-water in two directions at once, and the swell seethes indecisively, just so my heart is surging: anger banishes love, love anger – anguish, surrender to love.

[During the next speech she cradles, then dons the mask. At the end of the speech she raises the dagger].

Here, my dear offspring, sole comfort amid the ruin of my home, come over here and throw your arms around me in an embrace. Let your father keep you, unharmed—provided your mother does too. But exile and flight threaten me: soon they will be torn and snatched away from my embrace, weeping, groaning—let them be lost to their father’s kisses, for they are lost to their mother’s. Anguish increases again and hatred boils up, the ancient Erinys again demand my reluctant hand: anger, where you lead, I follow. If only the brood of Tantalus’s arrogant daughter had issued from my womb, and I had been mother to twice seven children! I’ve been infertile when it comes to punishments…. …use this hand of mine which has drawn its sword
[She cries out as she realises what the raised blade means—the death of children. She physically crumples].

FLORIA: [Taking off the mask – she is quite exhausted and upset. (Floria did not kill her son, but having given him up without any argument feels like she might have ‘killed him’—she was certainly robbed of him]. Adeodatus was my only child, your Grace!
FLORIA: [At the beginning Floria is writing a letter on parchment. Throughout she takes up the arguments putting a logical case—as Augustine would have done when a Teacher of Rhetoric. She is using reason to take herself towards her new life, and becoming quite excited by what she is saying and how well she is doing it].

I must thank you for your books, my Love. They help me to understand better why you first wanted to part from me because you intended to wait until an eleven-year-old girl became old enough to marry you. I am grateful that you write so frankly and sincerely. That your memory can play tricks with you now and then is quite another matter.

Now you despise all sensual joys. And more, more: you go on to despise the senses themselves. Truly, you have become a eunuch!

I do not understand how you can sweep away our love, our secrets, simply by calling them “sensual lust” or “the lust for pleasure”. You despise all the senses and everything they offer of fruit and wine to our souls. You boast to God about how deeply you can now realise that you despise the whole of his work of creation. You do this because of a “radiance” you say you have seen with your inner eye.

I see you have lost your way among the theologians. What a miserable occupation!

This is Floria’s confession! [She goes to the garment belonging to Augustine and puts it on over her own clothing. She begins to pace, and
speak as if making a speech to an audience, or dictating a publication as Augustine would have done with his publications].

We are created human beings. We should not try to live as something other than what we are. Would that not be to mock God? How can you distinguish between body and soul? Isn’t that bungling God’s work of creation?

Perhaps there may be a God who knows us. If so, I am quite sure he has stored up all the goodness we two gave each other. And if he doesn’t exist, my old twin soul, then there can be none in the whole universe who know each other better than you and I.

Imagine a luxuriant landscape with people and animals, flowers and children, wine and honey. In this landscape there is also a frightful labyrinth. Now imagine, pious Bishop, you who were once my little playfully teasing bedfellow, imagine you are lost inside this deep labyrinth. You can’t find Ariadne’s thread to lead you out of the maze of paths and back to the paradise you were living in. But all the theologians and Platonists reign deep within the labyrinth. Each man who goes into it increases the number. For every one of them is misled into believing that everything outside the labyrinth is the devil’s work. Now it is your turn to be misled, and soon you stop wanting to get out of the labyrinth. That is because you too have joined the theologians’ band, now you too have become one of those devourers of men in the depths of the dark labyrinth. Or perhaps I should say a fisher of men? You don’t forget the woman you loved, but you praise God that now you are separated from her. For now she can no longer tempt you.

May God forgive you. Perhaps he is somewhere watching you scorn all his works.
Life is short, *vita brevis*, it is all too short. But perhaps it is here and now that we live, and only here and now.

All right, it may be that an imperishable being who has created the whole world and all other living creatures on earth, women and children included, does exist. What remains a puzzle to me are the conclusions you draw from your belief.

No, perhaps you are only a shadow of yourself. You are almost fifty already. It would probably have been better if you were a poor slave on earth than a high priest in the theologian’s gloomy labyrinth.

You have stopped loving—as you have also stopped enjoying food, stopped smelling the flowers, and you have stopped listening too much to psalm singing.

Go out, my Love! Go out and lie down beneath a fig tree. Open your senses—if only for this very last time. Draw breath, listen to birdsong, look up at the vault of the sky and draw all the odours to yourself. It is this that is the world, and it is here now. Here, now.

The world is so big, and we know far too little about it. And life is far too short. If God exists, may he forgive you.

I have spoken and I have unleashed my soul. And now, your Grace, now is the time for drinking! I can see our old fig tree—it is blooming for the third time this year. But it bears no fruit.

This is Floria’s confession! Farewell!
[During the last stanzas of this speech she begins to ‘ascend’ – possibly in preparation for the final ascension, which could be on video as a reverse of the earlier video].
SCENE 9 – The ascension

FLORIA: [She goes to the altar and lights some incense, but she talks again to the clothing…]

My tragedy is ended, Bishop. There remains only to write the satyr play—later…

[She pours more wine and lifts the goblet as if making a toast]

Let us prepare…

[The projection structures begin to move towards the audience – everything is contracting and confronting the audience as closely as possible. As Floria begins to speak the last Medea speech the music from the Berbers begins, and she ascends either by the movement of the construction of the stage setting or by the devise of video as a reversal of the Garden Bench videos.]

MEDEA: Raise your swollen eyes towards me, ungrateful Jason. Do you recognise your wife? I’m used to escaping in such a fashion. A path to the heavens has opened up; twin serpents offer their scaly necks in submission to the yoke… I shall ride on my winged chariot among the winds.

[Floria/Medea begins to dance again, as she did in Scene 4, and drink her wine to—BLACKOUT]
Chapter 4

Why Do Theatre Artists Choose to Adapt Novels for Live Performance?

Introduction

Gatsby seemed like a cautionary tale and American classic, about the violence of our money culture and dreams that I could share… (E. Thoron, personal communication 2005).

Adapting fiction has given playwrights and other theatre artists ready-made subject matter for their productions. Even though, like original work, the adaptations can result in many varied styles of performance, very similar motivations were given by theatre artists to explain the use of already published materials as the basis for their new work. Theatre artists adapt novels for the stage, or live performance, in many styles. They also have various motivations for undertaking a process to adapt for the stage. These motivations propel them to engage in the retranslation of form that is required when resolving to adapt from literature—motivations they believe make the process more worthwhile than creating a new play from a new idea.

Method of Data Collection

The Study

One major reason for asking theatre artists why they wanted to adapt literature for live performance was that very little had been written about adaptation and many works of fiction were turning up in theatres. There existed a little literature regarding the process of adapting novels for films but this had only a limited value for this study due to the very different characteristics of film and live performance.
During the research period for the present study there were several notable productions of adapted literature performed in Australia by professional theatre companies, for example: *Cloudstreet*, by Tim Winton, adapted by Nick Enright and Justin Monjo; *Night Letters* by Robert Dessaix, adapted by Susan Rogers and Chris Drummond. It was therefore possible to interview directors whose work had been recently completed and presented. Chris Drummond, Artistic Director with Brink Productions, was the director and co-writer of *Night Letters* from the novel written by Robert Dessaix; Greg Lissaman, Artistic Director of Jigsaw Theatre Company, was the director/adapter of *The Lost Thing* by Sean Tan. Another Australian playwright who was interviewed for this study was John Romeril, who adapted *Miss Tanaka* by Xavier Herbert, among other works. Malthouse Theatre also hosted a seminar on Adaptation as one of its *Things on Sunday* series—which provided the study with the opinions of several other Australian theatre artists: Tom Wright, Artistic Associate and Literary Manager of the Sydney Theatre Company; Chris Kohn, co-writer with Lally Katz, of *The Black Swan of Trespass* and director of *Stuck Pigs Squealing*; Caroline Lee, actor and co-adaptor of *Alias Grace*; Laurence Strangio, director and co-adaptor of *Alias Grace*; and, Maryanne Lynch, dramaturge in residence at Malthouse Theatre.

As adapting of novels is a regular occurrence in theatre arts it seemed crucial to this study to find a theatre company whose work emphasised or was solely centred on adapted literature. Since The American Place Theatre in New York City produces the work of Artistic Director, Wynn Handman it seemed pertinent to ask a theatre artist like Wynn Handman why he devoted his artistic expression to the adaptation of American novels. The adapted work the company was working on during the research period was *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. Additional interviews were undertaken in the United States and Australia with professional theatre artists who deliberately chose to adapt novels as their
performance material. They were asked, as well, what elements they considered when they went about the process of adapting their works.

Interviews in the United States were undertaken with John Collins, Artistic Director of Elevator Repair Service Theatre Company; Elise Thoron, Associate Director with American Place Theatre; David Saar, Artistic Director of Childsplay Theatre; Adam Burke, Associate Director of Childsplay; Pamela Sterling; Academic and Playwright at the University of Arizona.

All the data collected was by personal interview apart from two that were conducted with Elise Thoron and Pamela Sterling via email. The session at Malthouse Theatre did not allow questions from members of the audience. Maryanne Lynch, the Malthouse Theatre representative, conducted the discussion.

All the theatre artists interviewed were asked similar questions:

1. How did you find, or come across the novel recently adapted for live performance?
2. How much did the original story affect the writing/adaptation process and the final production?
3. What other novels have you adapted?
4. Why choose to adapt novels rather than write an original play? What features of the novel make it appropriate for adaptation?
5. Do you follow the same process each time? What step comes first? What is your process of adapting novels?
6. Are you working on an adaptation presently? Or do you have ideas for future novels to adapt?
Findings
A major finding from the research was that even though many types of literature were chosen and different styles of theatre were the outcomes, the theatre artists had very similar motivations for preferring existing material over beginning from “scratch”. By asking these questions it became evident that there were similarities in responses between some of the professional theatre artists. Occasionally one artist would stand alone on an issue; however, it was possible to glean several answers to the questions of “why” and “how” adaptation of novels for live performance came about, and some recurring themes began to show themselves in the data. The headings used in this and the following chapter represent those themes that came from the Literature Review along with the data from the research for the study. The ways or elements theatre artists considered when adapting the performances will be presented in the next chapter. All the quotations used in this and the following chapters come from the interview data.

Popular Culture
One very logical reason for choosing to recreate a novel, story or social event into another form was the appeal that the topic or characters would have for an audience. Chris Drummond, director of Brink Productions, said he was looking for a project when he looked on his own bookshelf where his wife had collected novels she’d read and enjoyed. He later discovered that the Robert Desaix had read his own work, Night Letters, in a serialized form on Radio National, and also published very popular essays. The New York Times book reviewer, Patrick Farrell, attested to the popularity of the book as it drove the “Hollywood-bound Horse Whisperer from atop the Australian bestseller list.” (Farrell, N.Pag.).

The theme of Night Letters, “that life may be lived best as a voyage, not to get somewhere or to accumulate experiences but to savour each moment”
was also important to Tom Wright, Artistic Associate and Literary Manager of the Sydney Theatre Company, in his choice to adapt *The Odyssey*.

...so the *Odyssey* has a continuous tradition all the way through our collective memories, as it were, going back all through the entire western tradition, right back to its composition. It’s not just the original text, in so far as it existed in all the subsequent performances, readings and understandings of it, that make it such a rich, complex and historical event (Wright, *Things on Sunday* transcript 2006).

By looking back into the past with this classic work audiences were able to understand modern experience. Wright said he believed that rich, older works were “greater than you”. This is also evident in the recent example of Margaret Atwood choosing an aspect of *The Odyssey* in her novel *The Penelopiad*. This novel too, has been adapted for a history making collaboration between the Royal Shakespeare Company and the National Arts Centre, Canada (Munday, N.Pag.).

Laurence Strangio, Australian theatre director, said that he had wanted to adapt a work by Margaret Atwood because he admired her writing and realised her books were very popular. The novel he ended up adapting was not his first choice, but *Alias Grace* worked very well and he said he loved the language. So here we have an example of the popularity of the novelist as well as the novel itself being a driving force behind the decision to adapt for the stage.

Elise Thoron, Artistic Associate with American Place Theatre, chose to adapt *The House on Mango Street* because it was a popular choice for teachers of literature in schools. This book, by Sandra Cisneros, is her most popular and critically-acclaimed novel. It was told from the point of view of a young girl coming of age in a Mexican American neighbourhood in Chicago. Thoron said she felt that teachers had a responsibility to
encourage students to read and were not always engaging students with texts in a way that influenced their feelings.

Pamela Sterling adapted well-known stories for young people and adults. She said *The Secret Garden* was always one of her favourites and that she even adapted parts of this novel when she was a child. Her decisions to adapt *The Secret Garden, The Ugly Duckling,* and *Little House on the Prairie* were the result of the recognition of a collective and known love of the stories.

David Saar, Artistic Director of Childsplay in Phoenix, Arizona, emphasised that the popular titles of adapted theatre performances were “bread and butter” for their company. They needed a “title” for the public to trust which ensured full houses for the life of the production.

Elevator Repair Service is a contemporary New York theatre ensemble that takes inspiration for their works from a multitude of sources. One of their works is an adaptation of the well-known novel *The Great Gatsby.* The director, John Collins, said that one of the company actors was a great fan of the book, and that “everybody” had heard about it. As a Company, they knew it would have appeal, particularly for a New York audience where the novel is set:

…because it’s famous, because it’s a household word – that’s kind of inviting in a way, challenging in a way. I’m sure it was an unconscious or conscious underlying part of the reason for doing it… (J. Collins, personal communication 2005).

The reasons for choosing *Vita Brevis* for the practical part of this study were many: but one strong reason was the calibre and reputation of the writer. Indeed, the novel would not have been published and distributed in Australia had the writer not been internationally recognised for his earlier major novel *Sophie’s World.*
There have been some critics of this reason for adaptation. For instance, Andrew Bovell, Australian playwright and screenwriter, condemned the practice:

…there is still a feeling that it is safer to choose an adaptation because the emotional end point is established, you can show where the audience will be taken and it is easier to market (Zion, 21).

**Social Comment**

Doniger (114) suggests some stories that are turned into literature and adapted and re-adapted often have some aspects of social or psychological fear attached to them. This was not only a common motivation for choosing a novel for adaptation but also a number of theatre artists talked about the way they wove comments into their work. For example, Greg Lissaman, Artistic Director of Jigsaw Theatre Company, in the adaptation of *The Lost Thing* by Shaun Tan, made several comments about Australian society:

The book is a story of a boy who lives in this industrial world. It is very much like the world of Jeffrey Smart in artistic terms, that it’s an alienating world in which people are small in comparison to the built environment around them… Houses that look all the same in suburbs, and people who just sort of sit there and go “right let’s look straight ahead and see that our interest rates are OK”. It is very much created in response to a Howardian world… (G. Lissaman, personal communication 2005).

Lissaman agreed that the play had some very bleak elements but also had “hope”, and that the message was that playfulness was still possible to be found, and our thinking would become more liberal and progressive if our minds could be lifted from the mundane.

What inspired Chris Drummond’s creation of theatre would often be an element of form, or an idea for content within a performance:
And in this age of reason where we seem to have eradicated any need for Gods or a belief in the invisible, and really feeling that we’re told by the “powers that be” that economic rationalism and capitalism is as natural as trees and rocks, and so there’s no point in trying to think of the more compassionate way of being (C.Drummond, personal communication 2005).

