

## Conclusion

### Seeing 'new' sea/land(s) from the beach.

I have argued that, in a particular socio-historical context, solo performance has been a form of theatre that is suited to New Zealand. In the instances that I have explored closely, *The End of the Golden Weather* in 1959, *Coaltown Blues* in 1984 and *Michael James Manaia* in 1991, the performance is designed more with the marae and community hall in mind than the Theatres Royal that were built by the English settlers. As with the action of the marae and the hall, *The End of the Golden Weather*, *Coaltown Blues* and *Michael James Manaia* involve a directness and immediacy that come with the gathering of a community, native and settler, to discuss issues of importance to that community.

The dynamics of solo performance seem to have reached a local audience in a way that the conventional theatre with ensemble cast has struggled to do. The conventional theatre's resemblance to theatre from a former home on the other side of the world seems more likely to affirm a sense of distance and isolation. The actor alone, on the other hand, steps out from the established theatre community to confront the isolation that comes with the attempt to maintain the colonial idea of New Zealand as another England. The actor alone confronts the sense of isolation that is central to the New Zealand experience by travelling between settlement, town and city, and referring to a past held in common with communities that are in the process of working out who they might be.

As discussed in the last chapter, it may be that the idea of the actor alone is no longer relevant to New Zealand. But performances such as *Hatch or the Plight of Penguins* suggest that it is possible to exploit or revitalise some of the principles of

the actor alone for ongoing theatre work in New Zealand. In particular, much can be learnt from the way the primary relationship between the performer and spectator can reflect/comment upon the relationship between individual and community. In the idea of actor alone the search for a personal identity is related to a similar search at a collective level. There is the possibility of a sense of community – a coming-together that does not resolve difference, tensions and conflicts but sets the stage for the discussion (hui) that might make such things possible. In this conclusion, I consider what might be taken from the example of the actor alone in New Zealand. I begin by discussing the stance or position taken by the solo performer and how this might be useful for reaching an audience in New Zealand. How might the direct relationship the solo performer establishes with an audience be exploited to invigorate New Zealand theatre?

Differences in class and ethnicity notwithstanding, I feel a certain kinship with the likes of Mason, Thompson, Broughton and Moriarty. With the attempt by Mason and Thompson to create a National Theatre and Broughton and Moriarty's attempts to develop Theatre Marae as an indigenous theatre, I see the potential for a New Zealand theatre that can be immediate and relevant. I am excited by the search and uncharted possibilities of a theatre that grows from, and in relation to, the search for New Zealand identity, and that it might possibly have some effect upon the contours of New Zealand culture – a theatre that goes beyond individual identity politics to create a wider socio-political theatre that engages performer and audience in a dialogue. In doing so, the theatre can respond to a sense of aloneness and an isolation that is both culturally embedded in New Zealand and exacerbated by a contemporary sense of alienation. In different ways, the attempt to commune with an audience according to

contemporary concerns shared in common has been central to the work of the practitioners mentioned above.

At the same time, I'm wary of the way attempts to create a National Theatre or Theatre Marae (or Marae Theatre in the way Broughton uses the term) may also undermine the immediacy of theatre – possibly the very essence of theatre. That is, the attempt to explore collective concerns are affected by the recurring desire to prove a coming-of-age, to be 'all grown up now', or to use Mason's phrase, to be the "made man".

Mason, Thompson, Broughton and Moriarty, in their attempt to establish a distinctive theatre of Aotearoa/New Zealand, all pursued theatre projects that seem geared towards building the foundation for an established theatre. Such an approach suggests the desire to be mature and complete. This approach to theatre suggests an attempt to be, if not the same as then very similar to, the colonial model from England that was adapted by similar post-colonial cultures of the former British Empire. The focus of the careers of Mason, Thompson, Moriarty and Broughton before turning to solo performance had been on creating plays that combined different forms and styles, particularly from European and Maori traditions. What seems to have happened with plays like *The Pohutukawa Tree*, *First Return* and *Te Hokinga Mai* is that in an effort to create an indigenous theatre, playwrights have worked towards an established ideal of theatre that was introduced by the English settlers. This kind of theatre seems to lend itself to a sense of resolution both in form and content suggesting that identity has now been settled – reflected, supposedly, by an ongoing maturity of a New Zealand theatre audience. It seems, though, that the eventual decision to go it alone by each of them reveals that identity in New Zealand is, if anything, in between, liminal

and therefore uncertain as to the constitution of its body, let alone what it might look like as it grows older.

