Posthumous Documentary Theatre:

Re-presenting Historical Documentary Material on Stage

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ABSTRACT

A practice predicated upon the verbatim re-presentation of non-fiction documents, interviews, personal writings, and other historical source materials on stage, documentary theatre frequently claims to produce theatrical experiences that represent 'reality' and 'truth'. Yet, the symbiosis of real-world source material and a dynamic dramaturgy can be an intricate balancing act, as the theatre maker is often faced with the challenge of how to best navigate the tension between accurately representing 'the real' on stage and producing a dynamic theatre experience.

Much of the scholarship engaging with documentary theatre has addressed the complex ethical-political process of speaking for others and the risk of misrepresentation that comes with making a real person into a documentary character. Consequently, theatre makers often strive to not only represent their documentary subjects accurately but also aim to increase their agency in the documentary theatre process by facilitating opportunities for dialogue, connection, and collaboration. Yet what happens when the theatre maker is unable to communicate with their subjects or extend a collaborative hand? *Posthumous Documentary Theatre: Re-presenting Historical Documentary Material on Stage* addresses a gap in the documentary theatre discourse and explores how the potential ethical considerations associated with the form may be further complicated when the documentary subjects are no longer living.

This research takes the form of a PhD with a creative practice component that involved the creation of *What Remains: The Love and Letters of Vita Sackville-West & Harold Nicolson.* An original documentary play constructed primarily from posthumously published letters and personal writings, *What Remains* enabled a practical exploration of how theatre makers' ethical considerations for their deceased documentary subjects might influence their dramaturgical processes. Synthesising critical reflection on that creative process with existing documentary theatre theories and practices, this thesis offers findings that aim to be practically useful to others navigating the intersecting ethical and dramaturgical demands of representing the dead on stage in documentary theatre.

DEDICATION

What remains?

For the dead

Vita Sackville-West 1892 – 1962

Harold Nicolson 1886 – 1968

My Granny, Mary George 1920 – 2019

And for the living

My sister, Hannah

Mum and Dad

Is a great, enduring, and perhaps eternal,

love.

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Vita Sackville-West writes: “Of course I have no right whatsoever to write down the truth about my life, involving as it naturally does the lives of so many other people” (Nicolson & Sackville-West, 1973/1999, p. 9). So much of our lives are experienced, comprehended, defined, and remembered alongside the lives of others, and this research is no exception. This thesis would not have been possible without the support, kindness, and love of so many other people.

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Lastly, Hannah. My sister, my first friend, my best friend, now, always, till the very end.

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INTRODUCTION

> *Perhaps all art is*
> *A hollow knocking*
> *At the closed door of the dead.* (Ruhl, 2020, p. 27)

Theatre not only frequently knocks at the door of the dead but flings it wide open. The stage can be "a magic kind of meeting place" (Chung, 2010, p. 56) where the past becomes present and the dead live once more, if only for a night. This thesis: *Posthumous Documentary Theatre: Re-presenting Historical Documentary Material on Stage,* explores documentary theatre as a medium uniquely positioned to represent the dead. For centuries, from Aeschylus' ancient Greek tragedy *The Persians* (473 BC) to Shakespeare's various history plays (1591-1613), Arthur Miller's *The Crucible* (1953)*,* and Lin-Manuel Miranda's record-breaking musical *Hamilton* (2015), theatre practitioners have remembered, represented, and reiterated the deceased on stage. It is evident from the enduring popularity of these stage resurrections that re-presenting people and stories of historical significance is a cornerstone of the theatrical tradition.

Australian documentary theatre practitioner Alana Valentine (2018) suggests that "we make sense of our own lives through private and shared memorials to the dead" (p. 26). Theatre scholar Carol Martin (2013) similarly reflects that theatre which depicts and explores real events "participates in how we come to know and understand what has happened" (p. 5). Yet, these representations, while based on historical events and people, are often products of dramatic license and frequently adapt, exaggerate, embellish, and deviate from the 'official' historical narrative. Belsey (2008) comments "Shakespeare's history plays are not commonly taken seriously as history. Everyone knows they are not accurate" (p. 119). Similarly, while *The Crucible* might read like historical fact, the reality was that Abigail Williams never met John Proctor (Kellaway & Ruhl, 2022), and *Hamilton* too "is not a product of the historical profession . . . There was no peer review and no expectation of historical accuracy" (Medlin, 2022, p. 72). Thus, while these kinds of theatrical representations may be deemed dramatizations of history, they "are understood to be precisely art, not life, imagination, not truth" (Belsey, 2008, p. 119).

In contrast, documentary theatre frequently claims to represent 'life' and 'truth,' eschewing the notions of 'art' and 'imagination' commonly attributed to other kinds of dramatic representations of history. Playwrights, directors, and actors working in documentary theatre usually prioritise the verbatim re-presentation of non-fiction documents, archival resources, and historical source material on stage. This emphasis on using, often exclusively, the "actual words of real people" (Belfield, 2018a, para. 7) helps to situate documentary theatre as a medium of representation that promises "veracity, fidelity to the real and an authenticity not found elsewhere in the theatre" (Stuart-Fisher, 2020, p. 18). As documentary theatre practitioner Molly Flynn (2020) elaborates:

> To call a performance practice 'documentary' is to imbue it with a claim to truth and to the representation of reality. The categorization carries with it the connotation of authenticity, implying that what happens on the documentary stage is somehow more 'real' than what happens on the traditional theatre stage. Documentary theatre draws on archival resources (found texts, official records, artifacts, interviews, etc), and in doing so creates the illusion of a traceable, if not reliable, past. (p. 7)

This research explores documentary theatre as a "profoundly commemorative" (Favorini, 2008, p. 74) practice, that in its representation of past realities can knock loudly at the door of the dead. I am interested in the potential ethical considerations that may arise when re-presenting verbatim, the words, lives, and stories of real people on stage and how they might influence the theatrical expression of the work. More specifically, this PhD explores if/how the ethical obligations we may feel towards the living differ from those we feel towards the dead and how the construction of documentary theatre that re-presents the dead on stage is a unique theatrical process with distinct ethical considerations and dramaturgical challenges.

This is a PhD with a creative practice component and uses a practice-based methodology. My research and its findings manifest as both a written thesis and an original posthumous documentary theatre play titled *What Remains*: *The Love and Letters of Vita Sackville-West & Harold Nicolson*, the script of which is included as an appendix in this thesis (see Appendix

A). [1] A live performance of *What Remains* was presented to an invited audience on the 7th of September 2022 in the Playhouse at the Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts in Kirikiriroa Hamilton, Aotearoa New Zealand.

What Remains is constructed entirely from documentary material, the majority of which, with permission from Curtis Brown Publishing UK, is the published letters and diaries of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, both of whom were significant figures in twentieth-century British aristocracy. Harold Nicolson was an author, diplomat, and politician and his diaries and letters have become noteworthy sources of British political history. He was also appointed Knight Commander of the Royal Victorian Order in 1953 for his writing of the official biography of King George V. Vita Sackville-West was similarly a successful novelist and poet whose most celebrated works include her pastoral epic poem, *The Land* (1926) and novels, *The Edwardians* (1930), and *All Passion Spent* (1931). For 15 years Vita also wrote a weekly gardening column for *The Observer.* Both she and Harold are remembered and celebrated for their innovative garden design at Sissinghurst which, now owned and maintained by the National Trust UK, is viewed by thousands of visitors each year. Outside of the UK, Vita is perhaps most recognised and remembered for her, at the time, scandalous affairs with women during her marriage to Harold. Her intimate relationships with notable modernist writers Violet Trefusis and Virginia Woolf are evidenced significantly in Harold and Vita's posthumously published correspondence and Nigel Nicolson's *Portrait of a Marriage* (1973). Consequently, *What Remains* tells a story of a unique relationship, which seemed fraught with infidelity yet also sustained by a deep and enduring love and respect that Harold and Vita appeared to hold for one another.

What Remains adds to my repertoire of documentary theatre experience. Previous documentary theatre endeavours include *Strong Female Characters* (2019)*,* which served as the creative practice component of my master's research - *Towards an Ethical Dramaturgy: A Practice-Led Research Project on Verbatim Theatre,* and participation in Carving in Ice Theatre's *Life Music* (2016) and their production of *Hush: A Verbatim Play About Family Violence* (2020)*.* Additionally, I have written elsewhere about documentary theatre practice

[1] The play will henceforth be referred to as the abbreviated *What Remains*.

and my recent publications include, “The Live Reality of Death: Representations of Dying and the Dead in Documentary Theatre” (2023) and a forthcoming (2024) article in the *Australasian Drama Studies Journal* titled: “Bodies of Truth: Considering the Ethics of Physical Dramaturgy in Documentary Theatre.” From these various documentary theatre experiences and outputs, I have acquired knowledge and practical skills that leave me well-equipped to undertake this research.

In addition to telling a story of Harold and Vita’s relationship as gleaned from their 50-year correspondence, *What Remains* tells a story of this PhD. The play’s creation enabled the practical exploration of my research questions, and it serves not only as an expression of the research, “but in that expression become[s] the research itself” (Haseman, 2006, p. 102). This thesis was produced in conjunction with *What Remains* and aims to synthesise critical reflection on my creative practice with existing documentary theatre discourse and practices. Both this thesis and *What Remains* strive to make original and significant contributions to knowledge and produce findings that may also be of practical and “operational significance” (Candy, 2006, p. 3) to others working in documentary theatre.

OVERVIEW OF THESIS STRUCTURE

What Remains is the heart of this research and a crucial component of this PhD's original contribution to knowledge. Reflective of *What Remains* centrality, (and the play's three-act structure), this thesis has been organised into three distinct parts: Before *What Remains*, Crafting *What Remains*, and Reflecting on *What Remains*.

The first part is comprised of a literature review and methodology. It contextualises this research within the wider field of documentary theatre literature and practice and, referencing specific methods, practitioners, and plays, considers the origins, evolution, and definitions of documentary theatre. From this overview, I establish posthumous documentary theatre as a distinct sub-genre of documentary theatre and state my research questions. I then identify how the consideration of theories and practices of performing history, historiography, representation, and museology have been relevant to my conceptualisation of posthumous documentary theatre. From this interdisciplinary review of literature and practice, it is evident that a degree of ethical consideration often informs or impacts practices that re-present and reconstruct historical objects and narratives. Looking at documentary theatre practice through a 'representation lens', I begin to explore the ethical dimension of the form and offer a general outline of what ethics in documentary theatre might mean. The discussion then shifts as my thinking streamlines to focus specifically on the ethics of posthumous documentary theatre. By exploring notions of posthumous harm, I begin to consider whether documentary theatre makers have an ethical responsibility to the dead in their work.

Part 1 concludes with a thorough discussion of this research's methodology, methods, and ethics, detailing the rationale for the creative practice component of this thesis, its design, and the nature of the actors' participation in the research. I introduce the nodal technique, montage, and Moment Work as commonly adopted methods for crafting documentary theatre. These dramaturgical tools and processes are then unpacked practically in Part 2 within the context of crafting *What Remains.*

Part 2: Crafting *What Remains,* takes the form of a case study and process of practice. Drawing from and expanding on the foundation of literature, practice, and ideas introduced in Part 1: Before *What Remains*, I discuss the initial stages of creating *What Remains*. I delineate my pathway through the process of compiling, editing, and arranging documentary material into a narrative script form by reflecting on key moments during the construction and rehearsal of the play. I reflect on how the nodal technique, montage and Moment Work were used in *What Remains* to support the construction of what I consider to be an ethically nuanced dramaturgy. Part 2 also delves deeper into the notions of truth, reality, and authenticity frequently associated with documentary theatre and, considering these concepts from a postmodern constructivist perspective, I begin to articulate how documentary theatre can propagate an aura of authenticity yet simultaneously "confront the complexities of truth, authenticity and veracity onstage" (Flynn, 2020, p. 4).

The third part of this thesis continues to reflect on *What Remains,* but the focus shifts to the development of the performance text. I review and analyse how different elements of the live performance, including physical dramaturgy, production design, theatre maker and actor-as-character, and direct address, each contributed to *What Remains'* ethically nuanced dramaturgy and enabled the exploration of my research questions. Interlacing analysis of the final moments of *What Remains* with reflection on the findings offered by this research, I conclude by considering its potential limitations and suggest some potential avenues for further exploration in posthumous documentary theatre.

PART 1: BEFORE *WHAT REMAINS*

DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

There are a myriad of terms used by researchers and theatre makers alike to try and differentiate plays created from found documentary source material from those wrought purely from playwrights' imaginations (see Table 1). However, documentary theatre is frequently understood to be the "umbrella term" (Summerskill, 2020, p. 8) for theatre constructed from documentary materials such as newspaper content, media footage, historical photographs, maps, government reports and statistics, court transcripts, interviews, diaries, correspondences, and other personal writings.

Table 1: Table listing some of the different forms and 'labels' of documentary theatre.

Term	Author/Practitioner(s)
Docudrama	(Favorini, 1995) & (Paget, 2011)
Fact-based theatre	(Forsyth & Megson, 2009); (Hare, 2005); (Mann, 2000) & (Young, 2017)
Investigative theatre	(The Civilians, n.d.)
Non-fiction theatre	(Wake, 2010)
Reality Theatre	(Mumford & Garde as cited in Wake, 2010)
Theatre of Testimony/Testimonial Theatre	(Mann, 2000); (Stuart-Fisher, 2020) & (Wake, 2013)
Theatre of the real	(Martin, 2013)
Theatre of Witness/bearing witness	(Martin, 1996); (Wake, 2013)
Tribunal Plays	(Norton-Taylor, 2008)
Verbatim theatre	(Paget, 1987) & numerous others

While works of documentary theatre are many and diverse, exploring "topics from the urgent, pressing and national, to the minute, personal and unconsidered" (Rebellato, 2013, p. 48), documentary theatre makers are united by their use of documentary material to represent 'real' people in 'real life' situations on stage. This sets documentary plays apart from history plays, historical fiction, and other works where real-life characters are placed in a fictitious situation or story. A fictional play that explores real people or real events can still present recognisable truths about the real world, but generally relies far more on creative license and the playwright's imagination. In documentary theatre, as British documentary theatre maker Robin Belfield (2018b) suggests, "the practitioner still acts as a filter, but is guided by the authenticity of the actual words spoken in the original context" (p. x).

