

Landscape of the Psyche: the Dream Theatre of Jenny Kemp

Mark Minchinton with Jenny Kemp

I feel concerned to build alternative structures, completely new structures, new ways of thinking, new ways of perceiving and functioning
(Jenny Kemp)

Jenny Kemp (b. 1949) is a leading Australian director and writer, who has produced a small number of innovative productions of her own (nine plays in seventeen years) and others' playtexts since 1977. She has also been an influential teacher of voice, directing and writing in private workshops and at tertiary training institutions. Her highly structured rehearsal process is based on a refined spatial awareness and visual acuity that owe more to the visual arts than to theatre. Her theatre is built around carefully researched spatial dynamics creating intense fields of energy that rub against her scrupulously constructed vocal and aural texts.

[Kemp's] theatrical collages of visual imagery and soundscapes communicate an impression of sensory realms which flow around each other, inviting the inner responses of the spectators. She sets up a space for the spectators to wander around in with their minds, to roam in, amble through, fantasize about, get lost in, to daydream in.
(Tait et al. 1994: 86)

Kemp identifies her father the eminent painter Roger Kemp, whose abstract work hangs in galleries around the world-as a major influence. As a child Kemp tried to understand the dynamics of his paintings whose power she identifies as coming from their spatial dynamics and energy in relationship to the frame. 'That was a starting-point: having to grapple with that, and having to grapple with the abstraction of the paintings, with metaphysics, and coming to terms with something which is non-representational. That causes one to go inside and look for, or to build, a dialogue inside oneself.'

In its precisely constructed spatial, aural, verbal and visual dynamics her theatre recalls Robert Wilson who has said that 'a small dot in a large room will fill the room simply because of the space around it', and for whom 'a position is a role' (in Cole 1992: 152 and 164). * Kemp's work also recalls that of the American director/writer Maria Irene Fornes (who was a painter before she was a playwright); says Fornes:

If I have a feeling that this actor needs to get up and walk over there, then I don't know if it's right until the actor gets up and does it... [What] guides me on how to block scenes and [in the] composition of scenes ... has to do with energies that happen between the shapes and persons, Something happens inside the person when the distance between objects and persons changes.

(Fornes in Cole 1992:47: ellipses and interpolations in original)

After early experimental and collaborative work in the late 1970s, Kemp began to map out her concerns with an adaptation of D. M. Thomas's (1981) novel *The White Hotel*, which investigates Freudian psychoanalysis and the slaughter at Babi Yar in 1944. The cataclysmic collision of the inner and outer worlds of (fictional) opera singer Lisa Erdman, whose premonitions of her death at Babi Yar are psychoanalysed by Freud as hysteria, provided ripe material for Kemp's exploration of inner worlds that defy the rationality of the outer world. Kemp went on to write and direct two productions dealing with her own dream material, *Good Night Sweet Dreams* (1986), and *Call of the Wild* (1989) for the Spoleto Festival in Melbourne. With *Call of the Wild* Kemp worked in detail with the paintings of Paul Delvaux, using them as a catalyst for *mis-en-scène*; Delvaux continues to be central to her work. Kemp's next play, *Remember* (1993), which she also directed, departed from autobiographical concerns in examining the events surrounding a woman's rape, subsequent murder of her assailant, and recovery. *Remember* repeated Kemp's concern with the place and power of the internal worlds of memory and dreams, and their interaction with the outer world of 'reality', through complex and closely choreographed repetitions and simultaneous action, interspersed with songs and dance routines by a two-person



Paul Delvaux, *The Road to Rome*, 1979. Courtesy of Foundation Paul Delvaux

vaudevillian 'chorus'. Her last work (1996) was *The Black Sequin Dress*² commissioned for the Adelaide Festival; it continued her concern with the psychic landscape through repeatedly examining the moment of a woman's entering a nightclub and falling down. [*See the Credit note at the end of this article.]