The naturalistic play (based on the well-made play model) continues to be the basis for what is considered theatre in New Zealand. It seems to be the model to which playwrights aspire. This form of theatre seems to be the model that would underline a National Theatre – something that is often called for by those within the New Zealand theatre industry. Every so often, a prominent figure in New Zealand theatre will call for a national theatre, claiming that the time is now ripe for the directing of theatre towards a central model and organization. The theatre audience/community in New Zealand, it is claimed, is now at an age that allows it to appreciate its own images, ideas, and accents on stage – without grimacing or laughing with embarrassment. Other recent experiments such as The Actor's Company have, like The New Zealand Players in the 1950s, had limited success and found it extremely difficult to remain viable. It seems that these kinds of experiments also turn towards staging classic theatre pieces from elsewhere. Meanwhile, New Zealand plays are relegated to school curricula and turned into museum pieces.

The experience of solo performance in New Zealand suggests that embracing marginality and hybridity works better in New Zealand. This is evident in Mason's forays with *The End of the Golden Weather*, further explored by Thompson in *Coaltown Blues* and most fully exploited by the collaborators who produced *Michael James Manaia*. From the earliest to the most recent, the solo form has gone from being a last choice (that to the surprise of the makers goes on to be incredibly successful) to a deliberately crafted piece of theatre that aims to provoke its audience. Not only has the adaptability and manoeuvrability of the form allowed for better access into the places and spaces that typify the New Zealand experience, but the

directness of the relationship between spectator and performer has also allowed for a consideration of what is shared in common.

By referring to the experience of those who feel isolated, *The End of the Golden Weather*, *Coaltown Blues* and *Michael James Manaia* have represented the perspective that seems to respond to a similar sense of marginality in a New Zealand audience searching for a sense of communality. It makes sense that the liminality of such an audience/community should find a corresponding form that sits between more conventional ideas of theatre and presentational forms such as the lecture and the sermon. The alternative approach offers many different possibilities in reaching an audience. The actor alone is more likely to innovate with form and style in an attempt to come to terms with the material reality of a particular environment. It seems logical to look to such individuals as a reflection of the culture in which they live and explore through them a way to live in that culture. The idea of the actor alone suggests that the solo performer is never entirely either alone or on the outside but just as much a product of his environment as the 'insider'.

The actor alone points to a way of approaching theatre that is pertinent to New Zealand. Through the example of the actor alone, it is possible to say that it is more beneficial to forget about trying to be mature and, instead, embrace the youthful aspect of the New Zealand condition. Perhaps, being childlike, curious and naïve is a way to avoid the pervasive and perpetual drive of globalisation towards the homogenizing of identity. The unsettled aspect of solo performance is a very good match for an equally unsettled, and therefore alive New Zealand identity that can change and transform into different forms rather than being stranded, beached or grounded by imitating forms from elsewhere. Rather than seeking continuity and a seamless identity, the use of solo performance beginning with Mason and *The End of*

*the Golden Weather*, suggests that it is worthwhile refusing the temptation to grow up, or to become a “made man”.

At the same time, the rejection of such a ‘male’ stance for a supposedly fluid, ‘female’ one seems fraught with contradiction. In the last chapter, I considered what might be a more ‘female’ approach as suggested by the analysis of Gilbert and Tompkins. Their suggestion that monodrama in post-colonial cultures challenges fixed ideas of identity seemed applicable to the performances I considered. That is to say, the principle of a fluid identity represented by the solo performer can be seen in a number of New Zealand solo performances. This is the case especially with more recent solo performances. But in the New Zealand instance, what seems to be revealed by solo performers that represent more fluid, global identities is the sense of an identities that have already been resolved. That is, these performances that come to represent a sense of fluidity, strangely, suggest identities that have been fixed.