Documentary theatre has a rich history, and its roots are often traced back to the early twentieth-century German socio-political theatre (Anderson & Wilkinson, 2007; Fisher Dawson, 1999; Favorini, 1995; Garde, Mumford & Wake, 2010; Paget, 1987; Stuart-Fisher, 2020). In response to social and political unrest, Erwin Piscator and Bertolt Brecht developed the concept and conventions of Epic Theatre. "More than entertainment or the imitation of reality" (Shukla & Purohit, 2016, p. 48), the purpose of Epic Theatre was to present social issues and ideas and provoke spectators' capacity for critical judgement and thought. Brecht aimed to create a discerning dialogic engagement between the spectator, the theatrical event, and the real world it aimed to represent. Frequently this was achieved by exposing the illusion, construction, or mechanics of the theatrical experience.

Piscator and Brecht would employ a variety of techniques and conventions during performances that were designed to draw the audiences' attention back to the fact that they were watching a play. Some of these techniques included the actors playing multiple roles, speaking directly to the audience, and the use of placards or projections to exhibit information and these conventions have since become dramaturgical hallmarks of documentary theatre. This kind of overtly presentational delivery of documentary material aimed to shatter the 'fourth wall' and the spectators' suspension of disbelief, hoping to cultivate a metatheatrical experience that might "shift spectator consciousness from passivity to activity…and direct them towards a position of decision-making" (Stevens, 2016, pp. 43).

Testimonial and verbatim theatre scholar and practitioner Amanda Stuart-Fisher (2020) reflects that Piscator "used documents and other sources of evidence…to establish a direct connection with the actual lived experience of everyday life" (p. 38), encouraging audiences to make connections between the world of the play and the world outside the theatre. Theatre practitioner Moisés Kaufman (2001) also identifies links between the work of Piscator and Brecht and contemporary documentary theatre practices. He cites Brecht's model of Epic Theatre as influential to the aesthetic vocabulary of his iconic documentary play, *The Laramie Project*, which was similarly conceived to have a socio-political function.

Over the last century the popularity of documentary theatre has ebbed and flowed, yet it "seems to make a resurgence during politically turbulent times" (Wake, 2010, p. 16). For example, in the wake of World War II, as Germany was struggling to come to terms with their nation's role in the conflict, German playwright Peter Weiss created *The Investigation* (1965). A formative and influential documentary play that catalysed documentary theatre's 'second wave' (Groot Nibbelink, 2023), *The Investigation* depicts the 1963-1965 Frankfurt Auschwitz trials using verbatim excerpts of court transcripts and witness testimony from the trials. The play served not only as a way for many to process and acknowledge the horrors of Auschwitz, but "laid the foundation for further innovation in the genre" (Flynn, 2020, p. 33), and documentary theatre practice has since continued to evolve as it is created and performed around the world.

VERBATIM THEATRE

The term verbatim theatre is often used synonymously with documentary theatre or, as verbatim theatre practitioner Clare Summerskill (2020) identifies, preference is dictated by geographical location, with verbatim theatre being the preferred term in Britain, while the US favours documentary theatre. However, in the 1960s and 1970s verbatim theatre began to distinguish itself as a distinct kind of documentary theatre practice in the UK. In his British 'working class' documentary plays, theatre maker Peter Cheeseman moved away from using newspaper articles, media footage, court transcripts etc., as primary source material,

preferring instead to gather spoken verbatim testimony by instigating recorded interviews with everyday members of his community.

First coined by Derek Paget in 1987, in a now legendary *New Theatre Quarterly* article, the term verbatim theatre initially referred to theatre practice "firmly predicated upon the taping and subsequent transcription of interviews…This primary source is then transformed into a text which is acted" (p. 317). Subsequent contemporary definitions identify verbatim theatre as a specific type of documentary theatre, emphasising that it is created primarily from *spoken* rather than written testimony. For example, Belfield (2018b) states that verbatim theatre is "constructed with words that were actually spoken" (p. ix). Professor in theatre Tom Cantrell (2013) similarly affirms that "it is clear that verbatim theatre is understood to be based on the spoken words of real people" (p. 3). In this research, I similarly consider verbatim theatre to refer to a specific kind of documentary practice, with plays constructed primarily from written rather than spoken source material falling under the wider banner of documentary theatre.

Cheeseman's work paved the way for verbatim theatre's resurgence in Britain during the late 1990s and early 2000s. Marking the beginning of the 'third wave' of documentary theatre, this decade was central to the documentary theatre 'boom,' with an abundance of British verbatim political dramas being produced. Some of these include David Hare's *The Permanent Way* (2003) and *Stuff Happens* (2004); Robin Soans' *A State Affair* (2000) and *Talking to Terrorists* (2005). Alecky Blythe soon followed with her 'recorded delivery' plays, including *The Girlfriend Experience* (2008) and *Little Revolution* (2014). A method specific to verbatim theatre, Blythe's recorded delivery technique bypasses traditional line learning as it involves the actors wearing headphones during rehearsal and performance through which audio recordings of the original interviews are played. The actors then speak along with the recording aiming to capture the exact vocal quality, rhythms, and inflections of the interviewees they are representing on stage. Consequently, their performances achieve an almost "forensic" (Blythe, 2016, 17:20) level of accuracy and verisimilitude, which in turn can be perceived to endow the overall performance with a strong sense of reality, truth, and "aural authenticity" (Wake, 2013, p. 327).

Blythe was influenced by the work of actor Anna Deavere Smith, who in the early 1990s used headphones to learn the taped interview testimony for her trailblazing documentary play directed by Emily Mann titled *Fires in the Mirror* (1992). Mann's own documentary plays of the 1980s, *Still Life* (1982) and *Execution of Justice* (1985) can also be considered seminal texts in the American documentary tradition that paved the way for other notable American documentary plays. Some of these include Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen's *The Exonerated* (2000) and Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project's *The Laramie Project* (2001) and, with Doug Wright, *I Am My Own Wife* (2003). The recorded delivery technique, sometimes referred to as 'headphone Verbatim' (Halba & Young, 2014; Wake, 2013), has since been adopted in Australia, notably by theatre maker Roslyn Oades, and in Aotearoa New Zealand by Otago-based theatre practitioners Hillary Halba and Stuart Young for their documentary plays, *Hush: A Verbatim Play about Family Violence* (2009) and *Be|Longing* (2012) and Cindy Diver, Susie Lawless, and Stuart Young's *The Keys are in the Margarine* (2014).

POSTHUMOUS DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

There are a multitude of potential paths through the documentary theatre-making process, and it is evident that practices and definitions of documentary theatre are numerous and contested. For instance, the precise genre classification of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* (2005), a play edited together by actor Alan Rickman and journalist Katherine Viner from the deceased Corrie's written emails and diaries, has produced conflicting opinions within the scholarship. Paget (2009) refers to the work as "a true verbatim play" (p. 233). Cantrell (2013) contrastingly comments, "*My Name Is Rachel Corrie* was based entirely on written rather than spoken testimony, and as such falls within the wider field of documentary theatre rather than verbatim" (p. 124). Stuart-Fisher (2020) suggests that the play "sits somewhere between verbatim and documentary theatre" (p. 91). *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* is evocative of traditional posthumous publications and releases as, with the help of editing, Rachel herself became a kind of "posthumous playwright" (Martin, 2013, p. 124) and I suggest that it is more appropriately understood as neither just a verbatim play nor a documentary play but as a piece of 'posthumous documentary theatre'.

To distinguish plays such as *My Name is Rachel Corrie* and *What Remains* from other forms of theatre that represent real-life historical figures or events, this research introduces the term posthumous documentary theatre and conceptualises it as a specific subgenre of documentary theatre practice. An amalgamation of the terms 'posthumous', meaning "occurring, arising, or continuing after death" ("Posthumous", n.d.) and 'documentary theatre,' I use posthumous documentary theatre to refer to theatre that is constructed primarily from pre-existing documentary materials such as letters, diaries, personal writings etc., after the death of those documents' originator(s).

To locate this sub-genre within the wider field, I situate *What Remains* alongside existing plays that represent the deceased by re-presenting verbatim their documentary materials. In addition to *My Name Is Rachel Corrie*, these include Eileen Atkins' *Vita & Virginia* (1995). A play that interweaves the correspondence between Vita Sackville-West and renowned modernist writer Virginia Woolf, *Vita & Virgina* resituates the material into a live long-form conversation between the two women. Sarah Ruhl's *Dear Elizabeth: A Play in Letters from Elizabeth Bishop to Robert Lowell and Back Again* (2012), similarly re-presents a selection of the letters exchanged by the poets during their 30-year correspondence. Additionally, works sometimes classed as tribunal plays (another subgenre of documentary theatre) could also be considered posthumous documentary plays. For example, Peter Weiss' *The Investigation,* Richard Norton-Taylor's *Nuremberg: The War Crimes Trial,* and Moisés Kaufman's *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde,* stage verbatim excerpts from the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials, the Nuremberg trials, and Wilde's London trials respectively. Regardless of the exact categorisation of these works, they are united in their representation of the deceased in their own words on stage and I regard them as part of the foundation from which my research springs and products of what might be considered a posthumous documentary theatre process.

Hammond and Steward (2008) suggest that we turn to documentary theatre "because we feel that it is somehow better suited to the task of dealing with serious subject matter" (p. 11). Death and loss lie at the heart of many documentary and verbatim plays, yet, as Cantrell (2013) comments, "though many documentary productions focus on death, rarely do we hear the words of the dead individuals on stage" (p. 171). This statement identifies

and articulates the gap in documentary theatre discourse that this research aims to explore. Posthumous documentary theatre has been alluded to and inadvertently discussed by documentary practitioners and historians, however, there has yet to be a study dedicated to the ethics of posthumous representation in documentary theatre.

Consequently, the questions that guide this research are:

- How might posthumous documentary theatre practice differ from wider/traditional documentary practice?
- What are some of the dramaturgical and ethical considerations of constructing posthumous documentary theatre?

POSTHUMOUS DOCUMENTARY THEATRE, PERFORMING HISTORY, AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Conceptualised as a distinct form of documentary theatre that is exclusively constructed after the death of its subject(s), works of posthumous documentary theatre are imbued with a sense of the past and history. “How events are remembered, written, archived, staged, and performed helps determine the history they become. More than enacting history, although it certainly does that, documentary theatre also has the capacity to stage historiography” (Martin, 2006, p. 9). Through its re-presentation of historical documents in a contemporary performance space posthumous documentary theatre can be a crossroads where the ‘now’ of theatre and the ‘then’ of history intersect. Furthermore, it can be a practice that participates in remembering, documenting, and representing the past. Schneider (2014) states that “uncovering, preserving, analysing, writing about, telling about, displaying materials considered to be of the past are the domain of the historian” (p. 9), yet the same could be said of those working in posthumous documentary theatre. There are obvious links between performing history, historiography, and documentary theatre practice. Documentary theatre scholar, Gary Fisher Dawson (1999), goes so far as to suggest that “the association between documentary theatre and historiography is an essential one” (p. 100). Forsyth and Megson (2009), Luckhurst (2010), and Martin (2013) also remark on this ‘association’ and this thesis aims to further identify and consider the links between these practices.

Some works of posthumous documentary theatre can certainly be reminiscent of history plays, which Stern (2013) defines as a "focused, engaged depiction of real events" (as cited in Schneider, 2014, p. 72). Fisher Dawson (1999) ventures to suggest that historical drama is the larger category to which documentary theatre belongs. However, although documentary theatre could be considered a kind of historical drama, not all historical drama falls under the umbrella of documentary theatre. For example, Shakespeare's history play *Julius Caesar* is widely recognised as being congruent with collective memory and the 'official history' of the past. Many of the play's characters, such as Julius Caesar, Mark Antony, and Octavius, are real people known to have existed and Caesar's assassination was an event that verifiably happened. However, while Plutarch's biography of Julius Caesar was used as source material and informed the play's content, dialogue including Mark Antony's famous Act III Scene II funeral oration: "Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears" (Shakespeare, 1599/2005, p. 61) and Caesar's last utterance "Et tu, Brute" (Act III Scene I) do not come verbatim from historical records but were invented by Shakespeare. Thus, it is the combination of real people, real time, real place, *and* real words that distinguishes posthumous documentary theatre from other kinds of historical drama.

Yet, similarly to Shakespeare's history plays, posthumous documentary theatre can also be a kind of historiography, a term used here to refer to the writing of history. Historiography is a process of 'storying' (Macfie, 2015; Martin, 2013; Munslow, 2007) and any form of documented history, while about real people and events, is still to some degree always imagined and fictively constructed. Histories are "not found *in the past"* (Macfie, 2015, p. 36), but are created and remembered in the present/future. Posthumous documentary theatre also 'stories' its real-world source materials in the sense that the documentary material is usually edited, organised, and arranged into a performable historical narrative or story for its audience. Similar to written histories, "the documentary is not in the object but in the relationship between the object, its mediators (artists, historians, authors) and its audience" (Reinelt, 2009, p. 7). As Valentine (2018) comments, "a story does not simply 'exist in the ether' but was 'constructed' by the person writing it" (p. 23). Embracing this constructivist approach to historiography, this research examines the inherent storying that takes place in the development of any historical narrative, the ethical considerations of such

a process, and if/how it might impact documentary theatre's claim to truth, reality, authenticity, and objectivity.