Elise Thoron also made an adaptation of The Great Gatsby, but for a Russian audience:

…I was allowed to choose anything I wanted to stage in 1995 Russia, when the country was transforming at a fast pace from a place where money had no value, to a place where money got you anything, and everything, and was beginning to be on display. Gatsby seemed like a cautionary tale and American classic, about the violence of our money culture and dreams that I could share… (E. Thoron, personal communication 2005).

Thoron emphasised the fact that adapting work for a Russian audience and translating into that language also, to her way of thinking, constituted an adaptation, as she needed to consider phrasing and equivalence of dialogue. Thoron’s other adaptation, previously mentioned, The House on Mango Street, also had a social comment, as it’s a series of vignettes about a young Hispanic girl growing up in Chicago.

When Pamela Sterling, academic and playwright, adapted The Ugly Duckling she was inspired by the themes of bullying and the celebration of differences that she felt were relevant for the young audiences she was writing for (P. Sterling, personal communication 2005). David Saar also admitted that he liked the Childsplay productions to have questions that children could ponder, or discuss with their parents or teachers (D.Saar, personal communication 2006).

During the researcher’s “residence” at the American Place Theatre, Wynn Handman was preparing two new works for the Company. The first was Dorothy and Red, a work that combined adaptations of the writing of
Dorothy Thompson and that of Vincent Sheean. Thompson was an American international journalist in the 1930’s, reporting on the rise of Hitler. Handman found a publication of Dorothy Thompson’s letters and felt he could chronicle her story through her writings. Handman wanted the play to be about women: he wanted men to understand what women go through, and how they have complex emotions.

This resolve of Handman’s had grown from American Place Theatre’s conviction to perform stories that are…

strong on ideas and language and usually cut deep into American life… that illuminate our society, which provoke thought…” (W. Handman, personal communication 2005).

Among the repertoire of the company were Black Boy by Richard Wright, The Bluest Eye by Toni Morrison, China Boy by Gus Lee, Dreaming in Cuban by Christine Garcia, The Kite Runner by Khaled Hosseini, Manchild in the Promised Land by Claude Brown, The Secret Life of Bees by Sue Monk Kidd: all of which voiced various and different types of Americans and the views of America the company wanted to represent on stage.

As American Place Theatre had a commitment to representing different voices on the stage, the novel Vita Brevis not only gave the opportunity to demonstrate a woman’s place in society for fourth century Roman North African women, but Gaarder gave the protagonist the wherewithal to make a modern comment on women’s place within a male-dominated relationship and society: this, therefore, was a driving factor in the choice of novel as the performance would be a continuing comment on present-day society.
Sympathy and Understanding for Other People’s Lives

Martha Nussbaum (1997) discussed the novel *Invisible Man* (1955) by Ralph Ellison and said that narrative art “has the power to make us see the lives of the different with more than a casual tourist’s interest—with involvements and sympathetic understanding, with anger at our society’s refusals of visibility.” This reminds us that telling stories together as a community engenders wonder and a sense of mystery, and that narrative imagination can lead us to moral interaction, which Nussbaum says is “necessary preparation for citizenship and community.” She expressed the belief that it was important to members of a society to see themselves connected to each other by similar weaknesses and needs. Indeed, she argued it was impossible to relate to drama or literature unless you had some “interests” awakened within yourself.

Chris Drummond said that the book *Night Letters* talked about living in the moment, and that was something theatre could communicate very well and say in a way he thought the book did not: “it’s got something to do with what the novel doesn’t say that the theatre might reveal.” Drummond said that he wanted to understand it at a gut level: the internal journey towards one’s own death.

*Night Letters* talks about a very special quality of experience in which a dying man has burrowed down into the essence of his situation and found meaning for himself in an age where meaning has lost its, well, meaning! I believe it also communicates something very profound about humanity’s relationship to nature and something new about Australia’s identity to the rest of the world (C.Drummond, personal communication 2005).

John Romeril’s adapted work *Miss Tanaka* (2001) started its life in a personal connection with Japan, and the interest grew. *Miss Tanaka* is one of several short stories by Xavier Herbert that are based on Herbert’s own
working life in Darwin, and as Romeril read through them Miss Tanaka seemed particularly appealing:

It took my fancy because it’s a bit of a cross-dressing story. It’s already got a built-in theatrical premise. People putting on costume, and playing at being someone other than who they are… in the kabuki form of female impersonation role… that featured the Japanese diving community (J. Romeril, personal communication 2005).

In the interview, Romeril recalled another story, Sounding Brass, which he blended with Miss Tanaka, helping with the environmental details: “the pearling sheds, and the yards, and the jetties, and the smell, and the nature of the work.” Romeril explained that he also placed another overlay to the story with a Jewish character, as he wanted to place the play in the period of the “shadow” of World War II in Broome.

I made my Anglified visitor, put him under a bit of pressure, in falling in love with this creature, he squanders part of the family fortune. And the poignancy of making that money that the family actually needed because of Nazis seemed quite interesting (J. Romeril, personal communication 2005).

Romeril had created an earlier adaptation of the novel Jonah by Louis Stone. He said he felt a commitment to expecting State Theatre Companies to produce work about their own State, and when approached by the Sydney Theatre Company he said he felt it would be appropriate to adapt this work. Romeril didn’t want to create a contemporary version, but decided it was suitable for making into a musical.

Because there is in it a whole lot of musical premises: a mistress/piano teacher; Jonah, himself, plays mouth organ.

Romeril said he liked the book a lot and that was his main motivation in adapting it:

I love Jonah because it takes the rise of a hooligan, a kind of PUSH figure, who works part-time as a boot maker. Then after he gets this woman pregnant, he’s a hunchback, by the way, he encounters the kid who he’s been trying to avoid, something inside him changes. And he
goes straight. And opens up as a boot maker [and] runs a little shop. And then along the way he works out how to expand and ends up running a huge shoe emporium. And the sort of thuggishness that became second nature to him as a street kid stood him in good stead in the world of commerce.

Romeril said the adaptation of *Jonah* gave him an opportunity to research the manufacturing industry and the period: the book was originally published in 1911.

Chris Kohn talked about his motivation in co-creating *The Black Swan of Trespass*: this was a play that explored the “Ern Malley affair”. Kohn said the topic for the production was part analysis, part historical, part cultural, and that made it exciting to work on. Kohn was also interested in making a piece about spaces and the two ideas meshed well. He used the real poetry that was written by the fictitious character, which he felt gave an identifying voice behind the poems. By using the story and the poems Kohn said he felt he was keeping something alive in a different context. Kohn also agreed that adaptation was about the relationship or meeting point between the collaborating artists and the material.

Wynn Handman talked about his adaptive piece *Dorothy and Red* and that he wanted to emphasise the interior life of women as one of the themes. Handman, himself, grew up in the 1930’s and remembered Dorothy Thompson. He lamented that she was no longer remembered and believed an audience would be interested in the history and life of a woman who interviewed Hitler and “cottoned on” to what he was doing. The performance also planned to show the lives of journalists in that era that moved around Europe and other exotic places. 1927 was a year that was very exciting: Handman explained that the 20’s were really peak years, not only in America, but also around the world; the landing of the Lindbergh was a great event of the decade and the jazz age was coming into its own.
Another motivation or theme Handman had for *Dorothy and Red* was the complexities of human beings. The male character, *Red*, who was not yet physically included (at the time of the research) in the adaptation, was a popular novelist, but was personally uncertain of himself. The text describes a complex character and this is what Handman was aiming for.

The complexity of human nature was a motivating factor for the performance script for *Vita Brevis*, which aims to explore the helplessness of women, not only in fourth century Roman Africa, but also in any male-dominated situation. Floria, the protagonist, begins the play by lamenting the loss of her partner, Augustine, to the Christian Church. However, through comprehending, then challenging, her partner’s writings, and interrogating his views on their relationship, she comes to a better understanding of her personal place in the world.

**Shedding Light on an Aspect of the Novel**

The theatre artists who talked about some part of their adaptation being illumined by it being moved from one form to another also dwelt on the ability of theatre to add different elements of the performing arts, elements that are not automatically in a reader’s mind for the novel. Chris Drummond talked about some of those elements during the process undertaken for *Night Letters*:

> We had done five weeks creative development on the project… in which there were actors and acrobats and dancers and musicians, and Susan with this huge sprawling poetic text…we’d created a lot of images… (C.Drummond, personal communication 2005).

John Romeril wanted to work with his Japanese colleague, a puppeteer, when he looked for the material that turned into *Miss Tanaka*. Themes that were emerging in the text appealed to both of them for exploration on the
stage: men and women against the weather; the weather against humanity; the incidence of cyclones and monsoonal rain; the pearling industry being a “life and death” industry:

The physical damage that people often sustained was pretty horrendous. So people who limp, people who are missing the odd limb, people whose breathing was shockingly affected… I happen to think that’s the stuff the theatre can do well (J. Romeril, personal communication 2005).

All this led Romeril to join forces with Handspan, a visual theatre company, and they worked on images and animated puppets for some of the characters.

Greg Lissaman said that his reasons for adapting material from novels was a hard thing to condense into a few words, but he described a passion for finding new ways stories could be told:

That you want to create something that says something that is the form. The form that you’re passionate about, that is “live”, that appeals to the senses in ways of learning, understanding, perceiving, that you work with. I’m a visual kinaesthetic learner, so I love things that move. So theatre to me is magical. It transforms, it takes me into a place, and transforms my world. And therefore if I have a story I believe could be told in that way, then that’s great. And if I can expand it out more and bring more to that story, because I have ways of showing, as well as ways of saying, they can expand the experience (G.Lissaman, personal communication 2005).

Lissaman also said stories that were re-interpreted necessarily had to include the director’s own perceptions and feelings about the story. He felt the question about “why” adapt was akin to asking why theatre should be created at all. It was about the desire to create, and that was, he thought, about the form of theatre, that is “live”. He thought the director or playwright chose the story because they wanted to tell that particular story: and that implied inherent interpretation and perceptions.

You have to essentially put your position into that process in order to take that away. I think that’s it, it’s building you into the story, it’s making
you a part of it… That is incredibly selfish, maybe it’s all about “I loved it and therefore I want more of it”. Maybe we are all inherently selfish and we all wanted to express how we felt so wonderful about something.

Pamela Sterling said she challenged herself and found ways to make stories and scripts really theatrical as a contrast to what she termed the “Disneyfication” of many well-known stories. She wrote scripts with strong directorial concepts in mind:

For instance, *The Secret Garden* uses the nineteenth century convention of a live chamber orchestra to provide underscoring and a flute “voice” for the robin character. *The Ugly Duckling* is set in Japan and calls for Kabuki techniques and origami influenced puppets. *Little House on the Prairie* also calls for a live band and lots of songs mentioned by Laura Ingalls in the book. In *Nate the Great* the neighbourhood kids play kind of a chorus who also transform themselves into trees and playgrounds, and also makes use of puppets (P. Sterling, personal communication 2005).

In a similar way to Sterling’s desire to include theatrical devices in her adaptations *Vita Brevis* contains experimental theatre techniques written into the script, blending video excerpts shown before the performance, and different ways to use projected images within the play to explore “theatricality” not always in evidence in the novel. Reading the novel is relatively passive and allows the reader to disengage with the text. The live performance of the play adaptation would seek to engage with the audience and draw them into the raw emotions Floria experiences as she moves through her journey to the dawning of realisation regarding her true situation.

**Desiring to Bring Stories to a New, Wider Audience**

Chris Drummond said that one of the reasons he wanted to do *Night Letters* was that for him the book wasn’t complete and that he wasn’t able to access, through feeling, what some of the characters went through: he
understood it intellectually, and acknowledged Dessaix’s ability as a writer to bring interest to profound subjects without cliché:

…we wanted to take the book’s starting point to go in a new direction because there were questions, at least there were for me, that weren’t answered by the book and I was inspired by that… There has to be a much deeper reason for taking a novel onto the stage and it’s got something to do with what the novel doesn’t say that the theatre might reveal (C. Drummond, personal communication 2005).

Greg Lissaman felt the book *The Lost Thing* couldn’t be pinned on one particular age group and had something for everyone. He thought it was like *Animal Farm* in the sense that it was a children’s fable: on the surface it was a children’s book but it had meaning beyond the experiences of children:

So we put things all through that show that would require them to ask the parents or adults “what was that? Why was that there?” Those things that we didn’t want to explain fully… we just wanted to spark their curiosity so they had to ask someone. So theatre becomes the spark of discussion as opposed to the end point (G. Lissaman, personal communication 2005).

Lissaman said he found those features in Sean Tan’s book—that it asked many questions about the society in which the boy lived. Lissaman said that a young person in that society risked inheriting the apathy prevalent in that “world”: that was the story of the boy in his journey of finding a place for the lost thing.

The story of St. Augustine’s concubine is not well known. She is not noted in any historical documents yet discovered. The only information the world has is what Augustine wrote in his *Confessions*. The story of Augustine’s early life runs contrary to many of his later writings that heavily influenced the Catholic Church’s mainstream philosophy, therefore the history Gaarder proposes for Floria is relevant and important to take to a contemporary audience.
Lack of “Gutsy” Material in Original Playwrighting

“Gutsy” writing could be considered writing that “says it like it is”. In a recent New York Times book review, S. Kirk Walsh (N.Pag.) described an author as “a bold writer who goes straight for the aorta. He is in the business of making his readers laugh and cry.” It was this feeling or attitude in writing that the theatre artists lamented was missing from much contemporary playwrighting.

Chris Drummond commented that as a director of theatre he was “hungry” for writers to have dynamic vision, but, he lamented, there are very few plays that demonstrate this. For him, this meant he wanted to work more with writers, whether of fiction or other forms, in order to create his works.

Tom Wright said that he had grown tired of seeing the “crisis of funding” on the Australian stage where the size of casts were reduced, which resulted in “endless unconvincing plays… doing what other art forms could do better” (Wright, Things on Sunday transcript). This led to his decision to adapt The Odyssey. Wright said he felt that in order to adapt or translate classics for the stage a new, more robust way of writing was necessary.

Wright went on to say that he objected strongly to criticism of performance of adaptations where the critics judged the performance against the literary works.

Commissions for Specific Companies

John Romeril created adaptations of novels as commissioned works for specific companies. His adaptation of Jonah by Louis Stone was created for the Sydney Theatre Company and particularly for a Sydney audience.
Romeril also talked about an adaptation of a John Marsden short story that looked, minute by minute, at a labour dispute, for the Melbourne Workers Theatre, who, he said, took their work very representing the Unions very seriously.

In 2005 Malthouse Theatre in Melbourne, produced a season of adaptations that included *Alias Grace* and *The Black Swan of Trespass*. Two Australian Broadcasting Corporation programs, one radio and another television, also discussed the rise in the number of adapted works for live performance. The radio program was an episode of *The Deep End* (Smith, N. Pag.) where the presenter claimed that adapting novels for the stage was “a popular pastime.”

**Attraction to Language or Images**

Laurence Strangio said that he was immediately attracted to *Alias Grace*, and on the very first page he felt the language was “great”. The book used a first person narrative and Strangio felt it was strongly dramatic, and this gave him an avenue to explore.