This kind of fixing takes place in different ways. I considered a series of solo performances that may be seen to comment upon a range of identities within New Zealand: female, gay, Indian, Chinese. The idea that these identities are different to the normative position of the white, straight male is central to the stories that the performers tell. That is, the aloneness of the performer on stage may be read as a consequence of the identities he or she has come to represent. These performers have been in some way excluded or marginalised within New Zealand. As a result, they have the potential to offer insight into New Zealand identity in relation to that community as it gathered in the theatre. However, the meeting between the performer and community suggests that a search for an identity that may be found in common is unnecessary. This implies that such an identity already exists. The idea of national identity has been superseded by a larger international or global identity. As a result, it

seems that there is no longer a need to search for identity but, rather, the impetus is on affirming calls for inclusion of others into the wider collective.

This seems to result in a sense of nostalgia. The return to the past is a common feature of solo performance in New Zealand. However, in *The End of the Golden Weather*, *Coaltown Blues* and *Michael James Manaia*, a return to the past comes with the intent to search for a national identity. This is done with an audience in the present and with a view to the future. The nostalgia represented by the solo performances I considered in the last chapter points to a sense of resolution in the present, and, as a result, the future seems already worked out. It seems that all the trouble of negotiating a sense of identity was something that happened long ago. The solo performer comes to stand before the audience with an identity that is complete. There is a sense of unease that is represented by the stories they tell and roles they assume but by the end of the performance this all seems to have been worked out. This kind of fixing that is inherent in the nostalgia of recent solo performance denies the liveness of theatre and the immediacy of the relationship between performer and audience.

To offer another take on this idea of nostalgia in solo performance, I want to consider Jill Dolan's *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope in the Theatre* (2006). In the introduction, I referred to Dolan as offering a counterpoint to the experience of solo performance in New Zealand. Dolan refers to a number of recent solo performances in the United States to support her argument that theatre may offer a sense of hope and a way of finding a sense of community. It is in solo performance – a form with a long and varied past in the United States – that Dolan finds, as an audience member, a sense of hope. She says that this happens by joining with others to hear the stories of those on the margins. In this way, Dolan offers a similar observation to my consideration of solo performance in New Zealand. That by taking

up the margins (an active form of isolation) the solo performance points to the possibilities and potentiality of theatre to create a sense of community.

Dolan doesn't go into great detail about the formal dimensions of the solo performance. That is, she doesn't discuss how this particular form of theatre is useful in achieving communal contact other than to say that the directness of the form is what creates *communitas*. Her focus is on how Turner's idea of *communitas* allows for what she calls "utopian performatives" (Dolan 2006, 5). She explores a number of solo performances as she discusses this concept. In particular, she follows up her introduction of Turner's term by referring to a nostalgic solo performance called *The Chief* (the date of the performance is not mentioned). In her reference to the performance, it is possible to see some of the problems with using nostalgia in solo performance as a way of searching for *communitas*.

Dolan says this solo performance involved actor Tom Atkins re-presenting Art Rooney, the celebrated owner of the Pittsburgh Steelers (an American football team). Dolan refers to herself and her family as locals with a long history in the Pittsburgh area, and that they knew much of this man. She says that she had not known so much about football, but that she was aware of Art Rooney, such was his place of prominence as a local figure to whom was attached a great deal of civic pride. Dolan points out her stance, in relation to the figure portrayed, in order to emphasize the way in which the performance comes to create *communitas*. She says that Atkins-as-Rooney recollecting the events that had made him famous offered a sense of something that was shared in common by the local audience. She says that at the end of the performance:

Spectators approached the thrust stage like anthropologists shopping for museum artefacts, looking closely at the detailed memorabilia decorating the set, touching (until hurried away by ushers) the photographs and objects that called up such nostalgia, such team spirit, such pride. (Dolan 2006, 12)



Dolan suggests that a solo performance which offered an intimate portrayal of a much loved figure, in the company of the community she came from, allowed her to see for the first time what it meant to “root for the team” (Dolan 2006, 12).