POSTHUMOUS DOCUMENTARY THEATRE AND REPRESENTATION

Like many historical narratives, the subjects of posthumous documentary theatre are "absent— unavailable, dead, disappeared" (Martin, 2006, p. 9) and the representation of these absent past lives on stage is dependent on bodies in the present (Agnew, 2004; Gapps, 2009). Analogous to historical re-enactment, in posthumous documentary theatre the actors' bodies can consequently take on an anachronistic quality (Gapps, 2009), but this is not a characteristic unique to posthumous documentary theatre. Dramatic performance is a set of signs and signifiers (Honzl, 1976 as cited in Jestrovic, 2020) and frequently, in many kinds of theatre, the things that create a reality on stage represent or stand in the place of other things from other times. As theatre scholar Catherine Love (2017) comments, "whenever we see something on stage, it inevitably enters a representational relationship" (p. 38). The stage lighting might evoke sunlight or moonlight, the set may represent a certain location at a specific time and place, and the actors' bodies 'become' the bodies of others.

Posthumous documentary theatre is simultaneously a process of re-presentation and representation, and I make a distinction between these terms by identifying a representation as the product of an act or process of re-presentation. Thus, it is by posthumously re-presenting documentary material on stage that representations of the dead can be produced. Historiographers Canning and Postlewait (2010) suggest that the conceptual framework for historical representation consists of five primary ideas: *archive, time, space, identity,* and *narrative.* Representation theorist Stuart Hall (2013) similarly suggests that meaning is relational. Thus, it could be understood that it is the interaction and interrelation of these five ideas that result in a representation and create a particular meaning.

The re-presentation of "nontheatrical source material," which actor Greg Pierotti defines as "all sorts of texts not written for the stage" (as cited in Kaufman & McAdams, 2018, p. 260)

in posthumous documentary theatre is inherently a process of decontextualization and recontextualization. Re-presented in a new time and space (the contemporary stage), the historical documentary materials' identities, how they are understood and 'what is known', shift as they are observed and absorbed in the light of the present, arguably resulting in the construction of a new or evolved historical narrative. Posthumous documentary theatre can be considered a "highly complex and radically constructivist representation of the past" (Munslow, 2007, p. 143), as the dead are reconstructed, re-enacted, and 'resurrected' in representations that are simultaneously both a depiction and a symbol, that both "stand for" and "stand in the place of" them (Hall, 2013, p. 2). Furthermore, while a posthumous documentary theatre play is "an authored text and assemblage – an artefact" (Lidchi, 2013, p. 153), like objects, texts, and photographs, it too works "to create a representation of a particular people, at a precise historical moment" (Lidchi, 2013, p. 121) and, as both a historical and historiographical snapshot, can make a valuable and distinct contribution to the living archive.

POSTHUMOUS DOCUMENTARY THEATRE AND MUSEOLOGY

As they craft their representations of historical documentary materials for audiences in the present, theatre makers become stewards and curators of the past and, akin to museum curators, notions of history, memory, time, past, present, and future affect the exhibition of their work. Museums are archives of history and can be considered "repositories of memory" (Crane, 2000, p. 4). American theatrologist, Marvin Carlson (2003), comparably identifies the theatre as "the repository of cultural memory" (p. 87), while Martin (2013) suggests that it is the documentary theatre audiences themselves that become "repositories of history, gazing on an embodiment of memory" (p. 87). A repository can be understood as a place where something is re-posited or placed again and, similar to museums, posthumous documentary theatre can participate in the construction, preservation, and progression of cultural memory by 'placing again' histories and memories on stage.

Museums "occupy a contemporary, historic, and future place" (Besterman, 2006, p. 432). It is a unique positionality from which museums' evolving ethical contexts are acknowledged and continually (re)considered, responsive to "the shifting values of the society which they

serve and to which they are accountable" (p. 432). During the last century, there has been what could be described as an 'ethical turn' in practices of museology, with "those who work for and with museums giving more critical consideration to their own constructions of history than they have ever done before" (Beier-de Haan, 2006, p. 187). Contemporary museum studies and practices consider not just how objects of the past can be displayed but how they *should* be re-presented, with questions such as "Who owns the past? [and] What gives me authority to speak for others?" (Beier-de Haan, 2006, p. 187) now informing the dramaturgy and organisation of exhibitions. Theatre and performance historian Viv Gardner (2016), comments that "the responsibility of the historian is to both subject and audience, both past and present – to look both ways" (p. 63). Posthumous documentary theatre makers similarly look both ways as they navigate the dramaturgical representation of the past in the present and, as Sarah Ruhl comments, they try "to think how to make it live theatrically in this particular moment in time" (Peter, 2010, para. 8).

Ernst (2000) suggests that "museographical dramaturgy is about the art of displaying missing links and about creating a sense of distance; only when space is left can the imagination of the viewer step in, and objects communicate with one another" (p. 33). When provided with space and critical distance, the frame through which audiences engage with history, both in posthumous documentary theatre and museums, changes. It becomes a reflexive dialogue between collective cultural memory and their personal lived experiences. Their memories and knowledge of the past and present, coupled with projections of the future, inform their perception, reception, and engagement with the exhibition or performance. These cognitive strands are woven together to construct an individualised narrative that helps them connect with, understand, and make sense of what is presented.

Both museums and posthumous documentary theatre are sites where subjectivities (theatre makers', actors', and viewers' perceptions) and objectivities (the historical artefact or document) collide (Crane, 2000). This collision, or perhaps fusion of objectivity and subjectivity, "can lead to the creation of a nonhistorical exhibit of the historical, which is itself a commentary on the nature of memory, museum representation, and the desire for authenticity" (Crane, 2000, p. 9). Works of posthumous documentary theatre are inherently

‘nonhistorical exhibits of the historical’ and can similarly challenge us to consider the nature of representation, “of truth, the politics of storytelling and our relation to the world” (Adiseshiah & LePage, 2016, p. 4). The form poses difficult questions about what truth, history, and authenticity really are and “whether theatre can ever faithfully present reality” (Love, 2018, p. 4).

Exploring posthumous documentary theatre in relation to other practices of historical representation such as performing history, historiography, and museology has enabled me to identify similarities and differences between the practices and establish posthumous documentary theatre as a distinct subgenre within the wider field of documentary theatre. Moreover, this discussion has introduced the idea of ‘the ethics of representation’, specifically, that there may be a degree of ethical consideration implicit in any form of representation of history. This provokes questions as to whether there is a ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to re-present the past and the dead, and how theatre makers might interpret and consider this ethical dimension in their work.

ETHICS IN DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

Documentary theatre intimately engages with the lives of others. Aotearoa New Zealand-based documentary theatre practitioner Stuart Young (2017) describes the form as a “dramaturgical process of translating the lives of others for the stage” (p. 21), and if one agrees that “lives are never isolated from other lives” it could be said that “any work that engages with others will therefore have an ethical face” (J. Gibson, 2011, p. 1). Documentary theatre’s ‘ethical face’ is acknowledged by numerous practitioners to manifest as the ‘obvious’ and ‘huge’ ethical responsibility they have to those whose words inform the play’s content (Megson, 2018). Yet, while many actors, directors, and theatre makers agree that there are ethical considerations and responsibilities when this kind of theatre is produced, there are currently no official ethical guidelines, codes of conduct, or professional standards designed specifically for documentary theatre practice.

Ethics refers to the moral principles that inform how we navigate the world and make decisions as to what is right and wrong and good and bad. Yet, while “ethical behaviour is

the fabric which binds human society" (Summerskill, 2020, p. 45), notions of what is ethical and what is not are inherently subjective. Summerskill (2020) suggests that "the ethical conduct of verbatim theatre practitioners is guided more by their own individual moral compasses than by any external rules or laws" (p. 46). Unlike the rigidity of the law, ethical thinking and behaviour are more flexible and subjective, especially in a post-modern society where the responsibility to establish the ethics of a particular course of action has shifted from external authorities such as the church and elders to the individual (Smirnova, 2018). Consequently, theatre makers' ethical thinking is in a constant state of evolution, (re)evaluation, and (re)construction, responsive to their individual practices and perceptions of the shifting values of society.

Arguably the leading ethical concern for documentary theatre makers is the potential for harm to occur via the misrepresentation of their documentary subjects. Young (2017) identifies that when theatrically re-presenting or retelling another's story "if a participant feels that his testimony has been misrepresented, or he feels betrayed, he may be doubly wounded" (p. 26). Wary of misrepresenting their contributors, many theatre makers strive to stage their documentary subjects and their testimonies in a way that demonstrates "sensitivity and respect" (Summerskill, 2020, p, 55) and aim to cultivate a dramaturgy and mode of representation in which subjects appear to 'speak for themselves.' Thus, in documentary theatre that primarily uses recorded interviews as source material, "playwrights frequently choose to omit the interviewer's voice in their scripts" (Summerskill, 2020, p. 40). Although this dramaturgical act of omission often seeks to ensure documentary subjects' voices are prioritised and at the forefront of the work, it can be "deeply problematic" (Young, 2017, p. 27). Works of documentary theatre are inherently highly mediated constructions, orchestrated and controlled by the theatre maker. They are more akin to a visual artist's meticulously crafted collage than an unprompted, unedited confession, and the exclusion of the interviewer's guiding voice may falsely "suggest the subject's autonomy. . .and may create the illusion that the testimony comes unmediated and even spontaneously from the source's mouth" (Young, 2017, p. 27).

Documentary theatre is popularly championed as a medium that gives a "voice to the voiceless" (Belfield, 2018b, p. 110; Summerskill, 2020, p. 60), with numerous documentary

plays focusing on unrepresented, misrepresented, vulnerable, marginalised, and disenfranchised individuals and communities. For example, there are several verbatim and documentary plays that explore some of the harrowing experiences of asylum seekers and refugees, including Ros Horin's *Through the Wire* (2004), Jessica Blank and Eric Jensen's *Aftermath* (2009), Alecky Blythe's *Do We Look Like Refugees?!* (2010), and Clare Summerskill's *Rights of Passage* (2016). Such documentary plays have obvious ethico-political dimensions (Jeffers, 2011; Wake, 2013), and retroactively 'cast' their makers as active, 'ethically aware', and socially conscious allies. However, despite their best intentions to elevate and exhibit unheard voices and foster awareness, empathy, and support for others, documentary theatre makers run the risk of 'speaking for' their documentary subjects in the process, which could result in them experiencing further marginalisation or harm.

Reminiscent of its Brechtian and Epic theatre roots, documentary theatre is often constructed with the desire to provoke socio-political thought. It has sometimes been marketed as theatre made 'by the people, for the people.' Yet, it is perhaps better described as 'theatre about those people, made by this person.' Or as Lee (2009) suggests in her working definition of biography, it is "the story of a person told by someone else" (p. 1). Documentary theatre makers are "engaged in a process of speaking for or on behalf of the other" (Stuart-Fisher, 2020, p. 9). Moreover, the process of representation often results in the subject being 'spoken about' and they can even become 'spoken over' if their voice is overshadowed by the theatre maker's desire to "privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another's situation or as one who can champion a just cause" (Alcoff, 1991, p. 29). In other words, there is the potential for the theatre maker's attempts to illuminate the perhaps overlooked truths of others to negatively impact the very people they are trying to help. As Summerskill (2020) reflects:

> the possibility exists that one person who claims to speak for another might be doing more harm than good. This is because however well-meaning their intentions, the interviewer or researcher, in claiming to represent another, can potentially take the voice away from those for whom one claims to speak. (p. 62)

Philosopher Linda Alcoff (1991) suggests that "we should strive to create wherever possible the conditions for dialogue and the practice of speaking with and to rather than speaking for others" (p. 23). Documentary theatre makers, especially those working in verbatim theatre with living subjects, frequently embrace a similar ethos. To address and navigate any ethical concerns that might arise regarding the representation of their documentary subjects, theatre makers will often incorporate communication and consultation with their subjects into their construction and rehearsal processes. They may ask interviewees to review the transcript of their interview and indicate anything they don't want to be included in the play. The actors might meet with the people they are going to be voicing on stage to get to know them, ask questions, or observe their physical mannerisms so that they might incorporate this information into their physical performances on stage. The documentary subjects may even be invited to a rehearsal or preview performance to see how they will be represented in the context of the whole performance. J. Gibson (2011), Young (2017), and Summerskill (2020) emphasise that the best way to avoid 'speaking for others' is to endeavour to increase documentary subjects' level of agency within the production process. The strategies identified above are some of the ways theatre makers have traditionally built a dialogic relationship with their subjects, enabling them to have some agency in the re-presentation of their words and 'character' on stage.

Despite evidence suggesting that a level of ethical consideration influences the practice of many documentary theatre makers, the form itself "is susceptible to accusations of appropriation since narrators' stories are used to create a play which helps realise the aims of the theatre maker" (Summerskill, 2020, p. 31). Furthermore, as "it's definitely a protocol in documentary making that you don't pay your subjects" (Megson, 2018, p. 228) rarely do they receive any kind of compensation for their contribution and participation. Often documentary subjects are willing and grateful to have the opportunity to share their stories and generally have no expectation of payment. Nevertheless, the potentially appropriative and exploitative facet of documentary theatre becomes more apparent when the work is commercially successful. For example, Alecky Blythe's verbatim plays, *London Road* and *Our Generation* each had professional productions at the Olivier Theatre and Dorfman Theatre (formerly the Cottesloe Theatre) in 2012 and 2022 respectively. Produced by one of Britain's most renowned and respected theatre organisations, The National Theatre, and with an

average ticket price of approximately £35 (National Theatre, n.d.) (which roughly equates to NZD $75 in 2023) it is expected that both productions were profitable ventures for Blythe. Consideration of this may prompt ethical questions about how documentary theatre makers use and, to a certain extent, 'take ownership' of other people's words and experiences to further their own theatrical enterprise and in some cases their income.