John Collins felt that it wasn’t only because *The Great Gatsby* was a popular novel that it was chosen for adaptation for the stage, but that it was a “great story, great writing.”

…the language has a beautiful economy to it. It seems to me like one of the great accomplishments of the novel is the economy of the language. That’s what struck me when I first read it, how individual sentences, they can be very beautifully and simply constructed and the way the story is told, in this beautiful way. Some of the ways more dramatic things that happen, happen entirely in-between the sentences. (J. Collins, personal communication 2005).

Collins explained that this was a special novel for other reasons as well: it was in first person narrative, which gave them the opportunity to have an actor be someone who is both the reader of the book as well as a character.
in it; also, it is a short novel, but not too short, and because they were reading it in its entirety the audience would make the commitment and feel that they also had accomplished something at the end of the performance.

**Public Domain Material**

Just as Chris Drummond noted earlier, that it was possible to look for theatrical source material in places other than new plays, so John Romeril agreed that the public domain held exciting “seeds” for plays. When Romeril was asked if he could pinpoint what it was in material that attracted him to adapt it, he said that inherent theatricality was critical, and this was what led him to use a variety of “found” material.

> I think mapping one’s life and times is part of the contract. And it’s often the case that literary source materials, and especially oral histories are, in some ways, even more important as documents that you adapt. The stories that are out there, they are often infinitely more fascinating than anything I could hope to make up (J. Romeril, Personal communication 2005).

**An Example**

Perhaps the best way to illustrate all the motivations given by the theatre artists is through the example of *The Kite Runner*, by Khaled Hosseini. Wynn Handman, Artistic Director of American Place Theatre, was working on this adaptation when the interview for this research took place.

- **Popular culture, or themes that are in fashion:** Wynn Handman’s theatre company in New York was so well known for adaptations that publishers send them novels to review in the hope they would be taken up for a production and be the type of novel that fulfilled the company’s mission. *The Kite Runner* was a highly popular choice for the company to adapt—the novel was on the New York Times bestseller list for over two years.

- **Social comment:** The novel is about contemporary Afghanistan and portrays the relationship of two boys—one a privileged
Pashtun, the other a Hazara servant—with the backdrop of 1970s Afghanistan in turmoil. USA Today reviewer, Craig Wilson, called it a “haunting morality tale set in Afghanistan and California, covering nearly 40 years” (Wilson, N.Pag.).

• **Sympathy or understanding about how people live:** Khaled Hosseini, the author of *The Kite Runner*, thanked The American Place Theatre for their adaptation: “stage has always been a powerful medium for story telling… the story of Amir and Hassan, two boys who lived in my mind and are dear to my heart (N.Pag.).” This gives the audience a clear comment on how life would have been for young boys living through Afghanistan’s turmoil.

• **Shedding light on an aspect of the novel:** The American Place Theatre production of *The Kite Runner* takes place on a stage that is bare except for a stool draped with a piece of Afghani cloth. Authentic Afghan rubab music is played before and after the show. These added elements couldn’t be experienced in the same way through the novel.

• **Bringing stories to a new, wider audience:** American Place Theatre package their productions into educational products available for schools and other educational institutions in order to give students a new form of access to literature by “bringing to life the world of the book with performances that create an atmosphere of discovery and spark the imagination.”

• **Lack of “gutsy” material in playwrighting:** The Washington Post Book World says parts of *The Kite Runner* are raw and excruciating to read, yet the book in its entirety is lovingly written. American Place Theatre did not shy away from the “gutsy” parts when Wynn Handman adapted it for performance, including a
pivotal point in the novel where the protagonist of the novel, Amir, watches his best friend get raped by the antagonist, Assef.

- **Commissions for specific companies**: Even though *The Kite Runner* was not specifically commissioned, American Place Theatre did create a gala event with the performance as the central focus. The company awarded the writer with a Literature to Life award and called the event “Finding Afghanistan in our American Place Theatre”. The evening included Afghan music and was sponsored by the New York Society for Ethical Culture.

- **Attraction to language and images**: When Wynn Handman talked about what text he would include in his adapted script for *The Kite Runner* he didn’t cut out descriptive passages:

> The work is written by a fine writer, and you can just sail with it because the language is so rich and filled with images. Its really good, and it puts you right there (W. Handman, personal communication 2005).

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Some of the theatre artists also experienced some very difficult situations once they had made the decision to adapt a novel. The next headings reflect the obstacles that delayed or stopped productions or deterred artists from considering literature as an appropriate starting point for theatre.

**Rights, or Permission to Perform**

John Romeril talked about wanting to adapt the stories of May Gibbs, but complained that it was difficult to get the rights several years ago, and that it “is still pretty closely guarded cultural property”. He decided he would need to approach the project in a different way and take an incident from Gibbs’ biography, rather than adapt her stories. The incident he referred to was one where Gibbs was knocked down by one of her dogs, fracturing her
hip. Evidently she was unconscious for up to seven hours, and Romeril said he believes with this as the start point he could then exploit his love for all her characters in a performance.

Whilst in residence at the State Library of Victoria Romeril had found Gibbs’ first storybook, which had never been published. He didn’t think the story was very good but the illustrations had the theatrical element he looked for in material for his projects, and he was considering using them in the proposed production.

David Saar and Adam Burke emphasised the importance of ensuring that the rights for books of any contemporary adaptations they were intending to perform were readily available. Rights were possible sources of problems, with authors wanting their material to be presented in specific ways, and sometimes surprisingly expensive ones. Saar laughingly added, “Give me those dead authors!”

John Collins said that getting the rights to performance material was something they had never had to deal with before the company’s decision to present their adaptation of The Great Gatsby. They had used copyright material before but Collins said that he thought the combination of the company’s earlier obscurity when they were small enough that nobody noticed or minded, as well as what they did with the material, and “pass it through a very heavy filter or process” so that it was a starting point rather than an adaptation, meant no-one really followed up on copyright.

But with The Great Gatsby the company knew that the book was going to be featured very prominently and they decided not to change the text at all. Collins said that their production was very much a work for “this” book and about “this” book. So they made an application to the Fitzgerald estate to get the rights. Collins said this was the second time they’d applied to
use Fitzgerald’s material. They’d had a different earlier idea with another novel and the Estate declined their request stating that “there was possibly a movie coming out, and the movie company had bought the rights” and so they couldn’t allow Collins and his company to use the novel.

Collins and his actors worked on the ideas they had for *The Great Gatsby* before again approaching the Fitzgerald estate for rights. Collins said they were working on a “short works” kind of production, and then, after testing their ideas decided to go ahead:

> We did a workshop production of, I say workshop because it was one weekend. It was in a converted garage that some friends of ours run a theatre in, in Brooklyn, very much off the radar. And we decided we’d try and do the first half of the book. And we did it, we sort of set out from the beginning, we were going to make this into a real production and put it out as kind of a half hour workshop for—and we didn’t know whether or not we’d get through the whole thing. We sort of set a goal: get half way through chapter five, and if we don’t have time we’ll skip around. But we did have time; we did every single word in the first half of the book. And it worked really well, and people seemed to love it, and there was a great reaction to it. And so we said “okay, we’ve got to do this, this is our next thing” (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins said they contacted the Estate again at this point. They thought this could be a popular production and had the potential as a touring product, in which case the rights would be essential. The first contact they had with the Estate was with a Literary Agent that some members of the Company had met before, and so the relationship was positive and friendly. The Agent told them he felt there would be no problems and that he would help them write their proposal to the Estate. They were told, though, that there was another “party” who had a contract with the Estate and had an option on the rights, but it wasn’t an exclusive contract. The other party was a Californian who had written plays and had written an adaptation.
The Literary Agent that Collins had been negotiating with suddenly left his position and gave them another contact to work with. Collins said at this point the Company discussed whether to continue trying to get the rights or to quietly go about “doing their own thing.” When they decided to continue the proceedings they found themselves shuffled along through a number of people who said it wasn’t “their department”. Meanwhile, Collins said, they were busy making the production. They had designed the set and set up the theatre by reserving and paying for it.

When they finally heard again from the Estate it was a negative response telling them the playwright in California had renewed his option and didn’t want them to go ahead with their production. They decided to write to the Californian assuring him that their production would be completely different and would not create conflict. However the Californian producers refused them.

Collins said they were still trying to negotiate and discuss possibilities with the Literary Agent, the Estate, and the Californians right up until two nights before their opening night. They decided at that point that their only option was to officially cancel the opening, and they decided to perform only to an invited audience. They sent out an email to the members of their mailing list inviting them and said:

“we’d like you to come and see this, it’s a private showing [and] we’ve cancelled the press.” We were going to have great Press, we were going to have a feature illustration in the New Yorker, and we cancelled everything. But we still got people to come and see it. It basically worked out for us in a way, because people saw it. We got presenters to see it (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins and his company have been invited to present their production in a number of places, including New York Theatre Workshop, the Walker Art Centre in Minneapolis, and the Holland Festival in Chicago. When they
decide which of these is the most suitable they will go back to the Fitzgerald Estate with the request. Collins believes it will then carry more weight and credibility than “just our little downtown theatre company”, and the Estate will be assured of their royalties.

Collins was quite caustic regarding the attitude of the Fitzgerald Estate being centred on money rather than artistic integrity of the proposed company adapting the novel.

I think its just all business; it’s just about money—period. I think it’s deeply misguided, the work is supposed to have a relationship to the public, not just the family. That’s one of the things that I have distilled from all of this, it doesn’t make sense to me, because I think art is something an artist makes for the public. That’s what defines it I think, that’s fundamentally what it is, and you see intellectual property being confused these days often with real property, just like a family heirloom. The Fitzgerald Estate thinks that this book is something that’s there just to make money for them (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005)

**Adaptation is Looked Upon as the Least Imaginative Approach**

Greg Lissaman said that Jigsaw Theatre Company did not usually adapt books; it was only an occasional occurrence. The book or story really had to “spark” something for him to be interested in doing it. He said the reason for not adapting is that he believed it was the least imaginative approach to creating theatre:

Because someone else has already essentially presented you with a lot of the characters. The imagination in the process of adaptation comes from “what will I do with it, how can I adapt it, how will I retain the story, how do I retain what it is about that is special at the heart?” (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).
Conclusion

Adapting novels for live performance is a regular practice by theatre artists, and they recounted similar motivations for using literature as the basis for their theatre-making. It was very interesting to find these common responses to the question of “why” adapt. All the theatre artists had different processes in the way they worked with the material, and the productions resulted in varied styles and types of theatre, however, this chapter has presented the commonality of purpose in turning to literature as a fertile source for performance creation.

We strive to respond to the needs of our time with work that is relevant and cuts deeply into the fabric of American society (W. Handman, personal communication 2005).

The ways in which the theatre artists worked in order to create adaptations were various, but the main considerations that came from the research were the following: That playing around with ideas and images from the novel during the rehearsal process was highly advantageous, and in some cases crucial to the process. Due to the expansiveness of the novel there was a need to cut characters and sub-plots for the live production; in some way, theatre artists felt the need to stay true to the novel. On the other hand, it was also necessary to feel that an entirely new work had been created, independent of the novel. There was a need to consider how to deal with features of novels that are difficult to translate to the stage, like time periods or flashbacks. It was necessary to find a basic premise, idea or theme in the new work in order to create a personal interpretation rather than the novelist’s stated theme. It was deemed that playwrights, as theatre artists, were more able to adapt material for the stage than novelists. In works that were going to use “verbatim” text there was a need to use the first person and present tense in the live work. Material from the written work needed to be chosen carefully and that not all the material in the book needed to be in the new work—“less is more”. Characters on the stage
needed to develop differently to the way they do in novels. There was a necessity to use exciting and dynamic language on the stage and compose an appropriate performance structure for the new work.

The Theatre Artists who explained why they chose to adapt novels for live performance attempted to articulate their processes of working. The research data covering these ideas is organised under identified headings and discussed in the following chapter.
Chapter 5

How Do Theatre Artists Adapt Novels for Live Performance?

The theatre artists who were interviewed for the study were able to articulate many good motivations for choosing to adapt novels for live performance, and explained what inspired their choices. However, they had much more difficulty in articulating how they undertook the process that brought the written page of literature to the stage. In some of these cases the theatre artists, for example David Saar and Adam Burke, were not directly involved in writing material for the stage or adapting the words in a book into a playscript, but rather commissioned or engaged adaptations for their theatre company and then directed it, much as they would any other play production for the theatre.

For some of the others it appeared the difficulty in talking about a process of adaptation was the same as, or equalled, the difficulty many theatre artists have when articulating their process for creating theatre performance. Even so, several of those interviewed for the study gave some very valuable information.

The material from the study presented in this chapter has been organised according to the themes identified from the initial Review of Literature and the outcomes of the research study. These were elements for consideration that the theatre artists identified when explaining or describing a process for adapting a novel or literary work: playing around with ideas and images from the novel during the rehearsal process; the need to cut characters and sub-plots in a novel; the need to stay true to the novel; the need to create an entirely new work, independent of the novel; the need to deal with features of novels that are difficult to translate to the stage; the need to find a basic premise, idea or theme in order to create a personal interpretation rather
than the novelist’s stated theme; that playwrights and directors, as theatre artists, are more able to adapt material for the stage than novelists; the need to use the first person and present tense in the new work; the need to not put all the material in—“less is more”; the need to develop characters in a different way to novels; the need to use exciting language and compose an appropriate performance structure.

Each of these points of consideration is presented with explanations from the theatre artists. The responses of the theatre artists have been given as closely to their intentions as possible in order to honour and value the ideas as individual and unique. Therefore, wherever possible the artists’ own voices have been included to illustrate the points.

Playing with Images and Ideas Within the Rehearsal Room

John Romeril said whilst in Japan he heard about the short stories of Xavier Herbert, and resolved to explore them when he returned to Australia. He also had another Japanese connection in his colleague and fellow collaborator for Miss Tanaka, Noriko Nishimoto. Romeril said, therefore, that the first stage in his process was that he undertook some research in order to begin to flesh out his ideas to decide where he wanted to set the play. His previous work often involved mixed social research, and for the work in question he read about West Australian history and the pearling industry, as well as the Asian communities that were involved and connected with Australia. Romeril’s colleague, Nishimoto, lived in Perth and this led him to decide to set the play in Western Australia, in Broome, “in the shadow of the Second World War”.

Prior to this collaboration Nishimoto had only worked with written scripts, rather than creating new work, and was keen to develop skills in devised work collaborating with the playwright from the outset.
Once the idea had been created the pair spent a fortnight “kicking it around”. This emphasises the collaborative nature and need for feedback that Romeril required in order to clarify and focus his thoughts and ideas for an adaptation. For this project they were thinking in terms of animal characters. Romeril said he was thinking of a parallel with Italian *commedia*. Nishimoto was interested in doing a wordless piece so they only worked on images in that early stage.

Romeril then contacted the Handspan Theatre Company to let them know he and Nishimoto were working on the idea. Later, a new Artistic Director at Handspan initiated a development project that resulted in a co-production with Playbox Theatre. This led to more collaboration in a workshop period.

Nishimoto became the puppetry director, although Romeril admitted that his own relationship with the producers was less than satisfactory. Despite this, he agreed *Miss Tanaka* was ultimately a critical and box office success, which resulted predominantly from the initial collaboration rather than individual relationships developed later in the process.