It is hard to say without having seen the performance or being part of that community how the performance might have created *communitas*. I might be able to imagine such a performance perhaps, by considering someone playing mountaineer/explorer Edmund Hillary or rugby player Colin Meads and remembering the past with an audience in the present. But imagining such an idea – especially in relation to the kind of biographical performances I have considered – this kind of nostalgia seems problematic in the way it relates to the present. It is possible to see the potential in these kinds of performances to create *communitas*, if the performances engage/confront a sense of unease in the present. This is what the example of the actor alone suggests. He goes in *search* of an identity that he can only find in relation to a community from which he stands apart. Is it possible for a sense of *communitas* to exist without a *search* in the present? Doesn't an efficacious ritual (on the marae for example) offer a challenge to participants – a challenge they must accept if they are to make it through the ritual process?

In the way that Dolan describes *The Chief* it seems as though such a search is unnecessary as a local identity is already established. It sounds similar in relation to a number of solo performances I have seen. These kinds of solo performance open up an interaction between performer and audience that is unusual for mainstream theatre. But many tend to replicate mainstream theatre by offering easily consumed nostalgia for an audience of the already converted. That is, the performance *confirms* a sense of belonging with locals for whom this sports figure is almost an institution, a symbol of

their collective identity. It seems that such a situation is likely to evoke empathy with the other fans according to a set of preconceived ideas about what that community is. Can you really belong to a community if you are not always in the process of searching for one?

At the same time, the performance that Dolan describes may also point to a sense of dissatisfaction with the way ideas of a collective identity are currently imposed. Dolan, for example, suggests that the success of *The Chief* may be related to the way it seems “more local, less corporate, and more ‘real’” (Dolan 2006, 12). This feeling may arise from the situation I discussed at the beginning of the thesis, that is, in relation to feeling alienated from contemporary society. The sense that ‘identity’ is already defined by a market-oriented formula leads to a disconnection from a sense of community, when, ironically, the very opposite is suggested by new technology that is supposed to make connections possible. The introduction of new technology – as with clothes, shoes and food – seems to be directing identity towards niche moulds that typifies and normalizes everyday life and interactions. You are what you buy. This economic logic that pervades everyday life seems to lead to a sense of passivity – possibly a ‘feminising’ of culture – where identity runs fluidly between already established models. The possibility of actually *searching* for an alternative seems impossible. In this way, perhaps the idea of a fluid identity as a reflection of a global, ‘feminized’ culture is as isolating as its former (colonial) ‘male’ counterpart can be.

Reading *Utopia in Performance* from a place that is on the margins of what has recently been an American-centred ‘global’ culture, it is possible to see the spectre of the attacks on the World Trade Centre Towers looming over Dolan’s stance. Dolan acknowledges that this event has rocked that culture and led to ongoing insecurity (Dolan 2006, 3). Dolan’s observations seem to take place in a context

where there is a tendency to normalize, secure and centralise. In American culture there seems to be a heightened degree of conformity and repression. This, she says, has created a need to meet with others as a means of breaking such restrictions. Dolan claims that in this context solo performance offers an example of how theatre can offer just such a break. I think I have a similar hope to that of Dolan: that theatre can offer a place to converse, to explore ideas and to confront the issues that are central to a society at a given time – the theatre as a place of *possibilities*.

Also like Dolan, I think that it is at the margins that there is the possibility of *searching* for a sense of identity and, thereby, a community to belong to. I say this based on my own experiences in the theatre. In particular, let me refer to a recent performance produced by the Free Theatre in 2004 that I performed in: *Ella* (2004). I turn to this performance with a mind to the idea that a place to stand and search is not only at the margins, but also straddling ‘male’ and ‘female’ divides.