While this discussion has broadly characterised documentary theatre makers as motivated by a desire to give a voice to the voiceless or some other similarly 'noble' intent, like all creative endeavours and works of art, documentary theatre is made for a variety of reasons. For some the primary aim may be to spark and foster community engagement and raise awareness about certain topics or issues, resulting in narratives with an overt "societal anchoring" (Groot Nibbelink, 2023, p. 374) and political or didactic tone. Or, like *What Remains,* occasionally documentary plays are constructed as a research method or output. Other times it is simply 'art for art's sake' or there may be a more financial catalyst, for example, some of Blythe's verbatim plays were professionally commissioned. Moreover, often the theatre maker's documentary impulse is a combination of several of these different factors.

Regarding the release forms used to gain written consent from her interviewees, Blythe comments, "there's a scary two-page document which looks like you're signing your life away" (Megson, 2018, p. 227). While she is obviously joking, the notion of ownership of life stories and the possibility of the transference of that ownership to a documentary theatre maker is an interesting concept. J. Gibson (2011) comments that the "need for ethical negotiation between verbatim theatre-makers and their subjects can be seen to be grounded in a problematic idea about the ownership of life stories" (p. 8). Intellectual property refers to "new or original innovations and creations of the mind" (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, n.d., para. 1) and the corresponding intellectual property rights and laws serve to "protect the expression of ideas" (New Zealand Intellectual Property Office, n.d., para. 1). However, it is less clear if these concepts or similar notions of ownership extend to our life stories, that is, whether we can own our thoughts, memories, and experiences.

Theatre makers do not usually claim to own the life stories of others that they stage in their work. Yet, they do own the play that is constructed from those stories. Under the New Zealand Copyright Act 1994 "copyright protects the expression of ideas or information – not the ideas or information itself" (New Zealand Intellectual Property Office, n.d. para. 9). However, in the context of research ethics, it is commonly understood that interview participants own their data. The ideas and information they communicate in an interview and the content of any transcripts or recordings of those interviews belong to them (even if the theatre maker retains physical possession of the original documentation). Only when the theatre maker produces a written play script from that verbatim material, normally with their documentary subjects' informed consent and permission, does that work fall under the purview of "literary, dramatic, musical or artistic works" (Copyright Act 1994) and then is legally copyrighted to the theatre maker. The interviewees for documentary theatre, like research participants, own their contributions and data but the theatre maker owns the script crafted from them. However, if a theatre maker seeks to incorporate written documentary material such as diaries and letters into their work they must gain explicit permission from the copyright holder, even if the material is unpublished, as it is still a tangible expression of ideas and therefore is protected by the same legislation as any published literary work.

While it is legally permissible for theatre makers to gather and use the words of others to construct documentary theatre, it does not necessarily follow that it is always ethical. The law consists of a set of objective rules and regulations enforced by governmental institutions, while ethical thinking is far more equivocal and personal. It is up to individual theatre makers to evaluate the necessity of consideration of ethics in their practice and some, at the outset of their documentary theatre project, do develop an ethical agenda or framework to help ensure (their perception of) ethical practice is sustained. For example, in their recent monograph, *Verbatim Theatre Methodologies for Community Engaged Practice*, Australian documentary theatre practitioners Sarah Peters and David Burton (2023) propose an "Engaged Verbatim Theatre Praxis" that embraces a mindfulness-based ethics of care. They strive to

> Create theatre by a community's verbal stories in a way that:

1. Values listening to and sharing personal experiences and community stories so that people are heard, visible, and empowered through connection, relationship, and community
2. Embraces collaboration, dialogue, and experimentation with theatrical languages and conventions throughout the process of development to create innovative, engaging, and theatrically dynamic performance
3. Challenges normative and oppressive politics and policies, broadening our consciousness and transforming our understanding of the human and non-human world. (p. 28)

This manifesto articulates several concepts and principles that may be useful to others thinking about what ethical practice in documentary theatre might mean. However, it was created to serve a specific intention and practice and thus may not be suitable for other documentary theatre endeavours without some form of adaptation or recalibration. Devised by and for theatre practitioners whose work is largely constructed from testimony gathered in recorded interviews with live documentary subjects, Peters and Burton's Engaged Verbatim Theatre Praxis does not incorporate consideration of non-interview-based documentary theatre processes such as posthumous documentary theatre. This is neither unexpected nor unusual, as while there is consensus among theatre practitioners that documentary theatre demands some kind of ethical consideration, there is little discussion as to whether the same kind of ethical consideration afforded to the living is afforded to the dead when they are posthumously represented on stage.

ETHICS IN POSTHUMOUS DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

Lee (2009) comments that "the subject of a biography, like that of a portrait, should seem to be alive, breathing, present in all the totality, there-ness, and authenticity of their being" (p. 3). Posthumous documentary theatre can similarly be understood as a practice in which the living strive to reconstruct the life narratives of the dead as if they are "alive, breathing and present" on stage. Yet, the dead's 'authenticity of being' is fundamentally different to the living, and this discussion begins to explore whether their ethical status is too.

Peters and Burton (2023) suggest that "to ensure that stories are captured ethically, authentically, and respectfully, playwrights need to be clear with their interviewees about how the stories and material generated in the interview will be used in the development of performance" (p. 66). This statement is obviously directed towards verbatim theatre practices with living interviewees and the underlying sentiment, that ethical practice in documentary theatre is "an iterative process of call and response" (p. 42) predicated upon the establishment and maintaining of a channel of communication between theatre makers and their subjects, encapsulates the ethical approach of many working in documentary theatre. Yet, when creating posthumous documentary theatre, there is no way for theatre makers to develop an ethical dialogue with their deceased subjects and no way to give the dead agency in the documentary process. Consequently, the ethical processes that may be conventionally applied to forms of documentary theatre with living subjects may need to be re-evaluated.

"Traditional ethics concerned itself largely with interpersonal relationships - how, it asked, should we treat our fellow human beings?" (Anderson, 2011, p. 86). Contemporary ethical thinking can be thought to extend beyond only living human beings to "encompass humans' relationship to the world around them" (p. 86). Fundamental biology suggests that the world around us is made up of living, non-living, and dead things. Living things: humans, plants and animals, express signs of life such as movement, respiration, sensitivity, growth etc. Dead things are understood as that which was once alive, or part of something alive, but now shows no traces of life e.g. wood, bones, a dried flower. Non-living things do not and have never lived e.g. stone, a mirror, an umbrella. A primary principle of most ethical viewpoints is that human beings have a moral responsibility to other human beings, to respect their autonomy, treat them with kindness and fairness, and avoid causing them harm. This obligation is widely recognised to extend beyond humans to other living things such as animals, and by the same token, it is commonly accepted that we do not have moral obligations to non-living things (one is not expected to show kindness to a rock). However, whether or not we have ethical obligations to the dead is more contested.

Summerskill (2020) urges theatre makers to "demonstrate sensitivity and respect for narrators in their theatrical representation – particularly those who come from marginalized

or vulnerable communities" (p. 55). Alcoff (2016) similarly proposes that we have to think even more about "speaking for others who cannot speak back" (p. 91). The dead cannot speak back to us, does this mean that they constitute a vulnerable community? The deceased seem to occupy a distinct yet unknowable space between the living and non-living. Professor of history, ethics, and human rights Antoon De Baets (2004) remarks that "the dead are no longer human beings (or persons), but are still *reminiscent* of them. They are less than human beings, but more than objects" (pp. 134-135). Voiceless, defenceless, and vulnerable, the dead can evoke a need for protection and compassion in the living.

Although they do not inhabit the same realm simultaneously, the dead were once living, and the living will inevitably one day join the community of the dead. Consequently, a shadowy and tenuous connection stretches between them, as De Baets (2004) suggests, "the living and the dead are two groups sufficiently similar to speak of them as members of one historical community" (p. 138). Philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler (2012) incorporates Levinas' philosophy of the Other in her discussion of the ethics of cohabitation stating: "Our ethical obligations extend to those who are not proximate in any physical sense and do not have to be part of a recognizable community to which we both belong" (p. 139). Considering this, if we categorise the deceased as "those who exceed our immediate sphere of belonging but to whom we nevertheless belong" (p. 140), we may have some kind of ethical responsibility to them, and the living's ethical obligation could be said to extend across the uncertain space between life and death.

If ethics is concerned with treating others in a way that minimises harm, in order to consider the ethical responsibility theatre makers might have to their posthumous documentary subjects, it must first be determined whether the dead can be harmed. Floris Tomasini (2017) identifies that "the idea that we can harm the living is uncontroversial. By comparison, the idea that we can harm the dead is highly controversial" (p. 21). Notions of post mortem harm typically relate to the physical bodies of the deceased, with discussion of bioethics, autopsies, and posthumous organ donation dominating the discourse. Posthumous documentary theatre does not involve or impact the physical bodies of the dead. Thus, this research considers notions of posthumous harm as detached from the

physical body and draws from the philosophy of George Pitcher to make a distinction between post mortem harm and ante mortem harm.

Pitcher (1984) illustrates the difference between an ante mortem person and a post mortem person by asking us to "consider the linguistic act of describing a dead person" (p. 183). He suggests that there are two different ways a person might describe a deceased friend.

> a) he [*sic*] can describe the dead friend as he [*sic*] was at some stage of life – i.e. as a living person.
>
> b) he [*sic*] can describe the dead friend as he [*sic*] is now, in death- mouldering, perhaps, in a grave. (p. 184)

The first option describes the ante mortem person while the second describes the post mortem person. Many argue that a post mortem person cannot be harmed as "after death, no events can alter a moment of a person's life. Nothing remains to be affected" (Partridge, 1981, pp. 248-249). This research sidesteps that debate by choosing instead to consider, as proposed by Feinberg (1980/2014), Nagel (1970), and Pitcher (1984), that it is not the post mortem person who can be posthumously harmed but the ante mortem person.

Philosopher Joel Feinberg states that the

> interests harmed by events that occur at or after the moment a person's nonexistence commences are interests of the living person who no longer is with us [ante mortem person], not the interests of the decaying body he [*sic*] left behind. (as cited Belliotti, 2011, p. 50)

For example, if I were to break a promise I made to someone after their death, it would not, nor could not, harm the post mortem person but I may still feel like I had betrayed the ante mortem person I once knew. But how can a person's living interests be harmed after their death? Using defamation as an example, Feinberg (1980/2014) compares harming the ante mortem person to harming a living person without their knowledge. For instance, if I began to spread slander about someone without their knowledge, I would be harming their reputation even though they were not aware at that moment that they were being harmed. Feinberg (1980/2014) thus concludes that "if knowledge is not a necessary condition of harm before one's death why should it be necessary afterward?" (p. 66). If Feinberg's argument for ante mortem harm is applied to a posthumous documentary theatre context,

it could be said that there is potential for the reputations of deceased documentary subjects to be harmed after death. But whether the living have an ethical obligation or responsibility to acknowledge the potential for posthumous harm is another question, for what do we owe the dead?

Interpersonal communication scholar Jennifer L. Adams (2023) identifies that there is a "gravity and caution required" (p. 3) when representing the letters of the dead and conducting personal research about others from the past, "especially the deceased" (p. 3). Contrastingly, life writing scholar Margaretta Jolly (2008) reflects, "like others working with letters, I have wondered what we *owe* one another in relation to our personal lives? . . . How do we balance individual need – for privacy or, conversely, for public attention – against collective interest – for education, for political change, for amusement?" (p. 206). Can the betrayal of a person's privacy be morally justified if it is in the public's 'interest'? Certainly, presenting the personal and private documentary materials; letters, diaries etc. of a living person without their knowledge or permission to a public audience would generally be considered a breach of privacy and an unethical act, especially if motivated only by the intent to produce amusement or entertainment. However, life writing practitioners, Thomas Couser and Carolyn Ellis suggest that in the context of life writing practices such as biography, autobiography, performance ethnography, and autoethnography, breaching the privacy of the dead is not the same as breaching the privacy of the living.

Couser (2004) states that "whether a biographical subject is living or dead would seem to change the ethical standards, as it does the legal rules. . . the right to privacy is held to terminate with death" (p. 6). Ellis (2007) similarly identifies that "people lose some legal rules of privacy after they die, and the dead can't be libelled because they cannot suffer as a result of damaged reputations" (p. 14). While this comment acknowledges that it may be possible for an individual's reputation to be damaged after their death, in contrast to Feinberg, Ellis suggests that because a dead person can no longer be impacted by anything, it cannot harm *them*. Thus, it is perhaps not the dead who may suffer or experience posthumous harm but the living they leave behind. The living relatives, friends, and descendants of the dead can be impacted, and may experience distress or betrayal if they feel their dead have been misrepresented.