**Cutting Characters and Sub-Plots**

Elise Thoron said in order to undertake an adaptation it was important to choose a novel you love, that was well suited to adaptation for live performance. That said though, the two examples she gave of *House on Mango Street* and *The Great Gatsby* did not do this:

Neither work lends itself to the stage and would not pass my own criteria for good “dramatic material” on several counts. Both novels have resulted in “terrific” adaptations that have run for many years and audiences responded to very powerfully. This leads me to believe the best criteria for adapting something is a strong external reason to do so or a need to
communicate the material to an audience (E.Thoron, Personal communication, 2005).

Even though this quotation reinforces the “why” of taking up a novel for adapting for live performance, Thoron saw this as her starting point for entering into thinking about the possibility of adaptation, and thus, her starting point in any idea of process. The criteria Thoron referred to above were:

- The novel needed a strong journey for a central character, “whose voice has urgency in telling their story”;
- The novel also needed only characters with distinct voices that provided clear scenes of conflict;
- And finally, Thoron said the novel needed lively, active language that made for a good spoken word performance. She suggested reading different passages aloud to ascertain the strength of the voice—“is it fun to speak, good to listen to?” (E.Thoron, Personal communication 2005).

The next stage in Thoron’s process for adaptation was to consider the dramatic structure: she would write a sentence that stated the core story, and then decide which were the essential scenes to telling that story. She said it was important to work out what the primary actions, conflicts, and obstacles were for the main characters. Two other essential considerations were: whose voice was telling the story, and, whether there were multiple voices and points of view. These led to a structure that could be chosen for telling the story. The final element that she said she felt was necessary for a good structure was to decide where the adaptation began and ended, remembering that it did not need to be the same as in the novel (E.Thoron, Personal communication 2005).

Once her thoughts were formed in creating the structure of the adaptation, Thoron said she would then consider the characters needed. She said it
was necessary to make up a full character list of the central characters and the subsidiary characters that populate the world of the novel. When this was done it was possible to discern which ones would have distinctive voices on stage. Thoron’s usual adaptations, like those of Wynn Handman, would usually have a single actor playing many roles, so the character list would then be edited to ascertain which of them would be chosen to focus on and develop. It would be those characters who provided a good foil for the protagonist, or who conveyed the larger world of the story, or who might be funny, or physically active, that would be included in the adaptation (E. Thoron, Personal communication 2005).

The next step for Thoron was the language. She felt it was necessary to highlight those passages that have the most active spoken language. Also to be highlighted were those passages or scenes that distilled the essence of the novel’s themes and those that could be thought to demonstrate the passion of the author’s voice. She would note the moments, images and sentences that she thought “this novel would not be the novel without…” (E. Thoron, Personal communication 2005).

With regard to the staging, Thoron would ask herself where were there opportunities for physical action and movement, as this was important for varying pace and maintaining the audience’s attention. She would consider the key locations and the places of action in the novel that would need to be encompassed on stage. Here, she emphasised the audience’s imaginative ability to travel anywhere, but that it must be clear in the adaptation as to how those locations would be defined (E. Thoron, Personal communication 2005).

Another consideration for staging a work was identifying the core objects or visual symbols that would be essential for telling the story. Thoron said she preferred to use a fairly bare stage so the choice of objects and the few
costume elements were key. She said she also liked to consider the overall atmosphere, asking the following questions: “what does the world you will create on stage feel like? Sound like? What is the music?” (E. Thoron, Personal communication 2005).

Her final question that needed strong consideration was, “Why do it now?” Thoron said she felt it was vision and passion that fuelled the adaptation process. Thoron said her examples of The House on Mango Street and The Great Gatsby evolved slowly, shedding layers, and losing favourite passages.

Before working with actors there was a moment of a fundamental structural insight about the source text that provided a key to staging the material. With Mango this was understanding the circular nature of the novel that it starts with the same text as it ends with and using the “adult writer” as an entry and exit point for the actor playing the central character, Esperanza, who ranges from age nine to sixteen or so: allowing the actor and audience to connect with the mature voice of the writer [that] Esperanza is to become, and is present in the poetry of the prose, [which] was key so that the work of the adult actor did not become trite or cutesy. So we focused on the core story of the development of a writer and it connected all the vignettes quite naturally (E. Thoron, Personal communication 2005).

Thoron had to focus on the drama and themes and then hone them by working with actors in fairly long rehearsal processes, echoing the desires John Romeril expressed for the value of collaboration.

Thoron said she had a similar insight with The Great Gatsby:

[I was] creating a story in which Nick’s actual writing (a.k.a. Fitzgerald’s prose) was at the centre of the drama and could be spoken. For that I turned to two other Fitzgerald sources, The Last Tycoon, from which I pulled the character of Munroe Starr, a commercial producer, and his own essays The Crack-up about his alcoholism and depression… I created a frame for the telling of the Gatsby story by having Nick be an older washed up screenwriter, who was writing a screenplay based on his
Gatsby experiences. It begins with him and producer, Munroe Starr, watching the dailies (black and white film version of the Forties). Starr is dissatisfied that it’s too dark and won’t sell, so he asks Nick to edit and rewrite. As Nick starts this odious task, the characters emerge and tell their “own story” with Nick at a typewriter setting up scenes with luscious prose. The ending with Fitzgerald’s extraordinary last passage, is Nick’s decision to keep to his own truth in telling Gatsby’s story and not sell out (E. Thoron, Personal communication 2005).

This latter quotation shows Thoron’s way of transferring the adaptation into the directing process, where she makes decisions about characters and story line by researching the novelist’s other work. It can also be seen that the director role, which in many circumstances further adapts a text in ways to represent the performance through theatrical means, is evident in her choice of a synthesising character (Nick) created as a theatrical vehicle to realise the text of the adaptation.

**Staying True to the Novel**

Pamela Sterling said that she read the original source material very carefully and started with some “nuts and bolts” logistical questions. She often worked as a director as well as playwright and so staging problems were very important. The first question was regarding what she thought was the central dramatic question of the story, and if there were several, which of these questions she would concentrate on. She said she also considered the characters in the story and, like Thoron, worked out how many, or few, she absolutely needed to tell the story. She asked herself similar questions about the number of locales in the book (P. Sterling, Personal communication 2005).

Sterling said it was important to find the most theatrical ways to tell a story as opposed to relying on “cinematic techniques”:

> I am preparing to direct a play right now which is a lovely script in many ways, but as a director I am having to wrestle with lots of short “cut
away” scenes, and staging demands that are better suited to film (P.Sterling, Personal communication 2005).

She said she often included some of the narratives of the stories she adapted and also made use of direct address, choral speaking, music, “and a “Brechtian” approach which acknowledged the original source material and the fact that the performers are actors, in a theatre”. Sterling highlights a relevant tension that many of the theatre artists grappled with when “translating” the literal text of the novel into theatrical language, and how far they thought they could push this without disrespecting and moving away from the novel’s main themes and story (P.Sterling, Personal communication 2005).

John Collins’ production of *The Great Gatsby* was the entire text of the book, verbatim, without editing or rewriting. When the company first started experimenting with the text they thought they wouldn’t need to say “he said”, as the novel did, after someone spoke,

But then after a while it became very difficult to make those decisions and we started to notice that the quality of the text was changing as we chopped it up. And it just hit me early on that you just shouldn’t do that (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins talked about another piece the company members had “on their minds” as they were working on *The Great Gatsby*—a biographical piece about Andy Kaufmann, a comedian, who used to go on stage at a Comedy Club and instead of performing a stand-up routine he would take out *The Great Gatsby* and start reading:

It was a classic Andy Kaufmann stunt, and everyone was saying “what’s he doing?” and often he would get booted off stage. Apparently, a couple of times he actually made it through the whole book. That also gave it a twisted appeal to us—that Andy Kaufmann has used it this way (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).
Collins said that it was an early decision to use the complete text of the book without any editing. He said it helped them understand what they were doing:

What I wanted to make a piece about, was not so much the story of *The Great Gatsby*: obviously it was going to contain that, it was the powerful straining of what was going on, that if we did it this way, it was also necessarily a piece about reading and about the experience of reading (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins explained that for the audience it was going to contain the experience of being read to. So, for him, it was the bringing together of different forms, and he stressed, it was not going to be their telling of the story, they only wanted it to be Fitzgerald’s telling of the story:

We are very interested in questions of form and what happens when different forms are brought together, and so that is a structural concern, but also part of the content of what we did was to examine reading (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins said they wanted to make a play about the experience of the story rather than try to depict the period of the piece. He explained that the reality of theatre he most appreciated was seeing what was real in the room, including the “lights hanging from the ceiling and someone coughing in the audience”. He said he wasn’t interested in representing the story but including the story:

So to do a thing about a guy walking into a crumby dilapidated office, and reading this book, and to experience the story—and what you do on stage are the obvious things to distract him, but that the book would just keep going and eventually the people around him in his office, the place where he was, would start to coincidentally line up with the things in the book: someone yawns right before he reads about it to the audience, and people walk in and out on cue (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins described these as the two things beginning to “orbit” each other, and the other actors speak live as the characters. He felt it was about playing with the book and reading the book, and how the audience could
project imagination onto things that were not in the book. These were the problems that Collins and the actors struggled to solve. He said the story gets very intense, especially in the second half:

And it gets very dialogue heavy, and emotional, and it became a very tricky dance to do for us to put ourselves way into the story, and then get out of it, and go back to it just being a book. So we had to very carefully choose how to make the set change into something that didn’t get in the way of the telling of the story, but still didn’t pretend to be that way; and how to just completely jump out of it and go back to the table with a guy sitting reading a book (J. Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins said the way the novel was written assisted them with their presentation of it on the stage:

You finish one paragraph describing the events leading up to a tragic accident, say, and then the next paragraph begins with a reference to how the accident was referred to in the [news] paper. There is a kind of lightness and seriousness in the way this extra long thing... this particular novel, had so much energy (J. Collins, Personal communication 2005).

This description of the production of *The Great Gatsby* by John Collin’s company is the most extreme example of staying true to the text, by including the whole novel verbatim. This adherence to the text has also been prevalent in the work of English theatre artist, Mike Alfreds, whose work with his theatre company, Shared Experience, took novels by Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Bleak House*, and *The Arabian Nights* straight from the page and worked them into lengthy productions that are now considered seminal (Roose-Evans 192).

**Creating a Completely New Work**

The process for the adaptation of *Night Letters* by Robert Dessaix was another example where the collaboration relied heavily on work-in-progress being workshopped by actors at various times throughout a lengthy process. Chris Drummond was very clear that he and co-writer, Susan Rogers, were making a new work for the theatre production:
Robert’s not clear himself within his own book where fiction and fact start and stop. In one sentence he talked about the character Robert, and by the end of the sentence he’d be talking about himself, because it’s part autobiography and part fiction (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).

Drummond and Rogers spent a lot of time talking to Robert Dessaix at the beginning of the project, and drew out as many factual details about the author’s life that hadn’t been included in the book as they could. Drummond described the meeting as a “broad ranging conversation” where they discussed what excited each of them about the potential of the project.

The discussion with the author was followed by eight months of writing and talking between Drummond and Rogers as they put together material for their first workshop. Rogers wrote some individual narratives for the characters: they were experimenting with sections of the book regardless of whether they thought they would be included in the final work or not. The scenes she created in the beginning were very short; they both wanted to amass as much material as possible. Drummond worked on creating a structure for the work. This was how they delineated their roles: Rogers mostly wrote, and Drummond worked on the structure of the piece (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).

Drummond acknowledged that the State Theatre Company of South Australia’s Faulding On Site Theatre Lab was crucial to the process as they were able to experiment and trial their ideas:

The first workshop involved putting about sixty-five pages of disparate scenes, there might have been probably about forty-five scenes within those sixty-five pages. We put those in front of six actors—we read all the disparate scenes and then we, sort of, tried quilting—a couple here or there (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).
This helped them devise the type of structure and they found they could link scenes, which led to “something poetic” being revealed in the characterisations:

We also identified, by coincidence, a whole lot of arrivals in Venice. So we created the first draft of a little market scene, which was still there at the top of act one. And that’s all we achieved at the end of eight months work: and all these other scenes (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).

The author was invited each time the work-in-progress was presented, and the continuing discussions the writers had with him enriched the work as they fleshed out stories both from the book and from the author’s life. Drummond said that revelations about experiences in the author’s life found their way into the performance as experiences in the lives of some of the characters. He acknowledged Dessaix’s generosity and honesty, which inspired “a lot of flavours and images”. This continuing discussion with the author is in direct contrast to the work of both Romeril and Collins, who were both intrigued with the social aspects of their “discovered” dead novelist’s work.

Drummond and Rogers had the opportunity to work on Night Letters at the First Australian Playwrights Conference in 2001: they had developed the piece to the point of having a first draft of Act I. At the Conference they were able to work with high-calibre actors:

What I had been doing structurally is I understood that there would be an arrival in Venice, and that the time would jump between Europe and Melbourne. But I wasn’t quite sure how to bring clarity to that, and there was a conversation—John Gaden had read the book and loved it—and within half an hour with those actors talking, after reading the draft, a whole lot of little epiphanies started to happen. And that night I got the image of how to really begin the show: essentially Act I as it stands, was discovered in those two weeks (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).
Here again, is evidence of the high value placed on collaboration and workshopping, and the need for the playwrights to solve problems along with actors and other theatre artists.

Even though Act I was created, Drummond realised that the “exhaustive nature” of the style could not be sustained for two more Acts, and he referred to the changing form of the book in recognising that they would need to also change the form within the live performance (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).

The Second Australian Playwrights Conference was not as successful as the previous year’s for Night Letters and Drummond said that some delegates suggested the project should not continue. He and Rogers, however, were very committed and retained their excitement, but they needed to wait until they were in the rehearsal period before they could finally write and produce Act III:

> We knew we wanted Act III to be light, ephemeral and not reliant on the enormous emphasis on tying up all the strands, but to try to draw the audience into a state of just being in the moment, and enjoying the settling of the associations. And that was something that was almost impossible to write without actors that were working in the characters (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).

Drummond said they had produced three times as much writing for Act III than was finally used in the production. They cut many scenes and a lot of writing that wasn’t essential. Drummond didn’t lament the cutting of material but expressed the difficulty in knowing within the “labyrinth” of the entire piece what would be useful and what wasn’t. He said they didn’t really clear out all the unnecessary material until half way through the first season in Adelaide, and that by the time the show was opening in Melbourne it was in the form they had envisaged at the beginning of the project.
So the entire work ended up being created over several years. The first draft, which Drummond said was about the three-quarter mark of the process, took about two and a half to three years to come into being. When asked about the process, as a process, Drummond felt there was one, but on the other hand it was also about working without a process:

> The process gives me the courage to be more ambitious, and it does give me a sense of ways of working. I think one of the things I’ve learned from that experience is, there is no process, and what you become better equipped at is surviving the rigours of working without a process (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).

The length of the whole project and the writers’ commitment to see the project come to a conclusion required real belief in the suitability of the novel to be translated into performance and the value of such a project for an Australian audience. The new work, as in Tom Wright’s epic adaptation of *The Odyssey* needed the playwrights to maintain sight of the possible end value of the project, even through seemingly insurmountable obstacles on the way to completion of the process.