*Ella* is a play written by Bavarian playwright, novelist, filmmaker, painter and actor Herbert Achternbusch.<sup>1</sup> It is another example of the kind of provocative and challenging work that can come from the margins. Achternbusch’s work may be seen to reflect his perspective as a Bavarian on the outskirts of a wider German culture. This was the reason why the project under the title *Achternbusch in the Antipodes* was instigated by director Peter Falkenberg and commissioned by the University of Canterbury’s Te Puna Toi Performance Research Project in Christchurch. It offers an interesting counterpoint to New Zealand as a culture on the margins. In this way perhaps, it can be seen as an inversion of the tendency to imitate an international model as a way of getting closer to the centre – taking an international example and

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<sup>1</sup> *Ella*, directed and translated by Peter Falkenberg, Free Theatre, 2004. The performance was part of a larger exhibition of Achternbusch’s work that included two other of his plays: *Susn* and *My Epitaph*. They were all performed at Old Queen’s Theatre in Christchurch, and later that year in Wellington as part of the ‘Listening to the Image’ conference organized by Victoria University for the Australasian Drama Studies Association.

looking back at a New Zealand culture on the margins. Achternbusch deliberately takes up the margins and the position of the marginalized. This includes rejecting inclusion in mainstream artistic groups that look to centralise work under the umbrella of a larger more dominant culture. In 1977, he famously put his money where his mouth is, so to speak, “setting fire to the 20,000 DM Petrarca Prize awarded to him”.<sup>2</sup> For Achternbusch, the margins are an area that he occupies fiercely, an approach that is reflected in the form and content of his work, including *Ella*, which explores his mother’s repeated institutionalisation.

The performance involves a man standing in a chicken coop dressed in a chicken wig and apron, recounting his mother’s life as if he *were* his mother. The performance also involves another actor who plays the mother, sitting catatonic in the background. In the Free Theatre performance, the mother (Marian McCurdy) sat in front of a television, unmoving except for the odd jerk or convulsion. She watched a continuous loop of chickens attacking and eating other, lame chickens – an allusion to the role that television plays in relaying the competitive ethos of a contemporary culture fuelled by rampant consumer-capitalist ideology. The footage is borrowed from the 1969 film *Even Dwarfs Started Small* by Werner Herzog, another Bavarian and one-time Achternbusch collaborator. The son occasionally looks to the mother while he makes coffee for his guests, the audience.

Although this is a two-person performance the dynamics are similar to the relationship between performer and spectator that I have observed in solo performance. It is virtually a solo performance. The mother in *Ella* is essentially an inanimate prop or part of the set, perhaps playing a role akin to the white hat that represents the absent John Middleton Murry in *The Case of Katherine Mansfield*.

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<sup>2</sup> From the Te Puna Toi website: [www.tafs.canterbury.ac.nz/tepunatoi](http://www.tafs.canterbury.ac.nz/tepunatoi).

Mostly, it is the audience to whom he speaks and with whom he interacts during the performance, as he works out (with them) the events that led to his mother's state and, hence, he to his own. It is after recounting the harrowing tale of his mother's life – abused by family members, different men, institutions and authorities – that the son laces his own coffee with cyanide and drinks it. The performance ends with the son dying and the mother screaming.

Achternbusch describes *Ella* as the sequel to Alfred Hitchcock's film *Psycho* (1960). He offers a very different take on the classic thriller, in which the twist in the tale is the appearance of pathological killer Norman Bates dressed as his mother. As a sequel, *Ella* offers an emphasis on the social dimension of such a story rather than the psychological emphasis of *Psycho*. In this way, there is much in *Ella* that is reminiscent of *Michael James Manaia*, which arose from Broughton's looking at the social dimensions of a popular television commercial. In both *Ella* and *Michael James Manaia* the mysterious surroundings and circumstances of the action are revealed only as the performance progresses. Another similarity between the two (as well as a number of other solos) is the aloneness (isolation) of the protagonist as both a literal and symbolic provocation, the meaning of which is to be worked out (searched for) by the audience.