Kemp's focus on the relationship between inner and outer worlds obviously owes much to Jungian analysis and its development by such therapists as Peter O'Connor (1992) and James Hillman (1990). Her concern with inner dialogues, precise use of space, and a blurring of the boundaries between inside and outside, character and character, character and actor have caused many critics to label her work Surrealist'. While Kemp's interest in the unconscious, her use of fragmented narrative and occasional quotation from other sources to link the apparently banal with the mythic, and her efforts to displace temporal and spatial boundaries seem to invite this label, she herself strongly resists it. Her refusal of the label 'Surrealist' is supported by Alan Read who writes:

The problem of Surrealism for an ethics of performance . . . is that in the celebration of 'coincidence' and the 'marvelous' was lost the real which was supposed to be superseded by the surreal. Surrealism marked an escape from the everyday not a return to it, a belittling of most peoples existence in a process familiar to other avant-gardes predicated on minority status. Though influential within cultural parameters the claims of Surrealism were much more ambitious . . . these claims were not only unfounded but dangerous: 'the real world is accepted since it is transposed instead of being transformed by knowledge'. The Surrealists' revolt against the prose of the world became simply that, a battery of literary techniques.

(Read 1993:

77)*

[*The citation following the ellipsis is from Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life* (London: Verso, 1991), 123]

Kemp's own work is more than just a battery of literary techniques: she attempts to recontextualize what she sees as two essential and connected realms of human experience, the everyday and the inner voices of the psyche. Her aim is not merely to transpose the 'every day' and 'dream' worlds, but to transform her audience through the knowledge of their unavoidable imbrication. Her political project is quite clear in her interviews:

Very often, theatre is dealing with overt social concerns. I suppose I feel that the danger and its why I'm not very satisfied with the theatre that exists is that it doesn't offer something new. It often presents our known structures and offers a critique of them, but in presenting those structures, I often feel they get reinforced.

(Kemp cited in Barrowclough 1995:26)

This project expresses itself in her sophisticated rehearsal techniques built on an acute

recognition of the moment of change, and the part she has to play as an 'observer' in creating that moment.

I have known Jenny Kemp for many years and worked with her as an actor in Call of the Wild and as a script consultant to Remember. The following interview is constructed from conversations in December 1993 and January 1998.

Mark Minchinton: What was your training background?

Jenny Kemp: Probably the first thing I should mention is my father's influence as a visual artist. Throughout childhood I was confronted with abstract paintings. I spent a lot of time looking at those, trying to find a way of being able to look at them. They largely represent a sense of frameup. I've come to understand it as spatial dynamics and energy in relationship to the frame. That was a starting-point, having to grapple with that, and having to grapple with the abstraction of the paintings, with metaphysics, and coming to terms with something which is non-representational. That causes one to go inside and look for, or to build, a dialogue inside oneself. I had a dialogue with him throughout that time - he largely spoke a language that I didn't quite understand as a child - so I had to try and understand that. I chose not to go into the visual arts because so many people in the family had. It felt like a solitary life and I was more interested in being in relationship to people. I went to the National Institute of Dramatic Arts in Sydney as an actor when I was 17. I only stayed there a year; I felt strongest when I was looking at and critiquing other people's work. I went on being an actor for a number of years, went to England and acted in the fringe, some touring children's theatre



Margaret Mills in *The Black Sequin Dress*, Playbox Theatre Company, 1996
Photo: Jeff Busby

companies, and finally an experimental American production, Liquid Theatre, which started me questioning why I was in theatre. I actually gave it away for a number of years and worked on visual art. Then I returned to theatre by training on voice work with Rowena Balos in Australia. That was the beginning of the next phase. I became interested in the voice and realized I was much more interested in the actor from outside than being an actor myself. That was the turn-around: I realized I was quite a good teacher and potentially a good director.

Could we look at your concern with time - both in the works themselves and your rehearsal of them? I'm interested, too, in your use of paintings by a European male of the 1920s and 1930s - Paul Delvaux - to open up, or represent, an Australian female inner landscape in the 1990s. And also talk about internal states...