**Dramatising Difficult Features of Novels**

Greg Lissaman, in adapting *The Lost Thing* by Sean Tan, said he wanted to honour the feeling of the book because he said that the “feeling” was appealing. He said there was an understated tone to the writing and the visuals: ”it always felt like five o’clock in the afternoon, going along at this contented pace” (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

At the time of his interview Lissaman was Artistic Director of Jigsaw Theatre Company, which creates works for youth and multiple ages using a variety of media, including puppets. They also have an educational touring program.
Lissaman said that the author, Tan, worked with the Company through the process, which took three years. When Lissaman decided he liked the book he negotiated with the ACT Word Festival to bring Tan to Canberra, and they discussed the possibilities for the adaptation. Tan was very enthusiastic and gave permission for Lissaman to create what Lissaman calls “vertical stories” for some of the characters, where Lissaman expands on the character with information and ideas that are not necessarily part of the book.

About six months after the Canberra meeting Lissaman gathered a group of artists together for three days to discuss ideas. Without them feeling the pressure of an imminent production, he told them, “None of you are employed on the show [so] it’s pure dreamtime. You don’t have to work to a budget. What could this be?” From this collaboration some ideas were achievable and maintained in the initial draft of the playscript.

Lissaman had made a decision that the production was going to be an installation-based performance, and once funding was secured he formed the team of artists that worked on the production:

We had a week of creative development where we all sat at the National Gallery in the space that it was going to be performed [in] and said “what could it be, what is this?” And we story built it. It became quite a technical exercise in a way because we had to go “we can do a scene like this over here in this scale, so we’ll do that one in miniature, because we need a small boy in front of a big city and that will fit in that corner.” So it became quite logistic at the same time. Which led us to explore all the conventions of “when would we use a live performer? When would we use a puppet? What is the emotional relationship with the use of a live person with a small puppet, or a live person with a big puppet? Is the boy protecting it?” (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

After this Lissaman went away to work on the text and created the first draft in order to meet with his designers. His technique was to project his
script on the wall and allow them to make suggestions about what might be possible to be told through sound design, or, when it was better to use a live actor. (This process echoes Wynn Handman’s to a certain degree—having the text available for highlighting and use with the actors in the first read-through). This led to Lissaman’s second draft, which in turn began the process of working with individual designers.

For this adaptation Lissaman used the technique of a narrator who told the story and gave the introduction, and this was realised through part of the action on a security camera in a character’s office. The audience then, became the security staff watching, and the set became the world the narrator was talking about: “almost his memory of that experience” (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

Lissaman explained that because the text already existed as a book there were points where he could build it more and new text was created—vertical stories. For example, the boy’s friend Pete in the book only has six lines:

So we went “right, well what’s in the visuals that we want to draw on?”
The idea that Pete is an artist. He is actually trading art that goes all over the city and gets put everywhere. “We’ll expand that”! And because we were working in the National Gallery, we said “well what artworks are similar to Pete’s, here?” So we chose John Olsens’ *Sydney Sun* and said ‘well, right, let’s this be an exploration of his art, let’s get the moment where we see in his world that someone actually loves art and someone is just fascinated by what it looks like and what it makes you feel, other than just that it’s five o’clock” (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

Another way Lissaman played with the text was with the use of puppets, video, and using movement without text. The author was also involved in designing the set:

[We] work out all of the different ways you can take things from the visuals in the book, and the text in the book, and whatever else you want
to add that is a reference point to it. Yeah—without theatre, it all has to appear through the text, the spoken text. That’s the great thing about theatre—you can show so much (G. Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

Lissaman said that in all his work he wanted to present a story. He didn’t try to build a show around the theme of what is in the book because that was what carried the ideas. He said he believed that it was important to work on a story that was inherent, rather than the theme. He also believed that you didn’t know what the show was going to say until later, and if you began with the theme it limited the creativity and possibilities.

In this example, and in the descriptions earlier by Sterling, the adapted novel is explored through theatrical techniques and devices in order to solve problems that were difficult to translate to performance from the original text.

**Finding a Basic Premise, Idea or Theme**

Greg Lissaman also talked about another adaptation he had created from *The Man Whose Mother was a Pirate* by Margaret Mahy, where, once again, it was necessary to expand on the story and visuals. Once more there was a “feel” about the book that he wanted to retain.

It was like “we’re going to the seaside” and we wanted to keep that feel in that show. And in that one we basically took the book, but then expanded out the scene so it became dialogue (G. Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

Lissaman said there were some challenges with this piece: it needed to be for two actors even though the story had many characters. The story was of a boy and his mother travelling to the seaside. Along the way they encountered the other characters, like a farmer, and a philosopher. So in order for one actor to change into another character they had to disappear
from the stage. This became an enjoyable challenge in the directing and planning of the piece for Lissaman.

In the production all the characters they met said to the boy “don’t go to the seaside, it will be bad, you’ll hate it, it doesn’t smell as good as it tastes, the grass is never greener on the other side”:

As he’s getting closer and closer to the sea his clothes have started to get ruffled, and he loses buttons, and his shoes get less tight, and he ends up discovering the sea and loving it, despite the barriers of people saying “don’t go” (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

Lissaman decided to make the performance into a musical production and used the songs to tell part of the story as well as giving the audience more information about the characters’ emotional state:

A song has to advance the story. It’s not just about saying “this is where I’m at, but this is where I’m going”. And you must have some sort of emotional journey in that moment (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

Lissaman’s approach to the adaptation was to “cut” the book into sections: he felt the book was very episodic in form. He technically worked out where the transitions between sections were, and used songs to assist these. (John Shortis wrote the music for the work, and Shortis and Lissaman wrote the lyrics). The songs were written for the characters to make a discovery:

So it’s lighter at this point because it’s getting to the point where his clothes are loosening up. So let’s use the clothes as the constant guide to his state, and the state of the music, so it will always reflect that (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

Lissaman also used his technique of “vertical stories” in this work. The vertical stories gave the audience more information about the characters, and it allowed Lissaman to “give them more presence… life… depth, but did not advance the story.”
Lissaman was beginning to work on another adaptation at the time of the interview. He was collaborating with a director and designer from Spare Parts Puppet Theatre on *The Velveteen Rabbit*. In many ways, Lissaman said, the way he worked with vertical stories would be continued in this new adaptation.

Lissaman also reinforced the idea that a new work was created when an adaptation occurred. He felt it wasn’t worth bothering unless that would be the case.

If you take a book and you just say “well I’ll just present it exactly as it is, on stage”, a) I think it is unimaginative, and b) well, someone can just pick it up and read it to get out of it what you just gave them, so why not give them a broader experience of it. And if you love the *Velveteen Rabbit* then I want you to love it more. I want you to cry more for it, if that’s what it made you do (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

Lissaman said the process of adaptation in the early drafts needed to be very much about the story and needed to avoid collaborators making small changes that could lead to “band-aid” drafting. He emphasised the need to articulate what the story said and to ensure the relationship between the characters remained consistent:

And also, just in writing, if you change something in the scene—as the writer, you feel a very different shift in another scene. Like you just know that that had impacted. Whereas someone else’s said, “I think that would be funny if you wrote this over here,” they’re not necessarily taking into account what happens three scenes later (G.Lissaman, Personal communication 2005).

As an adaptor, Lissaman said he thought he was atypical because he sometimes liked to work in isolation just writing the script, and at other times he needed people around to respond to his ideas.

At the end of his interview Lissaman talked about using the process of adaptation in reverse. He was intending to employ writers and illustrators
to write a book at the same time he was writing a play. He felt this was a new form and a process that he was excited to try, but that his original intention for the piece, his own interpretation or vision, would underscore the project.

John Collins talked about a previous work his company had produced that used *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James. The novel, or novella, was not the first inspiration for the work. Collins described this as a way he and his company liked to work:

> We put that together much the way we put other shows of ours together, with “that’s working and that works”. The text in that case was not the driving force. It wasn’t involved in the original impulse to do the show. That was a piece I knew I wanted to do something with, it was very dark, literally dark: the book (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins said his main impulse was to do something in the dark. He was influenced by the sculpture of the artist James Turrell who created installations in extremely dark rooms with very delicate paintings with very low light:

> Light that’s so low you walk into the room and you don’t see anything at first, or you see it but you’re not sure what it is. As your eyes adjust, it changes shape, it’s a beautiful thing and I wanted to see if I could put that on stage (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

In rehearsal, the company had been working with the writings of Henry James’ brother, William: writings about religion. These were testimonials about people who’d had religious experiences. They realised, at a certain point that they’d been working on a ghost story:

> All this darkness [and] voices talking about seeing things. And somebody said, “well William James’ brother wrote a pretty famous ghost story so let’s get it in here”. By that time we had a kind of structure in place. We had a lot of ideas about how things should look and we brought all of that to *The Turn of the Screw* (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).
Collins said that when his Company decided to do a “scary” story they started to watch scary things. They watched *The Shining* and *Mulholland Drive*: those movies that used ideas about time as a non-linear aspect of the stories with things moving backwards and forwards in time. So they brought this to their version of *The Turn of the Screw*. Collins described it as a “stirring together a mix of things”, with the text being only one of those things.

When asked if there was a process or elements that they did the same way when preparing work, Collins said he didn’t have a formula, and, finding himself at the end of one project and the beginning of another brought about “a familiar feeling of terror”:

…like, how did I begin that last one?

I’ve been at Columbia, in Anne Bogart’s class. She says all you need to have to make a play is—technique, is the word she used—a technique, something to talk about, and passion, or something you’re pretty excited about. There are some things that I need personally, myself, to get to work on something. And I don’t always have it. Sometimes I have to go to work without it. I find it along the way sometimes. The best course is to have an idea about something I’d like to see on stage, just a simple idea about what, like a form or idea, not about the story I want to tell, but about the kind of event, the kind of action that I want to see happening on stage (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).

Collins said that sometimes they had two things to put together. For example, with *The Great Gatsby* it was putting a novel on stage, and then using the whole novel. He said the Company begin working on the relationship between the two problems, and sometimes that has to do with the relationship between the audience and the problems they are solving.

So a lot of its just trusting that if I have, or I’m excited enough, about a thing to do on stage, that the rest of the content—we can sort of leave the door open and the right thing will walk in. It’s really operating on faith a lot of the time (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005).
Wynn Handman also felt that he didn’t have a specific process and when he first approached a book he “just let it happen”:

Then I have to find something that starts to click. Then I try to get an opening. And then I usually go, “I don’t know, I can’t do this… OK, I’ll get back to it”. And I’ll see where I hook in (W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).

The descriptions by both these theatre artists parallel a type of process that a director might follow in order to produce a new work, including self-doubts about the final product, however, in both these cases the playwright was adapting a novel for performance.

**Theatre Artists Being More Able to Adapt Than Novelists**

This may seem like a point that “goes without saying”, however Morsberger (1990 197) proposes that even though a great many novels have been adapted for live performance it is seldom that the novelist successfully writes the playscript. Morsberger cites the examples of Henry James’ unsuccessful adaptations of *The American* and *Daisy Miller*. There are, of course, many examples of novelists successfully adapting their work for live performance: as in the example of Margaret Atwood adapting her novel *The Penelopiad* for a stage production, and the simultaneous creations Steinbeck made with his play-novelettes *Of Mice and Men* and *The Moon is Down*. Nevertheless, several of the interviewed theatre artists talked about playwrights and theatre artists being more able than novelists to undertake the challenge of adapting novels for live performance, which allowed them then to be on the “look-out” for material that had dramatic potential.

Rather than a process, Wynn Handman said he had a set of principles that he used in his work, but hadn’t articulated them until asked to reflect on his “method”. These principles were ones that contributed to the creation of
good theatre. The chronology of Handman’s theatre making, directing and teaching of actors forms a part of the history of theatre in New York during the twentieth century and continues into the twenty-first.

Wynn Handman felt that the first element was to identify good writing:

First of all, you have to have language to speak. Because I’m not a writer, I don’t in any way claim to be a writer. I need the writing that I find. When I find the writing that I can work with, I can use my dramatic sensibilities to try to make it work in these shows that are using the books.

So whatever the book is, the language has to be speakable—at least speakable (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman gave the example of working on a history project for the Library of Congress. The material he used was based on interviews and he found one that had “serviceable” language but also provided the second necessary ingredient—a dramatic incident:

So I found one that I thought would be very good. You could speak it, although the language is not rewarding language, it’s serviceable, and it didn’t stand in the way. But the dramatic incident—and that’s another important thing—that there’s a dramatic incident that has theatre in it. It’s not just description, or straight narrative, there’s dramatic incident—so that was this nurse, Maree Prescott, and it worked very well. [It’s] called Voices of War (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman described how he worked with the text The Things They Carried, which he felt was excellent writing and immediately recognised he could adapt it.

This was different to the others because it was a lot of short pieces, maybe twelve or fourteen stories. So I had to read them and get a sense of how I could do it. It takes some time, and then it starts to click. So I saw there was one story called On the Rainy River. So I saw I could use some of that and then The Things They Carried. It’s like an elegy; it’s elegiac. He has a whole chapter on the things they carried, so I adapted that chapter. And then I found another piece, which was in Vietnam, and he killed
somebody. So there are actually three pieces that I put together
(W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Here Handman was showing that he had the dramatic sensibility to merge
the ideas in the different stories into one performance. Handman is
planning to extend the current thirty-five-minute piece into a full-length
production and attributes the possible success of the piece to “that actor
and that writing”:

A whole workshop, and the author there, my actor and me: it will hold. If
we can plan the rest of the piece it will be brilliant. The author actually
got very excited, and sent his suggestions, which I have in a notebook
(W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).

The reference to the notebook and that it hadn’t to that point impacted on
his work in extending the adaptation shows that Handman liked his own
ways of working, rather than being influenced too much by the
“suggestions” of the author.

In terms of a process of working on adapting novels for live performance,
another key ingredient Handman said was integral to his adaptations was
the acting, or actors. He said the type of adaptation he creates is very
demanding on an actor and, hence, they are not able to perform as often as
some other commercial creations because it takes so much out of them:

When you do verbatim—just somebody speaking—it’s usually very hard
on the actors because you don’t have any kind of lubricant or good
writing, poetic things or… it just sticks there. So it’s very hard when the
actor does it, and it’s hard on the audience. It’s a different feeling. The
audience would leave just with… like ‘stuck in their stomachs’—not able
to talk. That’s a play called Still Life, which was based on tapes of a
Vietnam Vet. I did it way back. It was very painful, and so, that one,
became very successful. We were doing it maybe six times a week. And
then if you’re going to do it commercially then you start thinking of eight
times a week. And the actors said, “No, we cannot do this eight times a
week, maybe five times a week, but that’s the most”. And I know what
they mean (W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).
Another crucial ingredient Handman identified was putting the audience “right there”. The writing and language need to be “rich” and full of images. This, he said, also called for a special type of acting:

“...which I must say I’m capable of getting out of the actors I work with. Which is that every thing the actor says or does has to really exist. This is not Readers Theatre. Everything has to exist. You’ll notice that it pulls you in, so that you make the movie in your own mind.