In this way, *Ella* may be seen to represent a coming together of the 'male' and 'female' strands that have been explored through this thesis. Seeing myself as a man playing a woman is, in some ways, a reflection of where I stand. That is, the socio-historical position I find myself in is somewhere between my settler heritage (a masculine tradition), and a participant in a contemporary culture (a feminised culture). I've discovered through writing this thesis that I'm somewhere in between – I'm not sure where. But I want to explore my own performance of these roles in *Ella*, and

how this might show the potentials and limitations of creating theatre by approaching (acknowledging) that identity is liminal rather than well-made and complete. This is suggested by the role-play in *Ella*, where the son attempts to work out who he is by playing his mother. It involves a *search*. The search is reflected in the form and content of the performance, which is a sprawling, rambling monologue that suggests somebody who is disturbed, not-quite-right looking for who he might be – he does so by returning to the past to tell his mother’s story as if he is his mother.

This search for identity might first be considered in the socio-historical context in which *Ella* was written. In the German context, the disturbing element of the son’s search for the mother’s identity (and through her his own) may be seen to reflect a post-Hitler Germany that was struggling to find a sense of national identity. Achternbusch’s mother is of a generation that survived the Second World War, a generation that was shaken from the ‘dream’ of Nazi Germany to the reality of the events undertaken in their name, and an uncertainty of how to cope. The loss of an identity brought on by a sudden collective amnesia is represented in the story of someone whose past is littered with incidences that coincide with the uneasy post-war period. For example, the son-playing-mother recounts that she was made pregnant and then abandoned by an American soldier – possibly signifying the American influence in post-war Germany. In the revelation of such a past, it is possible to read a recent cultural history that has been disowned, never spoken of, in which unspeakable things happened. In the German context, the directness of the son-playing-mother talking to the audience may represent the need of the following generations to confront such silences and reveal the circumstances of the immediate post-war years that led to the catatonia of Germany society.

It is provocative, I think, to make a comparison between a post-war Germany and New Zealand in 2004. It was provocative to me to play the disturbed son of a catatonic mother (country), and to assume the role of that mother to work out who she is – to see that I am her in some ways. Historically, it is possible to see a similarity in the way a past is continuously being forgotten in post-colonial New Zealand, repressed, leading to a sense of unease in its revelation in the present. This has been evident in the solo performances I have considered through the thesis, which arise from a need to negotiate an unresolved past with the audience. In the figures of Firpo and Miss Effie Brett in *The End of the Golden Weather*, Thompson's mother in *Coaltown Blues*, and Manaia in *Michael James Manaia*, there is a representation of the insanity that arises from a past repressed. The condition is ongoing, considering the recurrence of unease/dis-ease and death (even if only peripherally) that recurs in solo performances as diverse as *The Case of Katherine Mansfield*, *A Long Undressing*, *Krishnan's Dairy* and *Hatch or the Plight of the Penguins*. Maybe, stand-up comedy is so popular in New Zealand because it allows the audience to laugh at such instances – a form of therapy perhaps. The recurrence of such forms in New Zealand culture might even be called an obsession.

In each instance of 'madness' explored in solo performance in New Zealand, the character's state of lunacy can be read as part of a social condition that effects/infects the individuals within it. This is also clearly the case in *Ella*, as the story told by the son points to a social attitude maintained by the ailing mother to keep up appearances, to work towards 'cleanliness' and order, even as a series of horrendous events leads to her being ostracized by society. In the Free Theatre production an allusion to the larger world is supported by the chicken images in which such attitudes see the lame and sick being eaten alive by other starving

chickens that are looking to support their own survival. As I have discussed throughout this thesis, theatre in New Zealand seems to support this kind of cleanliness at a social level, making seamless a past that, arguably, has created an unacknowledged class system. In the Free Theatre production of *Ella*, we worked with the idea of cleanliness both in form and content, with, for example, the coffee being made for the audience coming after (or from) an obsessive cleaning of the coffee machine (Ella's only possession) by the son-playing-mother.