Well, their not Internal states, they're internal actions. My focus at the moment is on internal action: what's happening and able to happen within an internal landscape. Often theatre has been concerned with external action... to create the space for a relationship with internal action I've had to address time. To become internally active, society's linear time frame needs to be arrested. We have to depart from cause and effect, beginning, middle and end; to stop travelling in a horizontal direction and open up a vertical time frame. In vertical time we exist in a space where past, present and future coexist; a space where there are states of being to do with memory, dream, reflection, emotion, imagination simultaneity and psychic phenomena. My interest in these areas is primarily an interest in the creative capacity of the psyche James Hillman says: We gain breadth of soul and wider horizons through vertical descent, through the inwardness of the image.

Can I ask whose internal action? You're creating events where the audience is allowed into vertical time, a contemplative, meditative, desire-filled space -and you have to create that same sort of space on stage through rigorous control of the image, the word, and the performers.

Yes, that's right. It's important to remember my background in visual art where the relationship of the viewer to the artwork is very different: the work is stationary, an image. It's always interested me that the still image can cause activity/ movement in the viewer, can activate the viewer. What I've found problematic, often, is that when theatre is very active the audience becomes passive, is acted upon. I want theatre that allows the audience to be much more active. I'm pulling away from work being an 'active' thing and introducing elements that make the audience stop moving forward. The audience's impulse is to keep moving forward, to look for the action and what happens next, but in *The Black Sequin Dress*, for instance, there was little dramatic action, the audience's forward movement was arrested and they were made to

continually look at one moment: the only way they could move was 'vertically'.

Would any moment do for that? It's a very specific moment in *Black Sequin Dress* a woman falls down in a nightclub. How do you choose the moment?

Well, it's partly personal, isn't it? That moment came from reading about someone lying on a kitchen floor, and I had a memory from when I was about 12 of my mother lying on a kitchen floor and I thought she was dead. So falling had particular impact for me, and the connection with the descent myth of Persephone seemed strong. And there's a fantastic disjunction between the sophisticated woman and the act of falling like a child. And the idea of the fallen woman - I mean there's all that. It's quite a powerful gestalt even though, or because, to fall over is an ordinary event. However, theoretically it seems to me that any action could have extraordinary resonance. In terms of vertical time or the Aboriginal concept of the eternal now, where the past continues to exist in the present, then any moment is absolutely full. Part of the dilemma of the fast-forward, fast-moving, fast-food consuming society is that any particular moment is empty, there's a grasping for the next moment because this one's dispensed with and eaten up and chewed and spat out. You can stop in any moment, anywhere, and it will be full, and the 'history' of that moment will be alive.

There's a tension, isn't there, between the desire to create a contemplative moment and the kind of 'lens' that allows that to happen: the lens you use is highly wrought and constructed.

Well, to pinpoint a moment requires a lot of control. To clarify: I started off saying I was interested in internal action, but I'm not interested in that in isolation - it's its relationship with external action. I'm looking at how what's happening internally is in disjunction with external 'reality'. To look at that relationship requires control: finding how they're connected at any moment is not a generalized thing, it's not interesting if it's generalized - I'm interested in the particular.

Your rehearsal work is very finely detailed; maybe you could talk about how you arrive at that detail. The Delvaux paintings are particularly interesting because they're very theatrical in themselves - someone else might simply animate them, but you don't do that.

Recognizing the links between memory, physicality and emotion - there's often a tilt of the head or some tension through the body that triggers it with the paintings, the text and the theatre space, I'm looking for a particular relationship where it synthesizes with my own internal landscape. With the paintings it's to do with the spatial dynamics which have a particular emotional field/feel to them. The paintings seem to be only

partially to do with the everyday world, they evoke another world, another landscape, an inner landscape. It's something to do with how a spatial dynamic causes an emotional dynamic: when I work with the actor, when she or he is in a particular position with a particular tension, that causes a gestalt to open up, or to drop through on the vertical level. I'm looking for the stage moment to have a multiplicity of meanings. When James Hillman analogizes the dream image and asks, 'What is it like?', he says keep working with the image so that it has many possibilities, many meanings. I'm looking for the moment when many resonances are possible. That's where it gets exciting, and that's a lot to do with how I read the stage action visually.