…it’s a mosaic of everything we’ve made, everything exists. We have improvised on moments. They have to make the other characters exist. In Manchild there’s a case where his mother exists, his brother exists, the women in the bar who tells him he’s in trouble exists, his father exists. He says, “there goes another one”: he’s really doing it. You mustn’t lose the audience in having blank spaces. The actor... it calls upon great concentration from the actor, and the involvement in the piece, and making each one of these, whatever is described, exists for the actor, so he can make it exist for you (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman is here talking about the theatrical decision to have one actor play more than one role from the novel and working with the actor as the director in order to ensure the adapted text reaches the audience in a viscerally moving and mind-changing way.

**Using First Person and Present Tense**

The above comment by Wynn Handman demonstrates the style of performance he is intent on creating. The actor’s are “in” the character and performing as if they are “in time”. This necessitates using material that is written in the first person and the present tense. When Handman explained about all the characters in the Manchild scene, the actor was playing them all, one after the other, within the theatrical space. If the novel isn’t written in the first person and Handman believes it has dramatic potential he will rewrite it. This first person narrative is specific to his adaptations and is demanding for the actors. The adaptations and the style of acting he requires are part of his own “style” or “method”.

Handman has, for many years, run his own Actors’ Studio where he teaches acting to students who audition to become a member of his classes. Many of the actors for his productions come from his “stable” of acting students, who, once they begin working professionally continue to attend classes in his studio in Carnegie Hall:

Sometimes, in the acting class I do an exercise when the actors have done something. And then I’ll just say, “well, tell me where you come from. Tell us about the High School you went to, tell us about the… something you remember vividly, an incident at the School.” And they do it. And then I’ll say, “two weeks from now I’ll ask you if you remember that and you will.” That’s because it really exists. That’s what these pieces have to do with imaginary material (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman emphasised that his works demand the rigour of this type of acting. He chooses material that is written in the first person so that the actor can “grab the audience early on”. Handman admitted that it takes a lot of work to “get the rhythm”:

Can’t be too fast because the audience is just coming off the street, or it can’t be too slow. So it’s really a lot of applying principles of directing for the theatre, and acting for the theatre, all concentrated in these pieces. But they’re very demanding on the actors because they slip into other characters and play a scene (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

**Omitting Material**

One of the limitations that Handman purposely imposes on himself for his works is that one actor, or occasionally, two actors perform them. Therefore, one actor delivers all the roles included in the performance:

In *Blackboy* you’re going to see a scene where he plays four characters. This is very hard. That took a lot of work. But he plays himself, his mother, his father, and his father’s girlfriend. You’ll see you’re engaged right away (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).
Handman was pressed further about the relationship between his teaching studio for acting students and the adaptations created and presented by American Place Theatre. He explained that they were two distinct parts of his work. He teaches his classes quite separately to the work he does for the theatre company. However, when he finds a book he is interested in adapting he turns to his records of students and former students as possible actors for the roles:

Open this up. 1999: these are all the people in my night class in 1999. Now I can’t constantly keep them all in my head so that I have to go through that to get ideas. So when I started thinking of Dorothy Thompson, I went there. I made a long list of about twenty names who I said “maybe, maybe”, and finally I came up with Arija, because I’ve done enough work with Arija to know the complexity you get from her mercurial nature. And she’s just the right age. And also she’s general American, which Dorothy Thompson was. I don’t think of the actor, and say, “oh, I want to build a piece for her”—I begin with the book (W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman emphasised the usefulness of working with actors he had trained at his Acting Studio for American Place Theatre (APT) productions. It meant, because he had trained them, they had a common vocabulary. It sometimes became a difficulty though, through working with American Place Theatre the actors would be seen by wider audiences and gain more roles in other theatre companies, which in turn compromised the work they could do for APT.

When asked how he made choices about the material to include in an adaptation, Handman said that it varied in difficulty. One piece, *Dreaming in Cuban*, used only one character’s story from the novel, *Pilar*, and this was a relatively easy choice:

Because Pilar is written in the first person; the other characters aren’t. And her story is obviously the author’s story. The author was a punk and so that was the easiest. And then re-arrange some of the time sequences. I
This novel was the exception, having sections already in first person, and not needing the language to be adapted. One of the projects the American Place Theatre was working on during the “residency” was *Dorothy and Red*, which needed a great deal of transference into first person, since the texts being adapted were mostly written as journals.

**Developing Characters**

Handman identified “urgency” as another key element in his adaptations. Like Thoron, he thought the character must portray the need to tell their story:

> I have to get them to click into the character, and its all through suggestion. Now in *The Secret Life of Bees* the woman—she’s playing a fourteen-year-old girl, and you’ll believe it; she does it in front of you. You’ll see the transformation. She’ll come on and there’s something we put in—which is the other thing you need—urgency. Urgency is part of drama. She’ll say, “well I’ve had this story and today I got up there’s something in my stomach that makes me say I have to tell it to you.” So “boom” it puts it right there, now, and its for the first time, and its urgent. So this is important: that they move you into the character. In that case, she’s not fourteen years old, but she gets into it (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman emphasises the need for the sense of urgency in a piece. In *The Things They Carry* this sense was reinforced by the knowledge that the character was going to be drafted at any moment, and the need to make the decision about whether to run away to Canada and avoid the draft, or, the audience wonders, will he go into the army. In the piece *Dorothy and Red* Handman said he had to create the sense of urgency:

> That’s why I’m building up to 1927—the jazz age. Anything is possible—free to die, to climb high, to dive deep—that’s a line I got from a play based on Zelda Fitzgerald, and a flashback and seeds of her craziness. She says “I feel champagne yellow tonight”. Well, this is the
night of the Armistice and she’s in France, but it’s the same feeling, it’s the jazz age bubbling—brimming with possibilities—that’s what I have to get in there. Dorothy has hit bottom and now will bounce up. She’s ready to celebrate… It’s a romantic period: romance is in the air. Risk; it’s a time for risk taking… The audience has to get caught up with the strong bright possibilities… (W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).

On the topic of the portrayal of challenging characters Handman talked about an adaptation he had agreed to do which was going to challenge the development of the main character for an actor, and the difficulty he might have in casting the role:

He’s ten years old. There’s plenty of good material in the book, it’s not going to be hard. The casting—well, the female voice doesn’t change like the male voice… You have an actor who is in his twenties, he doesn’t have a ten-year-old boy’s voice and he doesn’t have the physique. There isn’t [any grown up part to offset it], and it has to be that age. I’m thinking of getting a girl, a woman, I mean some women that stay with me are tiny, anyway (W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman begins with the character from the novel but then brings his directorial sensibilities to the casting of actors who will bring even more qualities to the theatrical presentation.

**Using Exciting Language and Composing the Structure**

Wynn Handman felt that the way to work with an adaptation involved many of the sensibilities of his well-honed directing skills. When working on the adaptation of *Dorothy and Red* he said he needed to find “something” that would characterise each section. He said it resembled writing music:

Its like music, the movement—the first movement is high allegro—when she tells the man off. But that’s in the spirit of “she’s over him”, and so we begin with a lift-off, I think, and that strong thing that I have inserted. I’ve got to get a snap in the opening that gets this… I want to reveal all those things that go on in a woman.
Handman said he steers away from physical demonstrations that illustrate or “acts it out”. He said he believes this is often why other adaptations fail:

Because they try to illustrate this scene, that scene... and it’s all over the place and it doesn’t work. But what works is this method where the audience makes their own movie and you don’t try to show, therefore you mustn’t do things that confuse them and that are showing them. That’s why I won’t use slides or film because then you get a kind of split, and then you’re showing them. No, I don’t want scenery—none. That’s why the bare stage. That’s what Shakespeare had—a bare stage. That’s why every one of these you [can] see it’s the same—one chair, one table or a bench, sometimes two of the three. I have just a blank background—so you’re the one who creates the pictures. And I don’t move towards scenery, I don’t want it (W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Instead, Handman said he preferred descriptive passages that set the scene for the audience and described characters the actor may be about to embody. He gave an example from The Things They Carry of an old man the young protagonist met when he was considering escaping to Canada:

(Reading) An old guy opens the door, stares at me. He’s skinny and shrunken, mostly bald. He wears a flannel shirt, brown work pants. In one hand he has a green apple, small paring knife in the other. (To me) Now I had to work with the actor, because this whole section has to have ominousness, a threat—he has a knife. And sure enough, the author used it: (reading again) his eyes are the colour of a razorblade, that pierce at me with strange sharpness, cutting sensation, as if the gaze were slicing me open. (To me) Well, I want to say, “what am I getting into here?” So there’s a good example of using description (W.Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman said he would occasionally add to the dialogue for the actor in order to give the audience essential clues of time, date or place. For example, in The Things They Carry, Handman added the opening lines
“I’m Tim O’Brien, my draft notice has just arrived… I’m being drafted to fight in a war I hate. It’s June 16\textsuperscript{th}, 1978, a month after I graduated…”

In his determination to convey the words of the author and not distract with “acting” Wynn Handman also emphasised that he disliked the actors using gestures unless they were crucially important to the performance. Even though people usually use their hands when they talk he would demand that the actor keep their body still:

I have to curb that because it distracts the audience and it doesn’t concentrate them on getting inside the actor. So a method in rehearsal is to let them do that to help get it in, then I say; “now you can’t use your hands.” Using hands is for their own sake; it doesn’t help the audience unless you find a certain gesture that’s going to help the image (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

Handman gave examples of these exceptions—the actor crouching in \textit{The Things They Carry} in order to augment the feeling of that section being in the Vietnamese jungle, and in \textit{Dreaming in Cuban} where the actor used a salute when playing the Dictator, and later sat on the floor with legs spread:

The gestures are very selected—like when the boys accost her in the dark park—I have her go down, and have her like this. I’m not opposed, when it’s a dramatic moment, a dramatic incident, to finding a particular position that helps to strengthen the whole thing but not act it out. You remember the scene when the boys accost her and they suckle her breasts. It’s very vivid. Sometimes I don’t even have the lighting, to make it a little darker, because it’s in a dark park. That is a spooky park in the dark—I know it. Anyhow, I have her go down and spread her legs, which is a very vulnerable position for a woman. And you can believe then what ensues. But I don’t have the boys doing things (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

These quotations show Handman’s adherence to the text in order to find language that will reach and move the audience. The language then leads him, as the director, to structure the scenes, on one hand not to distract
from the descriptive language, and on the other to judiciously choose actions appropriate for live performance.

Observing a Process
Several of the Theatre Artists interviewed for this study found it difficult to articulate a specific process undertaken in order solve the problem of taking a novel from its full-written form through all the stages needed to produce a live performance. They were very articulate in being able to explain elements for consideration and attributes they wanted in a live performance, but specific processes seemed to elude any explanation or transposition of a novel translating to live performance.

It was a very valuable opportunity then, to undertake observations of one of the Theatre Artists at work, and follow two projects through from almost-beginning stages to almost-culmination. The residence with American Place Theatre had the advantage of providing the opportunity to witness many of the crucial ingredients identified in the substance of Wynn Handman’s interview, which have been outlined in this chapter and the previous chapter, Chapter Four, which looks at motivations for adapting novels for live performance.

During the residence Wynn Handman was working on two projects. The first was something that had fired Handman’s imagination and he felt internally pushed to work on it: an adaptation of letters of Dorothy Thompson and Vincent Sheean with the working title Dorothy and Red. The second was an adaptation of a best-selling novel, The Kiterunner, American Place Theatre were using to launch their yearly fund-raiser celebration, and the adaptation of the text had reached its rehearsal draft, before the observation sessions occurred. This was given as an example in Chapter Four to show how a novel can fill all the stated motivations given
by theatre artists for choosing to adapt for live performance. The pertinent data from the project Dorothy and Red is included in Appendix C to elucidate a creative process that had the outcome of an adaptation that Wynn Handman undertook as a demonstrated example of his steps or method, and any points of consideration he provided in the interviews that affected his way of working.

Endnote:
The exploration into how theatre artists adapt novels for live performance produced data that reinforced several main ideas that needed to be considered when an artist chose material for adaptation. The residency with American Place Theatre provided the opportunity to witness an adaptation in progress. Throughout the interviews and observations of the adaptation of Dorothy and Red (Appendix C) it was evident that many of the main ideas iterated by other theatre artists were reinforced during a process undertaken by Wynn Handman, and his actors.

The main ideas emphasised earlier in this chapter by other theatre artists that were also evident in the adaptation Dorothy and Red by Wynn Handman can be read in detail in Appendix C. The following is a summary of them in relation to Wynn Handman’s adaptation:

- **The need to play around with ideas and images during the rehearsal process.** Handman took advantage of the discussion periods within rehearsals to discuss his research and emphasise images and key words he was interested in conveying to the audience;

- **The need to cut characters and sub-plots.** Handman had toyed with the idea of including the character of Sheean’s lover who was instrumental in key events leading up to ones that would be included in the adaptation. At the conclusion of the residency
Handman was still not sure whether the character of Sinclair Lewis would make an appearance. If the character were to be included in the final adaptation the male actor would be called upon to play that part as well as the part of Vincent Sheean.

• **The need to stay true to the novel.** Wynn Handman’s professed way of staying true to the novel was the determination to use only the novelist’s or writer’s words for the bulk of the text: the only words added by him, or the actors, were ones of convenience—where the audience needed to know something quickly due to a change in scene, or information that would help set the time and place.

• **The need to create an entirely new work,** different in substantial ways from the old form. The adaptation that Wynn Handman was working on was derived from writings predominantly from one source, but also from other journalists and writers involved with Dorothy Thompson. Therefore, the live performance was going to be very different from the literature.

• **The need to deal with features of novels that are difficult to translate to the stage.** In *Dorothy and Red* the letters of Dorothy Thompson were written in a journal-style where she explored her innermost thoughts. They were not meant for a wide public audience when she wrote them. One of the difficulties the director and actor worked with was how to communicate these intimately personal words to the audience in an appropriate way. Wynn Handman also drew out of the literature sections that described the time and place so that the actors would be placed in the minds of the audience, along with other information that was needed to quickly determine facts was added to the text.

• **The need to find a basic premise, idea or theme** other than the novelist’s stated theme. The letters of Dorothy Thompson and Vincent Sheean did chronicle what was happening in their lives and
in Europe in 1927, but as Wynn Handman set about his research for the project he determined he would create a piece about the inner life of women, using Thompson’s experiences to illuminate this topic.

- **Playwrights, as theatre artists, are more able to adapt material for the stage** than novelists. In this latter case, Wynn Handman was not a playwright, but a highly regarded theatre director, who understood what would constitute good performance material. His long-standing experience as a director gave him the ability to take material written by someone else and select and order the text to create a live performance that would be very satisfying for an audience.

- **The need to use the first person and present tense in the new work.** The writing selected to be included in the performance *Dorothy and Red* started out in the third person. Both Thompson and Sheean in the reporting and journal writing were telling about events that had occurred and so were talking in the past tense. Wynn Handman thought the writing had such potential as performance material that he converted it into first person. Some sections he needed to experiment with to see if it would benefit from staying in the past.

- **The need to be selective in including material**—“less is more”. The letters used for the production *Dorothy and Red* were carefully chosen to illustrate the theme Wynn Handman wanted to illumine. There was a great deal of material to choose from so Handman needed to consider carefully, not only the content of the letters chosen to perform, but how many or few other characters would be portrayed or talked about.