Ethicist Yotam Benziman (2017), concludes that "we cannot wrong the dead and they have no interests", yet, still identifies and questions "our strong feeling that we ought to respect the interests of the people who are dear to us, even when they are dead" (p. 75). Perhaps here we need to, as Alcoff (2016) advises, "think about our motivations" (p. 91). Perhaps the ethical responsibilities the living feel towards the dead are motivated not solely by the risk of harming the dead, or their living descendants, but by the fact that the dead were once living and could once be harmed. It is generally recognised that human beings have inherent dignity and are worthy of respect simply because they are human beings. De Baets (2004) argues that the living have responsibilities to the deceased because "the dead deserve respect, and they deserve respect because they possess dignity" (p. 136). They bypass debates concerning distinctions between living and dead human beings by suggesting that "*posthumous dignity* is not the same as the *human dignity* of the living...*Posthumous dignity* is an appeal to respect the past humanity of the dead and the very foundation for the responsibilities of the living" (p. 136). This idea is evocative of Pitcher's conception of the ante mortem person and similarly suggests that while the dead cease to be affected by anything from the moment of their death, the moral responsibility that the living feel towards them remains, lingering and uneroded by the passage of time.

Partridge (1981) challenges and ultimately rejects arguments for posthumous harm yet concludes that we do have a moral obligation to the dead. He states that

> even though a person's interests do not survive his [sic] death, we may nonetheless affirm that, in a community of moral personalities and just institutions, we are not only permitted to give the dead their due, we are morally required to do so. (p. 264)

By this reasoning, it is not minimisation of harm to either the dead or their living relatives that dictates the living's duty to the dead, but the fact that we supposedly inhabit 'a community of moral personalities.' In other words, to disrespect the dead is to disrespect the moral fabric at the foundation of our society. Or as De Baets (2004) suggests, "neglecting the view that the dead possess dignity offends the sensibilities of humanity at large" (p. 137).

Furthermore, if our 'community of moral personalities' is motivated by The Golden Rule Principle it may be in our best interests to honour and respect the dead and their post mortem wishes. The Golden Rule principle is a moral maxim embraced by many religions and cultures and "offers a neat moral balance between altruism - the desire to act for others' sake - and egoism - the desire to act for one's own" (Anderson, 2011, p. 57). It dictates that one should treat others as they themselves would want to be treated. If The Golden Rule is thought to extend to the deceased, it would dictate that we should treat the dead how we would like to be treated after our own deaths. Thus, perhaps the ethical behaviour we enact towards them, our honouring of their last wills and testaments, funeral instructions, and deathbed wishes is in part a way to ensure that our own future posthumous interests are similarly honoured when we die.

This research is primarily focused on exploring the potential ethical obligation theatre makers might have to the dead in posthumous documentary theatre. However, it is necessary to consider how this ethical responsibility, which Summerskill (2020) articulates as a duty to "DO NO HARM" (p. 56, emphasis in original), might extend beyond the people who are re-presented on stage in posthumous documentary theatre. For example, when staging *My Name is Rachel Corrie* it is not only the memories of the dead that theatre makers may have an ethical duty to consider but its impact on the live audiences encountering those memories. The sudden and violent nature of Rachel Corrie's death, crushed under the weight of an Israeli defense bulldozer in the Gaza strip while trying to stop the destruction of Palestinian homes, paired with her literary resurrection in the play, immortalizes Rachel as a kind of twenty-first-century martyr. The narrative that Rickman and Viner carefully construct from Rachel's emails and journal entries tells the story of an activist.

Rachel's father comments "the world knows Rachel for how she died" (Corrie, 2008, p. xx) and while Rachel has become a symbol for human rights following her death, she has also become a divisive figure. The nature of her death coupled with the play's content distinctly places Rachel on one side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Consequently, "the play sits somewhat uncomfortably in between a political examination of the Israeli-Palestinian situation and an exploration of the life of a young and talented idealistic activist who

decides to take a personal stand on an injustice" (Stuart-Fisher, 2020, p. 92). The story of Rachel as an individual becomes inextricably intertwined with a wider political engagement and it is difficult to extrapolate Rachel from the political ideology she might posthumously represent. Consequently, *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* has roused international controversy, to the extent that productions have been protested and even cancelled due to opposition and adverse reactions to the play's political content (Pincus-Roth, 2007). This exemplifies how the theatre maker's ethical considerations might extend beyond the deceased person they seek to represent. Performances of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie* have been cancelled because of the potential harm it might cause audiences and others outside the play, suggesting that (in these instances) the theatre maker felt their ethical responsibility to the living eclipsed any sense of obligation to tell the deceased Rachel's story.

Questions about whether or not the dead can be harmed, and the exact nature of posthumous harm can be hard to navigate. Belfield (2018b) describes ethics in documentary theatre as "grey mists" (p. 110), and the living's ethical responsibility to the dead, and our motivations to acknowledge that responsibility, can also be mystifying. Our relationships with the dead are deeply personal and just as we may have subjective perspectives on what is ethical or unethical in life, we do so too for our dead. It seems an ethical quagmire through which there is no clear path. So, what does this mean for posthumous documentary theatre?

Tomasini (2017) suggests that harm can be conceptualised in five ways:

1. We can intrinsically harm existing persons.
2. We can harm the transcendent interests of persons that once existed.
3. We can symbolically harm the narrative identity of persons facing their death.
4. We can symbolically harm the memory and biography of the dead.
5. We intrinsically harm how the dead continue to be remembered through the experience of significant others who feel their dead have been unjustly and harmfully remembered. (p. 36)

Posthumous documentary theatre has the potential to impact how the dead might be remembered and continue to be thought of and Tomasini's notion of symbolic harm, specifically as conceptualised in points four and five, is perhaps the most applicable form of

harm to posthumous documentary theatre practices. It circumvents post mortem/ante mortem debates, suggesting instead that, "if posthumous harm can occur it would damage the biographical life of the victim. . . and cause living persons to reinterpret the biographical life of the victim; or it could add a negative chapter to the victim's narrative" (Belliotti, 2011, pp. 109-110). Each new representation of the dead in posthumous documentary theatre could be perceived to contribute to their subjects' biographical life narrative, and it is these symbolic biographical lives that perhaps remain to be harmed.

To entertain the concept of biographical lives is to question whether the dead's identities are static, becoming fixed as something that ceases to progress after death or if they are something that can continue to evolve (Lea & Belliveau, 2023, p. 351). Philosopher Raymond Belliotti (2011) clarifies that the notion of 'biographical lives'

> revolves around human life as a narrative, a story. We are a series of stories in that we understand and identify ourselves through a chain of events, choices, actions, thoughts, and relationships. Our *biographical* lives including value and meaning connected to death and events thereafter, extend beyond our *biological* lives. (p. 109)

If we do accept biographical lives to be perpetual and exceeding the parameters of biological lives, it is neither the post mortem nor the ante mortem person to whom posthumous documentary theatre makers may have an ethical responsibility, but the ongoing biographical lives or post-selves of their documentary subjects.

Brian Massumi proposes that "ethics is about how we inhabit uncertainty, together. It's not about judging right or wrong" (Zournazi, 2003, para 25). Death is paradoxically one of the most certain yet unknown aspects of humanity. Therefore, it seems appropriate to conceptualise the living's ethical responsibility to the dead as an uncertain road that we cautiously navigate together. I do not wish to categorically declare that posthumous harm is possible or impossible, preferring instead to offer an exploration of a fragment of an ongoing multifaceted discussion. Yet, posthumous documentary theatre is an inherently commemorative and potentially memorializing practice, and how theatre makers remember, re-enact, reconstruct, and represent the dead may warrant ethical consideration.

METHODOLOGY

The creative possibilities for the theatrical expression of a work of posthumous documentary theatre are endless, as are the ways theatre makers might regard the prospective ethical considerations associated with representing the dead on stage. This research intends to practically probe the ethical and dramaturgical 'whys' and 'hows' (Lyndall-Knight, 2020, p. 72) of posthumous documentary theatre. Considering the subjective elements of both theatre practice and ethics this research adopts a qualitative research methodology. This enabled me to engage reflexively with the research process and recognise my subjective insider-researcher positionality as both a creative practitioner and practice-based researcher.

Moisés Kaufman reflects that notions of construction are fundamental to his documentary theatre practice, stating, "for what is the stage but a construct of a certain reality? And what is the playwright but a construction worker?" (Svich, 2003, p. 71). Posthumous documentary theatre makers are builders who work with found materials sourced and collected from the world around them. However, instead of creating architectural structures from wood, steel, and stone, they build dramaturgical structures from the words of others. Valentine (2018) reflects that "it has been useful to sometimes think of myself as a 'found materials' playwright" (p. 199), as the term implicitly understands and suggests that the theatre maker "must *transform* the found material to make it art" (p. 199). Even though the documentary source material from which theatre makers build their work is 'found' rather than fabricated, documentary theatre does not simply reflect aspects of the world and make 'reality' visible. It is also essentially a creative process of construction that transforms various fragments of found material into bricolages representative of individual experiences of reality.

Qualitative research is an appropriate methodology for this PhD because, similarly to many works of documentary theatre, it "locates the observer in the world" and "consists of a set of interpretative, material practices that make the world visible". Furthermore, these practices not only "transform the world" but construct our understanding of it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 10). Drawing further comparisons between approaches to qualitative

research and documentary theatre, the following section identifies constructivist and postmodern ideology as common influences in both practices and articulates the rationale for my chosen research methodology, design, methods, and research ethics.

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In contrast to positivist research, qualitative research is predicated on subjectivity and the emergence and construction of knowledge. Qualitative researcher Pranee Liamputtong (2013) identifies the following five characteristics of qualitative research:

- It focuses on context
- It emphasises holistic accounts and multiple realities
- Makes use of multiple methods
- It is emergent rather than strictly predetermined
- It is fundamentally interpretive. (p. xiv)

Because they typically incorporate "the perspectives of both researchers and participants" (Haseman, 2006, p. 99), research methods such as interviews, focus groups, observations, ethnographic research, autoethnography, action research, document reviews, and other unobtrusive methods are common in qualitative research. Knowledge is not considered something that is merely uncovered and illuminated through "structured and careful observations" (Liamputtong, 2013, p. xi) but is constructed by the researcher. In other words, a qualitative research paradigm purports that "knowledge only exists in an act of knowing and not as a kind of object or representation of the world" (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 10).

Qualitative and quantitative are generally used to encapsulate the "alternative understandings of how knowledge is created" (Haseman, 2006, p. 99). Yet, within these two overarching categories are multiple distinct research paradigms. Different types of research inquiry can generally be categorized into four major paradigms often labelled as positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, and constructivism (Guba, 1990; Lincoln & Guba, 2005). Donna Mertens (2015) adapts this categorisation, naming post-positivism, constructivist, transformative, and pragmatic as the four major paradigms of educational and psychological research. Furthermore, she reflects that different labels are used synonymously in different

texts, suggesting that “some authors use the label qualitative rather than constructivist for that paradigm; however, qualitative is a type of methodology, not a paradigm” (p. 8).

Before considering the nature of constructivism in more detail and how it pertains to this research, I briefly clarify what can be meant by the term ‘paradigm.’ The term was introduced by Thomas Kuhn and originally referred to “amalgams of scientific practices and scientific schemes. They [paradigms] are ways of doing the science in question, but also ways of thinking” (Preston, 2008, p. 11). The term has since been adopted beyond scientific fields. Prominent theorists on qualitative research Norman K. Denzin and Yovanna S. Lincoln (2018) describe a paradigm as ‘a net’ stating: “the net that contains the researcher’s epistemological, ontological, and methodological premises may be termed a *paradigm* or interpretive framework” (p. 19). A notable contributor to constructivist theory, Egon G. Guba (1990), suggests that “in its most common and generic sense” paradigm refers to “a basic set of beliefs that guides actions” (p. 17). Mertens (2015) echoes Guba, stating that a paradigm is “a way of looking at the world. It is composed of certain philosophical assumptions that guide and direct thinking and action” (p. 8). Additionally, a paradigm can be understood as something which provides a framework for researchers’ discussion. This research regards constructivism as a self-contained paradigm that falls under the larger banner of qualitative inquiry.

CONSTRUCTIVISM

“The *constructivist paradigm* assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjective epistemology (knower and respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 20). Constructivist researchers reject “the notion that there is an objective reality that can be known” (Mertens, 2015, p. 18) and acknowledge and emphasize that their research, which is often based on reports of experiences, “does not result in a definitive capture of a reality that can be generalized to a larger population” (p. 19). They take the stance that “the researcher’s goal is to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge” (p. 18). I consider documentary theatre to be a constructivist practice, for in their frequent exhibition of multiple voices, documentary plays can

champion a relativist ontology and can acknowledge the existence of multiple truths and perceptions of reality. Furthermore, documentary theatre also adopts a subjective epistemology in which meaning is not simply discovered but constructed and co-created during performance through the interaction of the knower (theatre makers & actors) and the respondent (audience).

Constructivists share much in common with philosophical orientations such as postmodernism, post-structuralism, and deconstructivism (Mertens, 2015), most notably their rejection of positivism. Education theorist Fenwick W. English (2003) comments that "constructivism forms the philosophical foundation of postmodernism (as cited in Pegues, 2007, p. 322). Yet, Wilson (1997) states the inverse, remarking that "postmodern perspectives about the world underlie much constructivist writing" (p. 297). A possible distinction between the two could be that constructivism is commonly understood as a paradigm and refers to an *approach* to learning or knowledge, whereas postmodernism encapsulates an entire worldview and movement. Postmodern thinking impacts "virtually every discipline, from philosophy to cultural studies, from geography to art history" (Ward, 1997, p. 3). In this research, I consider constructivism, as outlined by Lincoln and Guba in *The Constructivist Credo* (2016), to have emerged in parallel to the extensive 'postmodern turn.' Postmodernism is embedded in countless elements of contemporary society, consequently "a deep flavor of that postmodern influence will be seen in the lines – and – between the lines" (Lincoln & Guba, 2016, p. 34) of constructivist theory.

POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism is frequently equated with constructivism and, while they share very similar tenets, postmodernism could be considered a more sceptical intellectual stance than constructivism. Postmodernism is often characterised by an emphasis on deconstruction, pessimism and "disillusionment with the idea of absolute knowledge" (Ward, 1997, p. 9). As Karataş-Özkan and Murphy (2010) state, constructivism "focuses on its constructive nature, i.e. sharing and negotiating meanings, where there is an emphasis on deconstruction of the self and other in the postmodernist view" (p. 457). Here deconstruction refers not to destruction but to the questioning and exploration of knowledge as something that is not

found whole but is constructed via the amalgamation of multiple fragments of knowledge. Derridean theories of deconstruction suggest that meaning is never fixed but "unstable and perspectival" (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 121). Consequently, the individual experience and "small local truths from specific perspectives" (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 129) are elevated in status and subjective experiences are viewed as equal and even "superior to external or objectified ones" (Liamputtong, 2013, p. 13). Documentary theatre similarly frequently seeks to celebrate the extraordinary power of ordinary experiences by showcasing the voices of everyday people. As Hammond and Steward (2008) observe, "anyone can be the star of a verbatim play" which makes it "a remarkably democratic medium" (p. 12).

Postmodernism argues that reality is not singular and static, but multiple and always in flux; realities "are formed and re-formed, constructed and reconstructed" (Liamputtong, 2013, p. 13). Thus, although implicitly diverse, postmodern perspectives are generally wary of notions of objectivity and universality and instead embrace the subjectivity of relativism, asserting that reality, fact, history, and truth are relative to societal and individual points of view. Documentary theatre embraces this postmodern "plurality of experience" (Angrosino, 2007, p. 13) and documentary plays frequently take the form of patchworked amalgams that represent, reconstruct, and juxtapose fragments of contrasting and conflicting experiences of reality. Consideration of this influenced the qualitative methodology and constructivist and postmodern ideology that guides this research's exploration of posthumous documentary theatre practice.

ARTS-BASED/PERFORMATIVE RESEARCH AND PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

This research embraces the maxim that "knowledge is about *doing* rather than *seeing*" (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 10) and utilises practice-based arts research methodologies. Patricia Leavy (2020) comments that "arts-based practices are particularly useful for research projects that aim to *describe, explore, discover*, or *unsettle*. Furthermore, these research practices are generally attentive to *processes*" (p. 22). This research is concerned with doing and with the dramaturgical and ethical processes of constructing posthumous documentary theatre. Thus, arts-based research provided a suitable framework from which this investigation could prosper.

Arts-based research is generally considered to fall under the broader umbrella of qualitative research. However, Brad Haseman (2006) suggests 'performative research' as a "third category of research – alongside quantitative (symbolic numbers) and qualitative (symbolic words)" (p. 102) that may better accommodate arts-based research practices. Moreover, Haseman (2006) comments that

> It would be foolish to argue for a watertight separation of qualitative research from performative research for they share many principal orientations. Certainly, performative research is derived from relativist ontology and celebrates multiple constructed realities. Its plurivocal potential operates through interpretative epistemologies where the knower and the known interact, shape and interpret the other. (pp. 103-104)

Although performative research is "aligned with many of the values of qualitative research . . . The principal distinction between this third category and the qualitative and quantitative categories is found in the way it chooses to express its findings" (p. 102). This refers to "forms of symbolic data other than words in discursive text" (p. 103) including different creative outputs such as live performance. In this regard, arts-based research could be seen as a type of performative research as it is similarly described as "a process that uses the expressive qualities of form to convey meaning" (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. xii).

Arts-based research is "characterized by the use of creative art forms not just to make knowledge but to make knowledge about knowledge. . . In this way, art itself becomes the expression and performance of research rather than solely the object of research" (Hanzalik, 2021, p. 10). *What Remains* aims to function both as a distinctive creative artefact and an investigative research tool. Its construction and performance are simultaneously a process of representing the research and the knowledge-making itself (Hanzalik, 2021).

While I draw from constructivist, postmodern, qualitative, and performative research paradigms in this research, my methodological approach is best described as practice-based. Key voices within the field of practice-based research, Linda Candy, and Ernest Edmonds (2018) define practice-based research as "an original investigation undertaken in order to

gain new knowledge, partly by means of practice and the outcomes of that practice" (p. 63). In their collaboration with Craig Veer for *The Routledge International Handbook of Practice-Based Research* (2022) they further develop this definition, stating that "practice-based research is a principled approach to research by means of practice in which the research and the practice operate as interdependent and complementary processes leading to new and original forms of knowledge" (Candy et al., 2022, p. 27). They go on to identify four main principles of practice-based research.

1. Practice and research are complementary but distinctive
2. The research is based within a world-of-concern defined by practice
3. The practitioner researcher is at the centre of the research
4. The research aim is to generate new knowledge. (p. 28)

These principles provide the framework for this PhD, and the next part of this discussion articulates in more detail how (and why) my research embraced a practice-based research methodology.

THE CREATIVE PRACTICE COMPONENT

In practice-based research, the creative work of the practitioner is simultaneously the academic work of the researcher; "the *work* of art may… also be seen as a *work* of research" (Barone & Eisner, 2011, p. 48). Or as Candy (2019) states, "what is evident across all creative fields is that the making of works is in itself an 'investigation' in which the practitioner explores and experiments with materials and forms" (p. 49). Concerned with the relationship between form and content, this research questions how the nature of the documentary material and its associated ethical considerations might influence its theatrical form. "Many insights emerge in the processes of making and doing" (Nelson, 2013, p. 28) and the practical construction of *What Remains* serves as a research activity and experiment, "designed to answer a directed research question about art and the practice of it, which could not otherwise be explored by other methods" (Skains, 2018, p. 86). Both the play as a new creative artefact and the insight gained from the process of its creation inform the contributions of this research to knowledge and practice.

This thesis and *What Remains* support each other but "use different languages or modalities" (Brabazon, 2020a, p. 82). The knowledge generated from the live construction and performance of a piece of posthumous documentary theatre cannot be wholly expressed in words. Theatre is an embodied and 'lived' event and some of the knowledge produced from the creative practice can only be experienced and felt. Therefore, this thesis does not serve as a mediation of the ephemeral live performance of *What Remains*. Furthermore, although this thesis aims to make explicit some of the tacit knowledge discovered through the creative process, its primary function is to link *What Remains* to the scholarly context from which it originates. The play, as a creative artefact, moves the debate ahead and it is the role of the thesis to explain how the research has moved into new terrain (Brabazon, 2020b).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND PHASES

This research is structured into distinct phases intended to create an organised yet dynamic and embodied process of 'learning through doing'. "Practice-based research is often a process of exploration and discovery, with many key insights arriving via serendipity, rather than as part of experiment design" (Skains, 2018, p. 93). Donald Schön (1983) similarly comments that much of the reflective knowledge-making "hinges on the experience of surprise" (p. 56). Thus, the design of this research aims to maximise opportunities for reflection and spontaneous discovery.

Skains (2018) organises practice-based research into four key stages, the first and second of which are establishing the research problem and conducting background research. In this research, these stages were enacted through the undertaking of a literature review, a review of documentary theatre practice, a consideration of what 'ethics' in documentary theatre might mean, and the exploration of notions of posthumous harm. Skains' third phase is conducting empirical research and continuing contextual research. The practical creation and rehearsal of *What Remains* was the primary focus of this phase. The final phase of this research is the formation of an argument, which I have developed from reflection on my own practitioner process and consideration of the existing theories and creative practices of others. This argument aims to "shed light on processes and draw connections

between theories and realities" (Hanzalik, 2021, p. 52) and is expressed in both this thesis and *What Remains*.

REFLEXIVITY AND 'THE INSIDER RESEARCHER'

In practice-based research the creative practitioner-researcher must necessarily be positioned inside the research, as "the researchers themselves are an integral part of their studies, it is impossible for them to be objectively distant from their research" (Liamputtong, 2013, pp. 29-30). Accordingly, reflexivity has become an essential characteristic of this kind of research. Reflexivity can be understood as "the process of examining one's own beliefs, assumptions, and actions during the research process and examining how these influence the research" and "it is key to understanding one's positionality (Smith et al., 2021, p. 46). *What Remains* serves as a reflective "process of turning experience into learning, that is, a way of exploring experience in order to learn new things from it" (Boud, 2001, p. 10), and as a practitioner-researcher I must actively and analytically reflect on the experience both from the 'inside' and 'outside' in order to produce knowledge that may be useful to others.

The construction and rehearsal of documentary theatre is an inherently reflective practice as it "involves multiple iterations of making-seeing → reflecting → making again → reflecting again" (Candy, 2019, p. 57). Consequently, a practice-based researcher is at once a participant in and observer of their research. As Ross Gibson (2010) identifies, knowledge in creative practice research is generated by going "consciously and interrogatively into and then out of an experience, knowing it somewhat by immersion and then somewhat by exertion and reflection" (p. 5). The practitioner-researcher oscillates between being inside and outside the research and in this navigation must strike a fine balance between the spontaneous, impulsive, and often unknown trajectory of the creative practice and the more planned and calculated demands of the overall research design.

Reflective and interpretive analysis have been the primary forms of analysis employed throughout this project. Boud (2001) and Bright (2014) identify the key stages or occasions for reflection. The first is "reflection in anticipation of events. The emphasis here is on what

we can do to make the most of future events…what might usefully be taken into account in preparing ourselves for what is to come?" (Boud, 2001, p. 12). The establishment of my research topic was motivated not by a sense of 'problem', but rather "led by what is best described as 'an enthusiasm of practice' -something which is exciting, something which may be unruly" (Haseman, 2006, p. 100), and in preparation 'for what was to come' my research design bloomed from reflection on both my own past documentary theatre experiences and the practices of others. Candy (2019) identifies that "reflection on existing works may influence ideas of the present moment in different ways. Are they seeds for inspiration in themselves or do they enable a practitioner to learn what to do differently?" (p. 49). It has been this continual reflection of my own practice in motion and how it compares and contrasts with existing works and past practices that not only aided the construction of *What Remains* but enabled it to serve as an investigative and knowledge-yielding process.

Boud (2001) suggests that the second occasion for reflection is "in the midst of action…Through noticing, intervening, and reflection-in-action, we can steer ourselves through events in accordance with what our intentions are" (p. 13). 'Reflection-in-action' was a significant part of my creative practice, as *What Remains*' rehearsal process, and indeed many rehearsal and construction processes, are characterised by or largely predicated upon reflection-in-action. In the sense that the actors, directors, theatre makers etc., must constantly reflect in the moment of making, "in response to a specific action, in fleeting pauses, sometimes in short breaks, sometimes brought about by external interventions or interruptions" (Candy, 2019), such as the theatre maker's questions, notes, or directions.

The final stage for reflection is "reflection after events" (Boud, 2001, p. 13). This is the reflection that occurred after the construction, rehearsal, and performance of *What Remains* and during the writing of this thesis. It facilitates the viewing of "particular events in a wider context" (Boud, 2001, p. 14), and it is here that the analysis and synthesis of critical theories and subjective personal practice takes place, and findings are expressed and realised. In addition to practice, reflection-on-practice, and re-evaluation, Bright (2014) suggests a fourth phase in the cycle of reflective learning titled 'illumination' (p. 27). She comments that "during Phase 4, illumination, the practitioner reviews all previous phases

once more to determine further areas of learning" which "may include both points for future action in their practice and points of personal learning" (p. 28). Reflection on this thesis (which reflects on the reflection-in-practice that took place during the construction of *What Remains*) hopes to illuminate future areas for learning and exploration.

RESEARCH METHODS

This research incorporates a variety of qualitative research methods that create opportunities and occasions for reflection and illumination. Leavy (2017) comments that "a research method is a tool for data collection or generation" (p. 14) and this project utilised methods such as field notes, reflective journaling, participant observation, and document analysis. The primary methods used: creative workshops and rehearsals and recorded group discussions with actors, have been selected specifically because they function both as a means of empirical material collection *and* generation.

CREATIVE WORKSHOPS AND REHEARSALS

The primary outcome of the creative workshops and rehearsals is *What Remains.* Yet, these workshops and rehearsals served as more than just the necessary means to a creative end. They also enabled me to practically explore the posthumous documentary theatre process from within. By creating invaluable opportunities for learning through doing, the workshops/rehearsals enabled discovery and produced insight that would not have been possible via alternative methods.

It was also in these workshops and rehearsals that we explored some of the dramaturgical structuring techniques prevalent in documentary theatre practices. The following discussion offers a succinct overview of some of these methods, including general theories of juxtaposition and montage, Paul Brown's Nodal Technique, and Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project's Moment Work method, (see Part 2: Crafting *What Remains* for a discussion of how these dramaturgical methods were incorporated and utilised during the construction of the play's script and performance text).

DOCUMENTARY THEATRE METHODS

NODES

Analogies between the weaving or collaging practices of visual artists and the work of documentary theatre makers are numerous. Young (2017) reflects that "probably the most significant dramaturgical strategy used in fact based theatre is to interweave various speakers and their testimony throughout the plot" (p. 30), resulting in a collaged narrative and rich tapestry of woven voices. Paget (1987) observes that collage "is frequently the key descriptive term for practitioners of Verbatim Theatre" (p. 323). Verbatim theatre scholar Bettina Auerswald (2017) similarly comments that the assemblage of different fragments of source material into a new documentary theatre whole is "unmistakably collage-esque" (p. 117), and Brown's Nodal Technique, perhaps most notably used to create the seminal Australian verbatim play *Aftershocks* (first performed in 1991), is a documentary method similarly evocative of collage.