Paintings are two-dimensional objects which you have the illusion of looking into; likewise, your theatre is a theatre you look into not across. It's hard to imagine it in the round. We did *Call of the Wild* on a slight thrust stage on tour in Sydney and that was quite difficult. Once you shift from looking from one side of a spatial relationship to another side, the relationships and the emotional field all change.

If I'm working with an image what's important is the relationship of the figure to the architecture, and the figure to the space, and if we pull it out into the round it's another ball game; it's not something you can contemplate. The spectator is like the dreamer watching their dream, and I like that relationship that someone's dreaming it. What does a dream look like? We know it isn't linear, the images are happening simultaneously; when we tell a dream we organize it linearly.

Dream space is like the Tardis in *Doctor Who* - the space is bigger inside than outside.

When you look at something on stage, you look at it and you're out here, and then you zoom in. Videoing a stage show flattens it out, and makes you realize when you're watching a show your eye is continually zooming in. You're watching the whole thing but latching on to and entering a moment. Coming back to Delvaux someone looking at the paintings with a feminist critique might be critical of them, but I see the women as quite empowered within them: because of the number of women in the frame, and because they're larger and more present than the men. The men are small, less luminous, and quite ugly, they're imploding: the women are empowered because they're involved in their own meditation. Maybe one of the major links as a person living by the sea in Melbourne is that there are trams in the paintings! And the sea! What's fascinating in the paintings are the disjunctions between the banal and the everyday (which don't look banal in his paintings - trams look like extraordinary presences!). The time gap between his painting and me now is irrelevant, because what I'm relating to is that he's shifted himself outside time. If I use the paintings years later in Australia it doesn't matter, I never felt a difference. I don't know what's particularly European about him

or what's particularly Australian about me. I don't know the answer to that, because I feel like I've never quite known the answer to that. Sometimes I've tried to answer the question for myself and felt that I'm perhaps provoked by the lack of external action in this country so on find something internal! Or perhaps it's the 'emptiness' of the desert! I Laughs. Riding the tram out through the suburbs of Brussels it didn't feel that different - there were supermarkets and people doing their shopping, it felt pretty much the same as here!

I'd like to come back to what drives your decision-making process conceptually.

Practically, writing the text is separate from the writing of the scenic action. That's more like drawing a storyboard. Personally, I've needed to come to terms with internal chaos and to live with it, to live alongside it, not ditch it, but to dialogue with it; and to recognize the disjunctive existence we have with what is at the surface a highly organized, constructed society with this massive chaotic element inside. I want to sort out that relationship and to get it functioning creatively, to make accessible and functional those inner resources which are heavily repressed socially. Possibly, this is particularly important to me because of dealing with mental illness in my near family. The writing tends to be triggered by ... I just like writing ... I like the process of writing ... I like the process of the pen on the page. I used to draw - writing's a bit like drawing. What I'm doing in the moment of writing is seeing what my unconscious has to say. Just trying to open up and not control what comes out because I feel over-dominated by the conscious mind, so it's a chance to see what's inside. Writing's a chance to see what's happening now, so I can start having a relationship with it. Being conscious about it and naming it is an important part of the maturation process. I write best when I give a writing workshop and we work every day for a week from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.: I approach the workshop saying I'm not going to write because I don't want to write from that conscious place - I might do that later once the big offer is out then I usually do the writing exercise anyway! The best thing is to be surprised by what comes out, and not to recognize it after. Then there's a huge task after to see the pattern the writing presents, to be conscious of what it is and identify what it's about; and then write further consciously.

That's interesting, because I've meant to ask you about presentation, representation, and recognition, and I was wondering about recognition?

... the process of recognition?