- **The need to develop characters in a different way to novels.** On the page the reader can take time to absorb many details and use
their imagination to flesh out characters. In a performance the actor needs to “inhabit” the character and the audience member learns about them by the way they act, what they say, and implications that allow the audience to use their imaginations to complete the picture. The time period for the stage is condensed. It is impossible for the audience to absorb the amount of information leisurely reading a book can provide. In *Dorothy and Red* the actors needed to convey information about the characters very quickly in order for the audience to understand who they were and what they were doing in their lives.

- **The need to use exciting language and compose an appropriate performance structure.** At the end of the ‘residency’ half of *Dorothy and Red* had been created. All through the rehearsal period Wynn Handman emphasised the musicality of words and the images words created in the minds of the audience members. The balance of the types of words and the manner in which they were delivered had great bearing on the way Handman structured the work for performance (W. Handman, Personal communication 2005).

The ideas given by the theatre artists in the interviews had a great bearing on the process undertaken in the creative portion of this study. It was not until several artists talked about their approaches to working with the text of a novel that the researcher felt able to begin the adaptive process on the novel *Vitae Brevis*. The two different processes in this broad study, interviewing and observing theatre artists, and working on adapting a novel, did not happen synchronously. The journal that chronicled the process of thinking, planning and adapting the novel is given in Appendix B. The process of adaptation was not straight-forward, however, the bare steps are given in the next chapter, Conclusion, as the first indication of a
process that took into consideration the motivations outlined by other theatre artists in this chapter.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

According to Smith adapting novels for the stage is a popular pastime in the Australian theatrical landscape. As evidence of this, in her arts program on Radio National, she cited the examples of La Boite theatre in Brisbane producing Nick Earl’s *Perfect Skin*, David Malouf’s *Johnno* and Andrew McGahan’s *Last drinks*; Belvoir Street Theatre were re-producing Louis Nowra’s *Capricornia*, an adaptation of Xavier Herbert’s novel of the same name; at the Adelaide Festival there had been an adaptation of Peter Goldworthy’s *Honk if You are Jesus*; the STC were commissioning David Williamson to rewrite *The Tyrannicide Brief* by Geoffrey Robertson. All these productions were being produced in the early part of 2006.

Smith asks the question is it a “flawed project to translate something written for the page for a three dimensional set, with flesh and blood actors?” This study has demonstrated that the response to that question is definitely in the negative. The popularity of creating adaptations and the sophistication of execution shows that, rather than making an occasional decision to adapt, theatre artists are actively searching for appropriate and interesting literature to adapt for live performance. The International theatre scene echoes that of Australia as illustrated by the following few examples: Margaret Atwood created a highly regarded adaptation of her own novel *The Penelopiad* performed in both London and Ottowa as a ground breaking collaboration between the Royal Shakespeare Company (UK) and the National Arts Centre (Canada) early in 2007 (Munday) and in 2006 the estates of James Joyce and George Orwell tried to block controversial adaptations being performed at the International Edinburgh Festival (Malvern 30).
Summary of Findings
This study set out to consider three main questions: 1) Why do theatre artists choose to adapt a novel for live performance rather than write a new work? 2) How do theatre artists proceed after choosing to adapt a novel for live performance? 3) How do theatre artists adapt different styles and types of literature and novels in order to come up with contemporary new works? These questions evolved from the progression of the researcher’s earlier creative work in the performing arts that had included various forms of literature being translated, interpreted, being used as inspiration for, and adapted, for live performance. The evolution of professional work, for this study, was in considering one novel as the basis for adaptation for live performance. A novel, *Vita Brevis* by Jostein Gaarder, was successfully adapted and the playscript forms Chapter Three in this exegesis. The findings for each of the questions set for the study will be summarised in turn:

**Why Do Theatre Artists Choose to Adapt a Novel for Live Performance Rather Than Write a New Work?**
After reviewing the literature, conducting the research with theatre artists who have recently, or consistently, adapted novels for live performance, and undertaking an adaptation of a novel ready for a live performance, it was possible to identify the main motivations for choosing to undertake adaptation projects. These have been discussed in detail in Chapter Four: **Why Theatre Artists choose to adapt novels for live performance.** The key factors seen in the motivations given by the theatre artists for wanting to adapt a novel for live performance were consistent despite the different types and styles of theatre that eventuated from the adaptations. The motivations, often interrelated, were essentially a) popularity of the story, characters, or cultural aspects; b) exploration of social or psychological fear; and, c) the taking up of large themes that challenge audiences. A
novel chosen for adaptation could be for one or a combination of these motivations and in Chapter 4 Vita Brevis was shown to respond to these motivations. As well, The Kiterunner by Khaled Hosseini was given as an example of a work from The American Place Theatre being prepared for performance. Both examples clearly responded to each of these motivations.

This articulation of the motivations provides some useful and reflective criteria when considering works for future adaptations and the following examples are two works being considered by the researcher to continue and extend the work resulting from the adaptation of Vita Brevis:

- **Popular culture, or topics that are fashionable:** A verse-novel being planned for adaptation is Akhenaten by the Australian poet and novelist, Dorothy Porter. The “heretic” Egyptian pharaoh has been the subject of a modern opera by Philip Glass, and the religious revolution of Akhenaten’s beliefs and ideas together with the mystery of his death should appeal to contemporary audiences.

- **Social or psychological fear:** Another piece of literature planned for adaptation is A very easy death, by Simone de Beauvoir. The work chronicles the death of author’s mother, her own feelings and actions when faced with the reality of death, and the difficulties encountered with medical staff and the issues surrounding medicine for the sake of medicine rather than quality of life.

- **Large themes to challenge an audience:** Akhenaten not only offers some insight into the ancient culture of Egypt, but Porter also considers the controversial family dynamics within this famous dynasty, and the self-reflection and self-obsession of a powerful individual who obviously looks and thinks differently from others in the society.
Chapter Four also explores other considerations the theatre artists who were interviewed put forward as subsidiary ideas that informed their reasoning when choosing to adapt novels or literature for live performance rather than writing a new original work. Many of these considerations are sub-ideas, or further explanations contained within, or extensions of, the above main motivations. These other considerations included: a) sympathy with or exploration of how some people live or have lived; b) embracing the challenge of shedding light on some aspect of the novel through the medium of theatre; c) the desire to bring stories to a new or wider audience; d) the lack of “gutsy” material in original playwrighting; e) commissions of adaptations for specific theatre companies; and, f) the attraction of images or visual material within the text that could be translated to the stage. Again, to explain these ideas briefly Akhenaten and A very easy death have been used as examples:

- **Sympathy or exploration about how some people live or have lived.** Both proposed books give the opportunity for this consideration. De Beauvoir looks closely at the effects of a lingering debilitating death of a close relative, particularly the relationship of mother-daughter. The relationship with medical officials and the power over personal decision-making is explored.

- **Embracing the challenge of shedding light on some aspect of the novel through the medium of theatre.** As the proposed adaptation of Akhenaten is still in the dreaming stages the theatrical exploration will be a collaboration with a “contemporary circus” in order to explore the possibilities in acrobatic and aerial physicality to emphasise the surveillance, secrecy and plotting prevalent in power and rulership. Counter-plans (or dreams) to this first plan will be to explore the “new age-ness” or proposed “alien” influence that surrounds some so-called “theories” of ancient Egypt in the time of Akhenaten’s reign through the collaboration with science
through holograms or holographic images infused in the theatrical presentation.

• **The desire to bring stories to a new or wider audience.** The story of Akhenaten is not widely known by the general community. His wife, Nefertiti, has more notoriety as a famous ancient Egyptian. Philip Glass’s opera presents the pharaoh as a mystic and enlightened being. The opera is one of a trilogy that includes two other enlightened humans in *Ghandi and Einstein*. The many changes that Akhenaten brought to the culture of ancient Egypt, the depiction of family in hieroglyphs, the creation of a capital city of Aten removed from the rest of society, the religious changes imposed on the population, are stories that might provoke interest in audiences.

• **The lack of “gutsy” material in original playwrighting:** The identification of language and good writing that the researcher found in the novel *A very easy death* was similar to the realisation, when reading *Vita Brevis*, that it would be possible to write an original play around the themes delivered in the books. However, the beauty of the writing and clarity of language the authors of the literature achieve in bringing difficult relationship issues to an audience would be difficult to equal by the researcher if an attempt at original playwriting were made. Original playwriting is preferable when original ideas occur, but the writing by the authors in these two instances is very engaging and therefore a much better option for the adaptation for theatrical presentation.

• **Commissions of adaptations for specific theatre companies.** Whilst not having been approached by a theatre company for a commission in this regard, discussions have started regarding the possibility of adapting *Akhenaten* for performance by a contemporary circus, and a short excerpt of *A very easy death* has been presented for live performance together with a live musician,
with the intention of expanding this in the final adaptation for performer, visual art, and musicians within a designated arts space. Therefore, a specific company is envisioned for one of the adaptations, and specific performing and visual artists and space for the second.

- **Theatre artists are attracted by images or visual material within the text that could be translated to the stage.** The depiction of the pharaoh Akhenaten in hieroglyphs shows a male physically different from the norm of masculine prowess. Porter explores this possible fascination with beauty, sensuality, and different physicality in her poems. The image of having the main character played by a female, and having small athletic acrobatic creatures swinging, crawling and climbing around a set that allows spying and secret meetings was an early image that made the novel appealing for adaptation and prompted initial discussions with the novelist/poet.

At this stage, these motivations and the sub-set of considerations are not being proposed as a list of criteria for choosing a novel for adapting as they were identified by the theatre artists after reflecting on the choices they had already made. However, further analysis and critical application in considering future adaptations like those by Dorothy Porter and Simone de Beauvoir may provide a basis for proposing a clear set of criteria in a future research study.

**How Do Theatre Artists Proceed After Choosing to Adapt a Novel for Live Performance?**

This question proved very difficult to answer definitively when searching the literature, as theatre artists were more able to answer the question of why adapt novels or literature than how to adapt novels or literature.
Therefore, in the wider study, theatre artists were asked specifically about their process of adaptation during the research interviews. The Journal (Appendix B), which documented the creative process of adapting \textit{Vita Brevis}, as well as observations of theatre artist, Wynn Handman, from The American Place Theatre, were also included in the data collection to look at this question. Discussion of the data is explored in Chapter Five.

Essentially, even though specifically asked to articulate their process of adaptation, theatre artists found it difficult to put words to the creative process that aligned very closely with the creative process of making/writing/directing theatre, whether the production be an adaptation or an original work, and indeed, after initial steps in approaching the text of the novel were in train, the other processes of directing, workshopping and re-writing took over from merely working on the adapted text.

The only theatre artist interviewed who had managed to articulate a defined process for adapting a novel for live performance was Elise Thoron, Artistic Associate at The American Place Theatre. The steps she provided were for a specifically focussed type of production used by that theatre company. These steps did, however, provide a welcome and clear procedure that assisted in achieving the first drafts of the adaptation of \textit{Vita Brevis}. The Journal begins in November 2004 and chronicles research appropriate to the exploration of the “world of the play,” which reflects similar explanations by the theatre artists interviewed. It wasn’t until March 2005 with Thoron’s steps that the researcher felt confident to begin adapting the text of the novel. The discussion within the Journal and the responses to Thoron’s stated instructions provide interesting insight into a creative process that ended up being anything but systematic.

Working alongside Wynn Handman at The American Place Theatre meant that a practical application of adaptation could be observed. Appendix C
chronicles this Artistic Director’s process of adapting texts from talking about the ideas through to rehearsed playreading. It needs to be noted that the observation entries reinforced the difficulty of teasing the process of adaptation from the process of direction once Handman had done the initial work on the text. The adapted text underwent changes, but these happened as Handman began working with the actors and engaged them in his techniques of directing performance. The initial practical steps shown by Wynn Handman of adapting the text of the novel along with the articulated process by Elise Thoron, were applied in the adaptation for this study and discussed in the Journal (Appendix B) in the entries March through April, 2005.

The articulated actions in working with the text were as follows, and have been quoted from the Interview with Elise Thoron:

1. “To only use text from the novel”. This action was used in adapting *Vita Brevis*.
2. “Confine the performance to under an hour”. This action makes the adaptor consider which text from the novel is crucial to the performance and edit accordingly.
3. “You will only use 1-2 actors, telling the story without relying on elaborate sets, costumes or lighting”. Since the adaptation of *Vita Brevis* is planned for the researcher to perform, this action was adhered to, and is another method for editing the text.
4. “Strong journey for a central character, whose voice has urgency in telling his/her story”. This action was adhered to but necessitated reorganisation of the text, and the weaving of additional text (that of Seneca’s *Medea*) throughout. Handman himself did this when adapting *Dorothy and Red* by using the diaries of both journalists even though they were separate publications.
5. “Other characters with distinct voices, clear scenes of conflict”.

Wynn Handman would sometimes write for more than one
character for the one (or two) actor(s) to perform. The Medea performance and the creation of “a friend” in Vita Brevis provided the scenes of conflict.

6. “Lively, active language—good for spoken word performance”.

Wynn Handman’s practice at this point would be to photocopy the pages chosen as possible selections, and to highlight with a marker pen those lines, sentences and phrases that would “roll off the tongue and be performable”. Further edits would happen through the process of transcribing and reading. This action was crucial for Vita Brevis in order to find the text that was performable and that would carry the beauty of expression and visual information for the audience.

As with the “why adapt” research question there were further considerations given by the Theatre Artists regarding “how” they worked on creating their adaptations. These considerations were:

• “Ideas and images from the novel being “played around with” in the rehearsal room”. Those theatre artists who started with visual images tended to take those images into the rehearsal room and work with the text alongside improvisation and experimentation.
• “The necessity to cut characters and sub-plots from the original work”. The length and complexities of novels required the theatre artists to consider carefully what they wanted the theatre performance to say and in so doing what and who they could delete whilst still conveying the main ideas in order to present a complete work.
• “The need to stay “true” to the novel”. This was mainly done in two ways. First, as a counter to the above point, some theatre artists chose to present the whole book and found ways in which to do this. For example, John Collins’ theatre company Elevator
Repair Service presented *The Great Gatsby* in its entirety over two evenings of performance. This also required a commitment by the audience. Secondly, some theatre artists used the edited text “verbatim” from the novel when choosing the dialogue for the performer(s).

- “The necessity to create a new work independent of the novel.”
  Theatre and performance have qualities very different from other expressive forms, particularly the written form of novels and literature, and the form of film, which is the predominant adaptive “art” form from novels. Theatre is ephemeral, immediate, participative and liminal, and the theatre artists emphasised these qualities when creating their new work.

- “Grappling with features of the novel that are difficult to dramatise.” These elements, though difficult, tended to be the way the theatre artists solved some of their problems. For instance, flashbacks in time, thoughts of the protagonist, and presenting action in different locations and/or times, were examples of problems given by the theatre artists interviewed. Music was sometimes incorporated to express elements and change the structure, and other dramatic devices like specific theatre styles were sometimes employed where the audience would understand without explanation.

- “The desire for personal interpretation rather than the novelist’s stated theme.” Although seemingly similar to the desire to create a new work, this theme was more about the theatre artist’s motivations in choosing to adapt. Very well known novels could be chosen, but an element or aspect of the novel would bring the theatre artist’s main intention to the surface with a new way of looking at the work.