Nodes can be understood as "moments of intersection between separate stories where the speakers address the same subject matter from different or complementary perspectives" (Mumford, 2010a, p. 42). These nodal scenes can be created by interweaving and juxtaposing "discreet story fragments – what he [Brown] refers to in filmic terms as 'grabs'" (Mumford, 2010a, p. 40) to form scenes. This is a dramaturgical strategy commonly used in various forms of documentary theatre as it creates a sense of connection and cohesion from initially disparate documentary material. As Mumford (2010a) identifies, "the end result is something akin to, but distinct from, dialogue, with characters seeming at once isolated and even lonely, and yet connected with a community of listeners" (p. 46). Moreover, by identifying moments of intersection from different strands of narrative and constructing nodal scenes, theatre makers can enable their interpretation of the material and build the story they want to tell.

MONTAGE

Comparably to the nodal technique, montage offers viewers meaning or story by connecting previously unrelated or even contradictory dramaturgical elements. Eugenio Barba (2006) suggests that a montage is "born out of a specific dramatic relationship between elements and details, which considered in isolation, are neither dramatic nor appear to have anything in common" (p. 178) and that "montage is actually the construction of meaning" (p. 178). Montage can be understood as "both story line and composition" (Mueller, 1987) and in documentary theatre montages are frequently constructed not as seamless intertexts, but more like an artist's collage or a patchwork quilt. The stitches and fragmentary origins not only remain evident in the performance text but become part of the story. The recurrent use of montage in documentary theatre practices harks back to the Brechtian and Epic theatre origins of the form. Mueller (1987) comments "in Brecht's eyes, what made montage the principle of the modern work of art was that it did not pose as natural or as [an] organic unity. Instead, it freely displayed itself as an artifact" (p. 473).

Documentary theatre makers might use montage as a tool to weave together fragments from different bodies of text, fashioning something almost akin to Frankenstein's monster. Yet, while the stitches joining these narrative limbs may be visible to the audience, the montage is not monstrous. As Paget comments, "the use of montage in documentary theatre enables the theatre piece, through openly proclaimed juxtapositions, simultaneously to present a subject and an editorial attitude toward it" (as cited in Fisher Dawson, 1999, p. 47). As I unpack in more detail later in this thesis, it was this potential effect of montage that made it an appealing method to incorporate in *What Remains.* That is, how montage might be used as a dramaturgical tool to aid the ethically nuanced re-presentation of documentary material on stage by exposing the work as a subjective, edited, collaged representation that is inherently shaped by the attitude of the theatre maker(s).

MOMENT WORK

Similar to the nodal technique or montage, Moment Work is a dramaturgical method for both creating and structuring work. “A moment can be defined as a unit of theatrical time, a building block of theatrical narrative, or a structural unit of performance” (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018, p. 43). Developed by Moisés Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project, like montage, Moment Work aims to produce narrative and meaning for an audience through the collision and interaction of different elements of the stage, including architecture, set, props, music, lighting, script etc. Inspired by Brecht’s “refusal to separate form from content” (Mueller, 1987, p. 477), and in response to the question “which part of creation comes first – form or content?” (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018, p. 21), Kaufman echoes Samuel Beckett’s (1983) statement that “form *is* content, content *is* form” (p. 21). Moment Work was developed to be a method in which the ‘what’ (content) and ‘how’ (form) of a story or subject matter are consciously blended into a theatrical conversation, enabling the creation of work that tells a story while simultaneously showing the telling of that story.

When elucidating their methods in *Moment Work: Tectonic Theater Project’s Process of Devising Theater*, Kaufman and McAdams (2018) reflect:

> When we begin our work, we don’t need to know how or where a moment might ultimately fit into a larger narrative or finished piece. It might not fit at all. But making a moment helps us understand our material’s theatrical potential.
> (p. 43)

Exploration and experimentation are fundamental components of the Moment Work technique, and this perspective inspired my approach to editing and compiling Harold and Vita’s documentary materials and the construction of the early drafts of *What Remains’* script. Furthermore, approaching my compiled mass of Harold and Vita’s documentary material with the aim to just create a self-contained ‘Moment’ of theatrical narrative without worrying about the exact trajectory of the work as a whole seemed a manageable way to begin a potentially daunting or overwhelming task.

ACTORS AS COLLABORATORS

The nodal technique, montage, and Moment Work are dramaturgical methods that all incorporate collage, coexistence, and collaboration of different documentary source materials and theatrical elements to construct, explore, and communicate narrative and meaning(s). The construction of documentary and verbatim theatre is similarly often a "collective method" (Paget, 1897, p. 318). Actors frequently get involved early in the creative process, sometimes helping to conduct verbatim interviews, or assisting with other documentary material gathering and collation activities (Cantrell, 2013; Harcourt et al., 2014; Kaufman, 2001; Paget, 1987; Summerskill, 2020). For *What Remains,* I was the primary practitioner-researcher. I instigated its conception and researched, reviewed, and collated the documentary material from which it was constructed. However, the collective and collaborative spirit commonly embraced in documentary theatre practices was still a significant element of this research's design and creative practice.

Often associated with devised theatre practices, collective dramaturgy can be understood as "a collaborative effort by a group that is involved in creating the script and staging, from inspiration to performance" (Stankiewicz, 2015, p. 192). I worked collaboratively with the actors to construct *What Remains* and aimed to facilitate a rehearsal environment in which comfort, safety, trust, and mutual respect were foundational and ever-present. Furthermore, I wanted each of the actors to feel a sense of equity, ownership, and pride in their contribution to the work. *What Remains*, in both form and content, is shaped by Conor, Megan, and Lily's unique contributions. It would have been a fundamentally different play had it been constructed solely by me or with another group of actors. Cathy Turner and Synne K. Behrndt (2008) succinctly suggest that "devising implies that the dramaturgy of the work is not defined before the work commences" (p. 170). *What Remains* was, to a degree, collaboratively wrought. At the outset of rehearsals, the script had yet to be written and its dramaturgy was undefined. However, there were boundaries and parameters to this work that distinguish it from what might be typically considered a devised theatre practice.

Alison Oddey (1994) comments that historically "devised theatre offered the opportunity to groups of artists to try out ideas or notions that were not text-led" (p. 5) and that "devised

theatre can start from anything" (p. 1), which is "different from text-based theatre, where the play script defines and determines the parameters of the performance" (pp. 7-8). This creative practice, while open to imagination, spontaneity, and group exploration was simultaneously also extremely text led. The source material used to construct the work and my perceived ethical obligations and responsibilities as a posthumous documentary theatre practitioner all 'defined and determined the parameters of the performance.' For example, from the outset of this research, I imposed the 'rule' that *What Remains* would be created exclusively from documentary material, with no inclusion of imagined or fictional content. Thus, the work of the rehearsal room did not 'start from anything,' but rather sprang from Vita and Harold's material and was subsequently developed through a series of prompts, exercises, and script drafts that I prepared and brought to rehearsals.

Unlike the supremely egalitarian ensemble relationships commonly associated with devised theatre practices, I adopted what could be considered a more 'traditional' hierarchical interpersonal structure for myself and the actors for *What Remains*. Yet, the actors were still active and crucial collaborators in the work. To illustrate this actor/researcher relationship and the role of creative workshops and rehearsals in this research, I draw from Jo Butterworth's (2018) *Too many cooks? A framework for dance making and devising.* In her discussion, she offers the Didactic-Democratic spectrum model (pp. 100-101) which identifies five processes for devising choreography. My theatre making process for this research is best represented by "Process 3". As the instigator, primary creator, and director of *What Remains* I acted as a 'pilot' and the actors as contributors. I initiated the concept, directed, set and developed tasks through improvisation or imagery, and shaped the material that was produced, while the actors assisted with content creation and development by improvising and responding to the tasks and prompts I gave them.

Throughout the workshop and rehearsal period, I strove not to be a stifling figure in the rehearsal room. Yet, I still functioned as a clear leader who guided the actors through this "shared endeavour" (Butterworth, 2018, p. 102), and there were clear expectations for myself and the actors and our different roles within the process that served to protect all of us. The actors were not researchers but *participants* in *my* PhD research, and thus should not have felt the same level of responsibility for the work as I did. While the workshops and

rehearsals were collaborative and the actors were continuously invited to contribute, question, and offer ideas, the sessions were guided by me and based on plans I created in advance of rehearsals beginning (see Appendix B). If I am considered the 'pilot', and this research the plane, the actors' role could perhaps be understood as that of active passengers. They were along for the ride, inside *What Remains,* and even stepped up into the cockpit to help navigate moments of dramaturgical turbulence. However, it was ultimately my responsibility to chart our course and safely land the plane.

Butterworth's Didactic-Democratic spectrum model originates from a dance/choreography perspective. Yet, she identifies that the kind of collaborative ensemble work it details has become a pragmatic strategy employed beyond dance-devising contexts. Collaborative ensemble work "is now a central feature of many areas of the performing arts, and allows a particular kind of process of engagement, a shared vision, the sharpening of problem-solving skills and accompanying discoveries that a single artist cannot achieve" (Butterworth, 2018, p. 102). By involving the actors as active collaborators in my creative practice I was also better able to critically reflect on my process and methods of practice. "Each artist looks at the very same event through a vastly different lens" (Bogart & Gay, 2015, p. 213) and consideration of the different lenses through which the actors experienced the documentary material, and the workshop and rehearsal process enabled me to consider alternative perspectives and ways of thinking about my both my creative practice and research.

RECORDED GROUP DISCUSSIONS

Incorporated into the workshops and rehearsals were numerous recorded group discussions. These were designed to be less formal than focus groups and more impromptu and relaxed, arising organically from the process. Sometimes I did initiate these group discussions by posing specific questions, ideas, or reflections to the actors about *What Remains* and this research more generally. However, frequently they emerged spontaneously during rehearsals in response to our work and *What Remains* even stages some of these instances. For example, one of the scenes begins with an excerpt from one of our recorded group discussions in which the actors and I were talking about whether they

should physically perform writing Harold and Vita's letters in the play (see Appendix A, Moment 7). What was initially a quick comment identifying something for us to experiment with in a rehearsal unexpectedly sparked a larger, more nuanced, and ultimately important group discussion, the impact of which is unpacked more in the forthcoming Moments and Throughlines section of this thesis.

As I have begun to evidence, there were multiple benefits to recording our group discussions. Firstly, it was a way of documenting some of the discoveries made in the rehearsal room and the recordings have become an invaluable resource, especially when considered in conjunction with my recollections and field notes. During the thesis writing phase of this research, I've been able to look back at the transcripts of these discussions and reflect on the process without having to rely solely on my memories of the experience. Secondly, I have identified critical reflection as a crucial component of this research and the simple act of the actors and I discussing our work together, what we were doing, why we were doing it, asking questions, and offering ideas, was one of the primary ways critical reflection-in-action was achieved.

Schön (1987) identifies that

> when practitioners respond to the indeterminate zones of practice by holding a reflexive conversation with the materials of their situations, they remake a part of their practice world and thereby reveal the usually tacit processes of worldmaking that underlie all of their practice. (p. 36)

In these recorded group discussions, we were able to reflect on and 'remake our practice world' repeatedly, furthering the dramaturgical construction process of *What Remains*. These discussions also helped us to conceptualise and articulate some of the tacit and intuitive processes of our creative practice and the inclusion and representation of these discussions in the script of *What Remains* enabled us to share aspects of our 'practice world' and construction, deconstruction, and reconstruction of knowledge with others.

In the week following the performance of *What Remains*, I conducted a final recorded group discussion with the actors. In preparation for this, I sent the actors a brief list of reflective questions to serve as prompts that might guide our discussion (see Appendix C). These

questions invited the actor to reflect on the rehearsal and performance process with specific reference to my research questions and the nature of ethics in posthumous documentary theatre.

RESEARCH ETHICS

My central research question suggests that there is a kind of ethical substructure that intrinsically and necessarily influences every stage of the posthumous documentary theatre process from conception to construction, to rehearsal and performance. Comparably, Leavy (2017) comments that "there is an ethical substructure that impacts every aspect of the research process" (p. 24). Thus, ethical consideration is a cornerstone of my work as both a researcher and documentary theatre maker.

As previously identified in this thesis, documentary theatre practitioners' ethical considerations are "guided more by their moral compasses than by any external rules or laws" (Summerskill, 2020, p. 46). Leavy (2017) makes a similar comparison regarding research practices, reflecting that:

> Each of us brings our own moral compass into our research experiences. We each have beliefs, attitudes, and ideas about the world. The values we bring to the research experience shape every decision we make; they shape what we think and therefore how we act. (p. 25)

I have my own moral compass that guides me through the world and inevitably influences both my documentary theatre and research practices. However, I have also been guided by the University of Waikato's Ethical Conduct in Human Research and Related Activities Regulations. My research and methods have been approved by the University of Waikato's Division of Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee (see Appendix D). I have also endeavoured to make sure that my research activities respect the cultural and social sensitivities of my participants and aligned my practice to *Te Ara Tika – Guidelines for Māori Research Ethics.* Every effort has been made to protect participants from any potential harm during their participation in this research. At all stages I have strived to uphold manaakitanga which "acknowledges a person's inherent dignity and the

responsibility that people have to act in a caring manner towards others" (Hudson, 2010, p. 10). I have similarly endeavoured to always recognise and respect my participants' mana tangata (individual autonomy) "and their right to be appropriately informed of risks to their individual or collective mana" (Hudson, 2010, p. 13).