Natasha Herbert and Helen Herbertson in *The Black Sequin Dress*, Playbox Theatre Company. Melbourne, 1996. Photo Jeff Busby

Yes, because theatre audiences are so tuned to plotlines, characters, stories, and so on, you challenge their recognition. Sometimes they may not recognize what sort of event you're dealing with. And you need to recognize what the writing event is.

It's difficult. In the new work I'm working on, *Still Angela*, I'm working on about eight different streams. A couple of those will end up being irrelevant - I've got to be careful in identifying the relevant ones. I've got to ask what is the key image or key action here, and then be able to tell you it in one sentence, like I can now with *The Black Sequin Dress*: 'a woman comes into a nightclub and falls over'. I have to contextualize it in a way that's accessible and recognizable. The storyboard is another process that comes afterward when the action is identified. Because I'm interested in the relationship between the everyday, the here and now, and the other, I've got to acknowledge the everyday includes narrative structure, social time frame, and so on - I've got to work with them. It could be that an image from a painting helps me to identify the action. I'm looking for an action and a context from which text can be spoken ... and if the characters are often speaking from the unconscious where do they speak it from? Are they at a kitchen table? Or are they eating dinner? Walking down a road? Where and how are they, and what are they doing? And there's something about those paintings that reminds me of what's possible. That makes the unconscious a tangible embodied place.

That's interesting that you've asked where and how, you've not asked who they are.

Who the people are...

Yes, is that a question for you?

Yes, it is. But the paintings help me to address location; and it always feels that in some way location is a landscape of the psyche, so it's an internal landscape but it's got to have a groundedness about it. It's got to have both aspects but if it gets too grounded it gets too tight, and if it gets too far from that no one knows where we are, it floats off. If you look at those paintings it often looks like all the women are the same woman, and all the men the same man and coming back to the idea that the audience is the dreamer - then everyone in the dream is at any moment an aspect of themselves. For me they're always the same person; all the women are the same woman. In *The Black Sequin Dress* they were all different ages but they could have been the same woman at different times in her life. But it wasn't that explicit. When I was directing, I felt there was a certain sort of sexual energy that I wanted on stage, to focus on, and part of casting as trying to pinpoint that energy. And the men feel to me like they're part of a psyche too as you know!

This process - writing, storyboarding, and then directing - is from your perspective seamless: has anyone else done your plays, and do you think they could be done by someone else?

No one else has produced them. It feels like I'm completing the writing by directing it. But all the collaborations I've had - such as with (composer) Elizabeth Drake, (choreographer) Helen Herbertson, (designer) Jacqui Everitt - have allowed another dynamic to enter. It feels important that I don't have too much control.

I've wanted to ask about performers - given your love of, need for, precise physical detail and control in your performers, would dancers be better for your work?

It's interesting, that idea of control. I suspect all the storyboarding, and the amount of control I've had to have in rehearsal, has been partly economically driven. On a long rehearsal period we have six weeks. I had to fight for my six weeks on *Black Sequin Dress* (this is for a major festival production), they were going to give me four or five. I work solidly on the storyboards in order to have an offer to make to the actors; the world that the text sits within is not explicit from the text itself- you don't read it and think, ah yes, this is a naturalistic thriller, or whatever - you don't know what it is. I have to say, OK this is the world that it is, this is a landscape where time doesn't exist, and this is the feel of it, look at these pictures, here's an example of what could

happen here. I have to make a strong and particular offer in order to bring them all into the same world. I'd be very happy, to use a less explicit starting-point if we had time. I'd say, here are the elements, have a look at this, let's see what you offer up. To a certain extent that does happen in rehearsal and we deviate from the storyboard; the storyboard doesn't always work, it makes things a bit tight, too controlled. I would love to get away from that, but what can I do? When I worked in the dance world I felt released because we were able to work for twelve weeks on image. I felt this is right, this is how long it takes. Dancers know that, they're writing their texts in their bodies. Now for some reason theatre has got so that it's expected that rehearsal is about the text, it's not about the movement very often; it's changing, but many, actors are still just thinking about the text. Dancers' capacity for the particular in relation to their bodies and the image is endless, and really good actors will work like that.