- “The expectation that playwrights and other theatre artists were more able than novelists to adapt for the stage.” The theatre artists
interviewed for this study were “on the lookout” for good literature and novels to adapt, and had practised the process more than once. Even though, in most cases, a specific process had not been articulated, the theatre artists expressed a confidence in finding a way to create successful theatre through adapting. Those who also worked on original plays discussed the ways in which the skills of directing and playwrighting were brought to bear on the need to adapt.

- “The use of exciting language for the theatre and the need to use the first person and present tense”. In order for the actor(s) to be “in the moment”, those texts that the theatre artists were determined would make good theatre were first adapted to the present tense and first person and language was chosen that would easily “roll off the tongue” and engage the audience.

- “The differences between the development of characters in performance and in written work”. When determined to use a novel for live performance the theatre artists had to work hard to find ways to let the audience learn what they needed to know about characters through actions and behaviour rather than from what was said.

- “Composing the structure of the work for live performance”. Some theatre artists likened this to creating music. The work needed to have structure and the language needed to be appealing and engaging for the audience. Often the “drama” of the language in the novels had been part of the initial appeal to work on the adaptation, but the artists needed to mould the work into a dramatic shape.

These problems or considerations that were identified by the theatre artists for this study were held very prominently in the consciousness of the
researcher when proceeding with the adaptation of \textit{Vita Brevis}, and all of them had bearing on the final draft of the playscript.

\textbf{How Do Theatre Artists Adapt Different Styles and Types of Literature and Novels in Order to Come up with Contemporary New Works?}

As if to reinforce the current predominance of adaptation in Australian theatre, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation also broached the subject via television on its \textit{Sunday Arts} Program when three international artists who were attending the Sydney Writers Festival were interviewed on the topic of adaptation. The introduction by Virginia Trioli emphasised the idea of adaptation to film. However, the three artists were from different media and a broader enquiry into the topic of adaptation was initiated for the main body of the interview. During the conversation many of the considerations for adaptation alluded to in Chapters One and Two of this study were referred to in the television program.

For example, the question of whether the interpretation of an existing work, including theatre, was “adaptation” in itself was posed. One of the guests, the German theatre director, Walter Asmus, regarded as the foremost interpreter of Samuel Beckett, talked about his “interpretation” of a Beckett text essentially being an adaptation as it wasn’t just the performance of the original text, and it had differences from Beckett’s own work even though they had worked together on productions.

The progression from one art form already adapted into other different art forms as one or a series was also discussed. This was because the other two guests on the program were Susan Orlean who wrote \textit{The Orchid Thief}, which was adapted for the film \textit{Adaptation} (which was also about the topic of adapting novels to film), and Mikel Rouse, an American composer, who used Truman Capote’s novel \textit{In Cold Blood} as the basis for his one-person
opera. The artists all concurred that regardless of all other issues the adapted work was a totally new creation that stood independently of the original work or idea.

The creation of a new work, in each case very different to the novel, was one of the main findings that the study brought to the surface, even though, as discussed in the Literature Review in Chapter Two, this also provided a tension for theatre artists who struggled with how much or how little the new work needed to stay true to the novel.

**Implications for the Adaptation of *Vita Brevis***

The specific adaptation of *Vita Brevis* fulfilled and supported all the identified motivations for adaptation that came from interviewing the theatre artists, as well as documenting one process of adaptation from the text of the novel through to creation of a playscript ready for rehearsal. These will be briefly covered in the following paragraphs with the pertinent words bolded to refer to the previously noted motivations:

The novel *Vita Brevis* is by a world-renowned novelist who also wrote the best-selling novel *Sophie’s World*, Jostein Gaarder. The **popularity** of the author would create interest in an adapted work for the stage.

The novel concerns a woman who has been deserted by her long-time partner who also took their son. She is a woman who has lost everything she holds dear, yet lives in hope her lover will return. During the performance she lives through experiences that bring her to an **understanding of her situation**, which gives her a changed outlook to her life.
The adaptation also gives the opportunity to glimpse elements of Roman North African society in the fourth century, and a woman’s place in the culture of the time.

The novel *Vita Brevis* is presented by the author as a series of letters. Adapting for the stage meant that elements or themes from the novel could be seen in an entirely new way through performance, which is a completely different form from the epistolary novel.

Not many people know the story of Augustine, and fewer would be aware of his concubine’s story, as she is absent from historical documents. As Augustine is a recognised “father” of the Catholic church and has had a impact on mores adopted by a large section of the community, the presentation of a story from his earlier years would provide interest and “shed light” on a little known topic.

Even though the researcher has written original plays and created original work, the novel *Vita Brevis* specifically deals with a topic that inspired new ideas when reading through the book, which led to the conviction that an adaptation would result in a much better product that writing an original play.

Several academics (colleagues from the Humanities Faculty), literary (professional writers) and theatre experts (reviewers from Melbourne Writers Theatre) have commented on draft versions of the playscript for *Vita Brevis*-in progress: each critical review was acted upon in order to achieve the most dramatically satisfying product prior to rehearsal.

Because much of the process of adapting *Vita Brevis* was similar to undertaking research that would normally be done in order to explore the “world” of the play, a Review of Literature also reviewed texts for the
specific intention of creating a work set in fourth century Roman Africa about the separated spouse of St. Augustine: this Review is included as Appendix A. To set the work in the context of the researcher’s previous theatre creations, it was necessary to take a limited review of theatre practitioners whose work had been both inspirational to the researcher’s prior theatre work, and, had shown adaptation as a main feature of their productions. The discussion relating to the style of theatre and influencing theatre artists is included in Chapter One of this exegesis.

The adaptation of *Vita Brevis* now sits ready for rehearsed reading and workshopping in order to complete the process of realising the work for live performance.

**Contribution of the Work to the Field**

As was made evident in Chapter Two, very little has been written about the topic of adapting novels for live performance. The references that were made to any earlier processes and productions were mostly found in introductions to playscripts, allusions to specific productions within texts on the theatre, and some interviews in various forms of media. Therefore, this study has made a considered first step into the specific discussion of—and exploration of processes for—adapting novels for live performance.

From the examples presented in the two ABC interviews mentioned earlier, it is clearly evident that the wider theatre world values, embraces, and seeks, the products of adaptation, and this will not decrease in the future. Indeed, the notion of adaptation has proliferated, not only in the Australian theatre scene but also overseas. This study will give voice to the ideas of many of those artists involved in contemporary work in producing adaptations of novels for live performance.


**Directions for Further Research**

**More Intense and Focussed Scrutiny of the Adapting Process**

It was relatively easy to discern the motivations theatre artists had in using novels as the basis for creating new theatre works. These motivations were fairly fixed and more exploration is not expected to illumine any findings further than, perhaps, to use them to explore a set of possible criteria when choosing a novel for adaptation. However, the sub-ideas that came to the surface through the investigations in this study regarding the further considerations by theatre artists when undertaking adaptations highlighted the individual responses and ways of working that could continue to interest the contemporary theatre world. Applying the motivations and sub-ideas as a way to examine the suitability of novels and other forms of literature would be one focussed future direction for future research.

The theatre artists interviewed for this study each had different perspectives and priorities in their working processes. The elements they considered in directing theatre works were often inextricably linked to the same considered elements when adapting novels and these often difficult-to-articulate processes will always be of value to the world of contemporary theatre. Observing ways of creating theatre by working alongside theatre artists like Wynn Handman, and the documenting of thoughts through the process of the reflective journal, are two types of qualitative data that need deep thought and analysis in order to articulate the highly inarticulate process of creativity. As theatre artists find ways to articulate processes, and individual theatre artists’ ways of working can be investigated through observation, the richer will be the benefits for all theatre artists involved in the future process of self-examination and research on the products of contemporary colleagues. These attempts at
articulation are necessary in order to demonstrate and explain inspirational processes of creativity. Reflective journal-keeping in new adaptive studies should tease out more finite descriptions of these elusive processes and provide an intensely interesting focus for further research.

Therefore, this study is the first of more intensive investigations into the processes of adaptation. The theatre world will benefit from learning about the mechanics of inspiration translated to practice, along with the documentation of ways some theatre artists work.

**Theatre for Young People and the Difference Between Original Plays and Adapted Performances**

The theatre artists interviewed for this study included directors and writers from the field of Theatre for Young Audiences. Their work was not dwelt upon in a very detailed way, but was necessary given its history of drawing from pre-existing literature. Further interrogation of writers and directors in this field is worthy of exploration, particularly to acknowledge that in the field of children’s theatre the rationale is similar to the film community’s: that is, a previously published children’s novel or a fairytale will have the “name recognition” that an original story will not.

Also, the youth theatre artists, more regularly than the other theatre artists interviewed, wrote original playscripts as well as adapting novels and other literature for live performance. Greg Lissaman, for example, emphasised that his company, Jigsaw, only occasionally adapted texts for performance, and those chosen “sparked” something inside him. It would be a very interesting study to interrogate further the processes undertaken by playwrights and directors like Lissaman, Sterling, and Saar, to compare similarities and differences in the creation of adaptations and original plays, particularly as there is an ongoing debate put forward by the
academic and playwright, Pamela Sterling, which centres on criticism that the proliferation of adaptations has hindered the development of original scripts.

**Similarities and Differences in the Process(es) of Adapting for Film and Live Performance**

In the existing literature about the process of adaptation, there were several texts that discussed adapting literature to film. McFarlane, in particular, proposed an approach to analysis of adaptations that provides a series of criteria for examining the similarities in the forms of the novel and film. These “narrative” criteria could be transposed to film, whereas the ways in which novel and film were different, the “enunciation”, needed much more thought and investigation, since these criteria were more about the means by which the narrative in film is displayed and organised, and thus went beyond words. McFarlane said that it was possible to examine these two forms of novel and film because they were documents—fixed forms—whereas stage performance was ephemeral. Therefore, there are interesting and revealing questions that could be asked if McFarlane’s approach to adaptation was extended to include live performance. Two major steps would need to be taken. Firstly, McFarlane’s approach was written in the mid-nineteen nineties, so developments in film techniques may have bearing on the need to revise aspects of his approach. Secondly, live performances would need to be recorded in order to analyse them as forms of documents using the same criteria as McFarlane has done with novel and film, even though recording of live events changes the quality and character of the performance. The question then might be: does taking away the ephemeral quality of the theatre performance make the analysis of the approach redundant? Regardless of this last point there are certainly some good questions that could be asked about what the three narratives forms of film, theatre and novels demand of and allow their creators, and it
might be possible to have a coherent listing and discussion of some of those features that “work” for novels but do not “work” on stage. Further research could extend McFarlane’s approach and provide a comparison of these art forms, with indications about what is peculiar to each, and examples of how adaptors have tried to find equivalents.

**Embracing the Stated Difficulties and Solving Problems for Live Performance**

During the study it became apparent that some types of novels and writing were deemed particularly difficult to adapt and were therefore to be avoided. For example, in Chapter Two under the subheading “Key factors from the literature”, there is a reference to Martha Nussbaum’s discussion about Virginia Woolf’s *To the Lighthouse* as being inappropriate for live theatre due to its inner dialogue taking up much of the text. That part of the Literature Review provoked a desire to investigate this assertion later (as further research) as it is the researcher’s opinion that theatre, or performance, in the 21st century, along with the integration of technology, provides more tools for solving the problems of these inner dialogues. Shakespeare wrote them within his plays, the most famous of all being Hamlet’s “to be”…. These “problems” are in evidence in *Vita Brevis*: it is the woman’s inner thoughts and dialogues that Gaarder gives her on the page that were challenges to resolve as theatrical problems in live performance. The figure or hanging with Augustine’s clothing is the device used to enable Floria to direct her “answers” to Augustine’s statements in the *Confessions*. Also, the *Medea* passages are her chance to “channel” her feelings dramatically in order to reflect and release her emotions further as the play progresses. Therefore, there is more investigation to be undertaken regarding solving the problems that difficult novels might provide when theatre artists determine to adapt them for live performance.
Taking the Process Used in this Study Further

As indicated in the section in this chapter under “how to adapt” novels for live performance, a process was stumbled upon in combination with the interviewing of theatre artists, reflecting on previous practice, and considering the methods that two of the theatre artists articulated during the interviews. The process, outlined by Elise Thoron, was used as part of the practical application of adapting *Vita Brevis*. The questions Thoron addresses, along with the suggestions and observations of the process undertaken by Wynn Handman, provided the basis for the adaptation for *Vita Brevis*. As this was the first novel adapted by the researcher the Journal that chronicled the journey will be invaluable for further reflection, research and study, both for the process of creativity, and the process of adaptation. It will be essential to pursue the steps outlined in the “how” section with further scrutiny on new adaptation projects in order to propose a tested process for the researcher and other theatre artists to engage with when planning new adapted novels.

Endnote:

During this study it was very interesting to note that all the theatre artists had thought about the difference between the two art forms of literature and dramatic performance as completely different from and incomparable to each other. The following opinions were all offered at the end of the interviews, almost as culminating observations about adaptation. The comments were rarely in response to a specific question; it was as if the preceding questions had brought them to a place of clarification in their own minds about rationalising the qualities of the two differing art forms.

John Romeril explained what he saw as the vast difference between the two forms of novel and theatre:
A reader, usually a solitary reader, drives a book. An audience having a collective or shared experience unfolding in real time drives a play. Time is something that any readers control themselves, they put the book down, they take a phone-call, they control the rate at which the pages are turned. [It] doesn’t happen in the theatre, it’s quite another process to film, audiences cannot even affect film except by buying a ticket, it’s locked in, on the wall. Even your laughter is not going to affect those actors (J.Romeril, Personal communication 2005).

Caroline Lee agreed with this position. She believed that when making an adaptation she created an autonomous artwork that had its own life:

It becomes something other but it still has its strings to the original but it’s almost like an adjunct. You don’t want to replace the experience of reading the book, you want to say these two different sorts of artistic versions co-exist and sit nicely with each other or make you ask questions about each other… (Wright Things on Sunday).

John Collins hoped that every response to the question “why adapt”, and “how to adapt”, would be completely different:

Part of me hopes that each encounter between theatre and literature in that way is something that happens from scratch, that starts from nothing, and is a completely honest response to the particular material of that novel, the particular situation of that theatre (J.Collins, Personal communication 2005)

Chris Drummond summed up the whole unpredictability of adaptation and theatre thus:

Maybe you would start with the scientist, and an artist, that it would begin as clumsily as Night Letters did for Susan and I, where we would talk a lot and then something would suddenly become exciting, and then we would give one hundred per cent to that. The moment that that seemed to lose its energy, you change the direction, and not be concerned about that change in direction, trusting that eventually things start to reoccur and patterns start to reveal themselves. And I’m a bit Buddhist about that, I think that if you remain open and you remain a purist, and you have the time, those are all the elements that you need, and you have like-minded talented people. Eventually, a pre-existing form reveals itself. And once you
become aware of it, then you know what the rules are… then you start to bring in all your practical dramaturgical skills and your technical skills. But in the first vital phase, it’s about being naïve. It’s about being hungry and persistent (C.Drummond, Personal communication 2005).

From the Journal—April 11th, 2005

Adapting is not easy though. I’ve started, and choosing the sentences is hard. Finding and telling the story in *Vita Brevis* is difficult. But I will do it. I must chain myself to it.
WORKS CITED


---. Personal Interview. 8 Jan. 2005.