This production was unusual in relation to other recent work I had been involved in, which had largely been physical theatre and less spoken text. This performance, however, was mostly text-based which actually brings it closer to what an audience would be used to in terms of theatre in New Zealand. At the same time, the directness of the performance was unusual compared to mainstream theatre in New Zealand and was clearly discomforting for many in the audience who did not quite know where to put themselves. The confrontation was compounded by the set design (Richard Till). The audience were cooped up in a small room. To get to their chairs they had to walk past me (as son-playing-mother) as I stood in a chicken coop (complete with live, often very vocal, chickens). The audience had to pick up and arrange their chairs, which were laid helter skelter within the room. From the beginning, then, the audience were implicated in the performance, their act of walking past Ella and her son and taking up their chairs (tidying the room) all significant, literally and symbolically, in the encounter.

It took me some time, through the course of the performances, to exploit the direct relationship with the audience. A greater exploitation of the situation came as I started to engage the Brechtian potential of multiple role-playing. That is, it was more interesting when I began to play the son *searching* for who his mother might be in



relation to (and with the help of) the audience. To begin with I had a tendency to move towards empathising with the mother (in a Stanislavskian-type way), as if I *were* the mother without maintaining the analytical distance suggested by the son's presence. I think this engendered a similar kind of sympathy from the audience. In doing so, it is easier for an audience to write off the character – to see his behaviour as a personal (psychological) rather than a social problem – just another *psycho*. To engage at a social level makes the likelihood of developing a sense of community all the greater because the audience come to see that they too are implicated.

This reassessment was what the Free Theatre production of *Ella* attempted to provoke. As I say, it seemed to work best when I managed to play the son *searching* for who his mother might be. It was far more interesting maintaining a degree of distance between son and mother, making the act of recollection more inquisitive and urgent rather than continuously hysterical. At these times there seemed to be a greater degree of attention from the audience, a response I felt to be more analytical than voyeuristic (both perhaps). This carried over into the discussions that followed the performance. Rather than simply being patted on the back – perhaps a more usual response to a performance – people wanted to discuss or, alternatively, vent their own experiences of coming into contact with ‘nutters’ or ‘psychos’ and to discuss family members who were ‘a little (or whole lot) out there’. Possibly the most interesting discussions were about the need to share stories, to talk with others as a means of exorcising the voices in our heads – that this is something we do not do for a number of different reasons, and that those reasons are socially oriented and not just individual.

In these instances, it was brought home to me the power that comes with the more direct approach of theatre, the liveness and immediacy that is the very essence

of theatre: talking with the audience – working it out with the community from which I have come. The solo performers that I have read about or spoken to during the writing of this thesis, regularly refer to the idea that the more direct exchange with the audience that comes with solo performance, both in terms of form and content, leads to spectators coming up after the performance and sharing their own experiences. Theatre in this instance is a kind of communion. *Communitas* comes with the *search* for something that is unknown, in the presence of others who share similar as well as different experiences.

For me, the experience with *Ella* pointed to the possibilities that arise when working from the margins. Through the writing of this thesis I have discovered that solo performance has been, at some stages, a form of theatre that, working from the margins, created a sense of national identity but that that may not be the case now. I intend to test this by continuing to work on a solo performance with the benefit of what I have discovered in this thesis. However, in a broader, more general way, this thesis has revealed the ways solo performance has created a live, direct and dynamic New Zealand theatre, and that these methods might be applied to ongoing theatre making here, and, possibly beyond. New Zealand (and the world) is still growing (up?). Standing on the beach it is possible to see that “new” sea/lands may be still be on the horizon (to find, to create, to hope for?). So I re-turn to the land where such hope might be found, catch a bus, and go to the theatre.