But what about that thing you see in many dancers where they might be physically particular, but they don't have a world going?

Yes, nice little pieces but there's nothing going on.

Nothing going on between the people in the space.

Or between the people and the space, or the place. Yes, how do you get to the epic without narrative?

By 'epic' you mean?

The closest I've got to it is calling something an experiential narrative. You engage someone on a journey through their psyche, that they can't walk away from - they'd be halfway through a gestalt. Instead of the death of the soldier or the princess it's the death of your old self!

If people thought that was going to happen no one would go!

Yes, well it is a bit tricky! I saw Teshigawara at the London International Festival of Theatre and his piece had a sense of traveling through landscape after landscape after landscape; a major journey was being taken where, in narrative terms, we ended up in the inner sanctum and coming out the other end, back to the everyday, to the natural world. Maybe dance is the place you can do narrative best, because it's so abstract it's in disjunction with it.

Jude Walton once pointed out that 'sexy' dance is often not sexual so much as a demonstration of sexuality; she asked how do you keep the desire between dancers

real, what would that type of dance be? And we thought it would require of the dancers a commitment that they're not used to giving, because so much of dance calls for a fetishizing of...

...form.

Yes, now it seems to me you're asking of your actors that they...

...fetishize the form. [Laughs.]

And that they bring the possibility of their everyday selves being there.
Margaret Mills and Greg Stone in *The Black Sequin Dress*,
Photo Jeff Busby

Yes, they're not playing characters.

They're just...

...present. When I work with actors, what's most important is that they really relax. Even if we haven't got lots of time it's very important in the early rehearsal to remove the time pressure altogether, to give the illusion of incredible space and time. When you do that the first part's quite slow, but then the actors can work quickly because they're coming from a creative state. I hope that the formality of my structures enables actors to feel secure enough to be utterly vulnerable within them. If they know they're going to walk, they know they're going to walk along that line with their hips at this angle and their shoulders at that angle. And we know what that's about, we've found exactly what tensions the body holds to locate the emotional state that is right for the text. What's happening physically is tangible, that's where you relate. When the actor hits the emotional, balanced state where she or he's whole, then I'll try to describe her precisely; and I'll probably give her some text instantly, because that's where the language needs to come from. It's a state of being. When we come to repeat it I'll ask what she was working on. Often it's something I set up, for example, the state of pain. We can work on an active verb (remembering, fantasizing, and soon) or a state of being (pain, anger, or whatever). We'll go through it again, and she ends up sitting on the seat, that's where she's landed herself, so we'll keep that in. The next time she sits I might notice, say, that she hasn't got her hands on her knees, she's sitting back not forward, she's looking straight ahead not down, her hands are beside her body, and the state isn't there. I'll say put our hands on your knees, lean forward, and look down. She does that and it unlocks the state again. Sometimes we have to go back to the exact physical state. When the state is solidly landed she might be able to deviate physically a little bit but it's fragile at the start. Often people resist relocating something unfamiliar, they have to go to exactly the same position and relax, then it'll unlock. We find a physical manifestation of an emotional/mental state that is

registered perceptively in a physical position. Time and time again the actor will go back and her body won't necessarily remember, and I'll have to remind her of the exact shape. Rationally she'll be telling herself that she's going to do something else now, be a bit 'creative', that there's no point doing the same thing again, and so on.



So your job as the director is to encourage the actors to allow themselves to go to the state, and to remember the physical detail?

To reassure. Instead of saying, 'I need you to find an emotional state where you'll be quite fragile' - an actor can't find that - it's much easier to say, 'We were working on "reflecting"; sit on that chair, lift our head a bit, it's there somewhere, just feel it.' It should be simple. With detailed physical instructions actors at best have a sense of security, at worst they feel trapped. There's a particular kind of actor who can handle that: an actor who is able to work vertically. If you put parameters around them, restrictions on them, they'll go down, they'll go in; whereas if you put restrictions on other actors they feel paralysed, straitjacketed, because they're not prepared to go into the depth, not prepared to open up into the chaos. A lot of times the most exciting emotional state has a slight element of the unknown in it, it's right on an edge.

But you're not dealing with purely emotional states, are you?

No, it might be the state of reflection, remembering, or fantasizing. But we need to locate how the particular performer locates that state. These aren't necessarily familiar states that actors are used to working with. It's to do with timing and rhythm, because I work a lot with impulse; they're the key things in relation to the text. When the actor

has located the state of remembering, for instance, it's got a particular rhythm for her. I can't tell her what her rhythm is because my rhythm will be different; it's important that we find her rhythm because that will be interesting. It's a lot to do with actors finding a relationship to their own timing. I impose a whole lot of things but I don't impose that.

How do you avoid manufacturing and controlling the action totally?

I've had to confront that a lot because of working with the Delvaux painting, I look at the paintings and there's a particular spatial dynamic, which includes a figure who is in a particular dynamic with another figure in relation to the architecture. I believe in giving the actor a lot of freedom, but I've had to work out another way where I can say, 'I want you in this position'. I have to work with great care so the actor also has freedom to explore outside that position. What I might do is say, 'This is the position I want you to end up in, but this is the journey we can take to end up there; that might enable you to be open, once you get that position.' I can't just say, 'Sit there and be like that!', bang, bang, bang. I can say what we're going for and show them the painting, but then we have to undertake the work to give the actor the internal freedom to find that position. Once they've got the position, they then need an equal amount of freedom to feel hack through the body into themselves from that position, to be receptive and responsive to the spatial dynamic I'm giving them. When you're working around the other way you give them freedom and they find the position that arrives out of that. If I give them the position, I still have to give them the freedom to go hack the other way. Or I give them a journey to arrive at a particular point. It's trick and it's something I've had to really confront. I work from both angles, not always from givens. Mostly the storyboards from the paintings are starting-points only.

What's the difference between directing your own work and directing someone else's work?

With text that's given to me I need to work very solidly conceptually and visually, to find a world to give the actors parameters within which to land. In some ways that's not hugely different from my own work where I do have a shift-over point from writing into the storyboard phase which is an act of creation comparable to that of creating the text. Sometimes with a text that's given to me I draw a storyboard and work off paintings. It mightn't be quite as pinned down as some of my storyboards for my own work, but even the storyboards for my own work are only starting-points. The actors are more dependent on me in my work, they don't know what the world is going to be, it's not as apparent from the text where I'm going. Often with someone else's script, it's a more recognizable world to the actors in some way, because it's derived more directly from a social context, so they know where they are: they're in a room with furniture, or

in a kitchen, having a conversation with a person in a particular sort of way. But what about when you're communicating a thought-state or a dream-state? That's another task, I try to be specific about how the actual world on stage will manifest. The actors need that to be quite specifically pinned down or they're going to be really lost ... of course, as a director these days scripts are becoming much more challenging in this respect.

Do you feel lonely in the Australian theatre scene? We're in a country with a population probably equal to Greater London's or New York's, there's not a lot of work of the kind you're talking about.

I think I'd feel lonely anywhere. The work's dialoguing with, is about, being alone. There's a sprinkling of other works in the world. Hotel Pro Forma's Operation Orfeo [see Performance Research 1(3) (1996)] was very reinforcing for me because Kirsten Dehlholm was working with visual elements in a way that I found interesting. I felt slightly less lonely watching that, but is anyone else working like that in her country? Twenty years ago I spent four years in London and I certainly didn't find anything there that made me feel less lonely. But when I came back my loneliness, or aloneness, or the sense of loneliness one can feel in this country was a catalyst in my work.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Credits for The Black Sequin Dress

Writer and Director: Jenny Kemp

Music: Elizabeth Drake

Designer: Jacqui Everitt

Lighting: Ben Cobham

Cast: Natasha Herbert / Helen Herbertson / Margaret Mills / Ian Scott / Mary Sitarenos / Greg Stone.

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