The open nature of the recorded group discussions aimed to ensure that the actors felt in control of their level of participation and did not feel pressured to answer any questions or contribute if they did not feel comfortable doing so. Similarly, the actors had control over which material from the discussions would be included in my research outputs. They were encouraged to review the transcripts of the recorded group discussions and indicate any material that they didn't want to appear in either the play script or this thesis. They were also asked at the outset of this research to specify in writing on the Actor Consent Form (see Appendix E) how they wished to be identified or represented in the research. Additionally, as this thesis neared completion, they were again asked if they were happy with their previously indicated decision and given the opportunity to amend if they desired. Here I note that at the outset of this research, actor Lily Whitehouse was known as Lily Empson. Lily has since got married and legally changed her name. She has given consent for either version of her name to appear in research outputs. Throughout this thesis, she has been identified as Lily Whitehouse, except for in the flyer and programme for *What Remains* (see appendix F & G), as these were designed and printed before Lily's surname changed.

In my research activities, I aimed to prioritise a "principle of mutuality, in which the research benefits both the researchers and the participants" (Leavy, 2017, p. 27) and this research provided a unique opportunity for the actors to not only perform in a piece of documentary theatre but also be involved in its creation and development. Furthermore, the experience sought to produce interesting and practically useful knowledge that they might draw from, adapt, and use in future theatre and performance endeavours, some of which I begin to articulate and explore in the next part of this thesis.

PART 2: CRAFTING *WHAT REMAINS*

Part 2 of this thesis aims to begin to articulate some of the *hows* and *whys* of the initial stages of my creative practice. By highlighting key moments of realisation, discovery, and decision that occurred during the construction, workshopping, and rehearsal of *What Remains,* I hope to provide a useful and insightful discussion that explores the symbiotic relationship and potential tension between ethics and dramaturgy during a posthumous documentary theatre process.

This section begins with an overview of a 'typical' documentary theatre process and some of the notable approaches, techniques, and methods of others working in the field. I then reflect on my approach to collating Harold and Vita's documentary material while considering how it relates to that of others engaging in documentary theatre practices. Deviating momentarily from reflexive discussion of my own practice, I unpack the blanket notions of truth, reality, and authenticity often associated with documentary theatre and highlight how a postmodern and constructivist consideration of these concepts was pivotal to the ethical-dramaturgical development of *What Remains.* Referencing specific moments from the documentary material gathering, compilation/editing, and dramaturgical exploration/rehearsal phases of my creative practice*,* the remainder of Part 2 identifies how exploration and experimentation with juxtaposition, montage, the nodal technique, and Moment Work were utilised in *What Remains* to aid this research's ethical-dramaturgical investigation*.*

Because the creation of *What Remains* was undertaken within the framework of a PhD, I acknowledge that I have not faced some of the pressures commonly experienced by artists working commercially outside of research contexts. For example, I am fortunate to have been able to create *What Remains* solely as a research activity without concern for its financial success. However, unlike other working artists, the necessary academic demands of a higher research degree required me to adopt a multi-faceted and perhaps more critical role and positionality within my creative practice*.* In addition to being a creative documentary theatre maker, I was simultaneously a researcher, biographer, explorer of

ethics, playwright, dramaturg, director, and even a documentary subject, and each of these different perspectives informed and influenced the nature of my work.

While my process of practice as articulated in this thesis could serve as a potential framework for others working in posthumous documentary theatre, it aims not to be a definitive model. It is *my subjective process* and this reflective analysis of my dramaturgical decisions, and their ethical rationale exemplifies just one possible method or approach. Actor and ensemble trainer John Britton (2013a) comments that "one set of ethics is not necessarily superior to any other" (p. 309) and this research in no way seeks to suggest that *What Remains* is ethically superior to any other representation of Harold and Vita and/or their writings. A different theatre maker would likely create an equally effective and ethical yet entirely different piece of documentary theatre from exactly the same material.

Britton (2013b) also suggests that "we meet principles through the work, discovering them as 'practically useful'" (p. 322). The ethical considerations and dramaturgical strategies I explore in this research are those that I found practically useful for *this specific practice*. Thus, they should be regarded not as rules, or even guidelines, but as considerations that other theatre makers might find useful to think about as they navigate their own unique posthumous documentary theatre journeys. "Both ethics and theatre are concerned with possibility" (Read, 1995, p. 83) and Part 2: Crafting *What Remains* begins to explore just a handful of the myriad of possibilities posthumous documentary theatre might offer (Summerskill, 2020).

THE CONSTRUCTION PROCESS OF DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

Documentary theatre is generally understood to be "a three-stage process of material gathering, editing/compiling, and rehearsal" (Paget, 1987, p. 323). This definition provides a conveniently succinct distillation of what has been widely recognised as a standard process for creating documentary theatre (Belfield 2018b; Hammond & Steward 2008; Peters & Burton 2023; Summerskill 2020). However, I elaborate on Paget's articulation and suggest that documentary theatre could be more accurately described as a process of material gathering, editing/compiling, and *dramaturgical exploration*/rehearsal.

In addition to my own documentary theatre practice, it is evident from the reflections of others working in the field that dramaturgical exploration and experimentation are not only significant to the structural or theatrical development of documentary theatre but can also inform the theatre maker's ethical thinking and action. Halba and Young (2014) comment that their "stated agenda" for making *Hush: A Verbatim Play About Family Violence* "was to honour the interviewees and their testimony" (p. 105). They recall that their first draft of *Hush* "did not work at all" (p. 106) and identify that their initial arrangement of the testimony "presumptuously added an inappropriate layer of interpretation and theatricality. . . . our structuring of that draft revealed an explicit element of judgement" (p. 106). Consequently, they "duly started 'writing' all over again" (p. 106). It was only through exploration and experimentation; trying it one way and 'getting it wrong', that Halba and Young were able to produce a work that honoured the interviewees and their testimony and thus adhered to their 'stated ethical agenda.'

Dramaturgical exploration of the different ways Harold and Vita's documentary source material could be re-presented was imperative to both the construction of *What Remains* and my investigation into the 'ethicality' of that construction. The expansion of Paget's definition to include dramaturgical exploration is more reflective of my process. However, it still paints a potentially over-simplistic and unrealistically linear picture of the construction of documentary theatre, which is often a simultaneous and webbed process. As Paget (1987) goes on to emphasise, while initially distinct and successive stages, "the processes of information gathering and rehearsal are, after the first week or so simultaneous and not

consecutive" (p. 329). Frequently the parameters between the editing/compiling of documentary material and exploration/rehearsal of that material blur, with the editing and exploration becoming reciprocal during the rehearsal stage, especially if the work is developed collaboratively by an ensemble of actors and theatre makers. Martin (2006) states that "the process of selection, editing, organization, and presentation is where the creative work of documentary theatre gets done" (p. 9). While "the editing of the [documentary] material into an overall composition is clearly a dramaturgical task" (C. Turner & Behrndt, 2008, p. 190), increasingly it has become a task no longer confined to the literary realm or scriptwriters' desk, but rather a practical and embodied collaborative activity that takes place in the rehearsal room.

At the commencement of creating *What Remains*, the process of gathering documentary source material soon evolved into a simultaneous and symbiotic process of compilation and editing. After taking into consideration the sheer mass of Harold and Vita's writings available to review: multiple volumes of letters and diary entries, newspaper articles, biographies, and other monographs, I soon recognised the need to develop a kind of radar or method of discernment to help me efficiently sift through and organise the abundance of material. Drawing from this PhD's research questions, I generated the following questions to guide my collation process:

- What does *What Remains* need to 'be' to best serve this research?
- What do I want the audience to know, understand, and experience?
- What is the story I want to tell?
- How do I want *What Remains* to contribute to Vita and Harold's ongoing biographical narrative?

In their respective verbatim theatre how-to guides, Belfield (2018b) and Summerskill (2020) similarly reflect that identifying a guiding question (or questions) can be a useful first step in a documentary theatre process. Belfield (2018b) argues that "finding the 'story' is part of the process, rather than the catalyst for the process" (p. 1), suggesting instead that the subject is the catalyst. He states that "the subject is what you set out to explore" (p. 1) and labels this early part of the editing process "revealing the heart" (p. 84). In *Creating*

Verbatim Theatre from Oral Histories, Summerskill (2020) offers the following guiding questions as a starting point, under the heading, “confirming the heart of the project”:

1. What subject did you want the play to address?
2. What is your own angle or opinion?
3. What do you want the audience to come away with? (p. 114)

As I embarked on my journey to create *What Remains,* in addition to identifying the questions at the heart of this project, I also began to practically consider some of the dramaturgical techniques used by other theatre makers to organise and structure their re-presentation of documentary materials on stage, and how these might be utilised in my own creative practice.

COMPILATION PROCESS

The next section of this part elaborates on my navigation through the compilation process for *What Remains.* Paget (1987) comments that “with most variants of documentary theatre, the essential difficulty in the working process is the reduction of a mass of source material to some sort of viable theatrical shape” (p. 232). I identify some of the ways others working in the field have approached this task and, in my discussion, incorporate reflection on how consideration of concepts of reality, truth, authenticity, and ethics also impacted this process.

When beginning my compilation of documentary material for *What Remains* I first followed my instinct or gut feeling and picked out from Harold and Vita's letters all those that had left a lasting impression. Halba and Young (2014) similarly began the process of scripting *Hush* by identifying from their conducted interviews all “those pieces of testimony that had stuck with us” (p. 105). Some of Harold and Vita’s letters resonated with me because of their literary merit and ‘resurrecting power’. Adams (2023) reflects that “letters are physical objects that function as mediums to conjure the spirit of deceased loved ones in their own words” (p. 162). Both celebrated writers, Harold and Vita had a practised eloquence, command, and relish of language that gave their writing, and by proxy their ‘deceased spirit’, a dynamic quality and sense of liveness that I thought might engage an audience as

they had captivated me. Other letters stuck with me because I felt I could relate to them on an emotional level. Summerskill (2020) comments, “there is absolutely no doubt that theatre makers and audiences alike have a deep and continuing appetite for dramatic representations of personal narratives” (p. 152). Fundamentally, I think of Vita and Harold’s correspondence as a deeply personal narrative and it is the personal nature of their letters that has enabled them to transcend any boundaries between the living and dead, past and present, time and place. They paint a picture of a relationship so recognisably ‘human’ that audiences can engage and relate to them decades after their deaths.

Documentary theatre maker Chris Horner comments that the reduction of documentary material at this stage is partly “guided by one’s sense of theatre” (as cited in Paget, 1987, p. 324). Actor-musician Gary Yershon expands upon this idea, stating that “you just instinctively know what’s theatrical… what an actor will be able to play and whether it will [be]… dynamic enough to be shown on stage” (as cited in Paget, 1987, p. 326). Summerskill (2020) suggests that when sorting documentary material, the theatre maker must look “for only the most relevant and dramatically powerful excerpts” (p. 118). These notions of theatricality, theatrical potential, dynamism, and dramatic power are naturally vague for they refer to the theatre maker’s inherently subjective understanding and opinion of what will “engage the hearts and minds of an audience” (p. 128), which is often informed by that which engages the heart and mind of the theatre maker themselves. While potentially unhelpful due to their ambiguity, these ideas can perhaps be distilled into the suggestion, as Blythe urges, that you should “trust your instincts.” In other words, if you have a connection with a certain piece of material, if it makes you laugh or move you to tears, then chances are it will do the same to an audience (as cited in Belfield, 2018b, p. 157).

In addition to their ‘theatrical potential’, I was also drawn to certain pieces of documentary material because I felt they directly addressed aspects of my research questions. Some of the sections of Vita’s posthumously published self-titled ‘confession’ serve as notable examples. Evocative of some of the questions I raised in the earlier Ethics sections of this thesis, in this autobiographical narrative Vita alludes to the complexity of ‘truth’ and the potential ethical uncertainty around the ownership of life stories. She expresses reservations about whether she has ‘the right’ “to write down the truth” about her life,

"involving as it naturally does the lives of so many other people" (Nicolson & Sackville-West, 1973/1999, p. 9). Aware of the intersubjective and intersecting nature of her lived experiences, Vita questions whether her life story is entirely hers to tell, that is, whether we can exclusively 'own' our memories and experiences when much of our lives are comprehended, defined, and remembered in parallel with the lives of others.

In her confession, Vita also acknowledges the impossibility of representing objective or historic truth via personal reminiscence and autobiographical narrative. She comments:

> I realize that this confession, autobiography, whatever I may call it must necessarily have for its outstanding fault a lack of all proportion. I have got to trust a very uncertain memory, and whereas the present bulks enormous, the past is misty. (Nicolson & Sackville-West, 1973/1999, p. 10).

Here she identifies herself as an unreliable narrator whose "lack of all proportion" could be understood as a reference to our inherently individual and sometimes insular experiences of reality, which can result in not only subjective truth claims but potentially inaccurate or unreliable ones.

Although Vita is regarded as a major modernist writer, her written confession demonstrates a level of self-awareness regarding the fallibility of memory and an acknowledgement of the multiplicity of truth more typically associated with postmodern thinking. Furthermore, by acknowledging her autobiography's "lack of all proportion", Vita effectively rejects not only notions of singular truth but also our ability to objectively experience and know our external reality. Recognising this during the early gathering/compilation stage of *What Remains* prompted me to further consider the complexity of notions of reality, truth, and authenticity in documentary theatre and how that might affect the dramaturgy of my work going forward. Thus, here I deviate slightly from what has, up until this point, been a relatively linear delineation of my process of practice. However, it is a necessary lateral divergence, for the ideas explored crucially influenced all stages of *What Remains'* construction process from compilation and editing to rehearsal and performance.

The Methodology section of this thesis explored documentary theatre as a postmodern practice and, when developing *What Remains,* I continued to think about concepts of

reality, truth, and authenticity through a postmodern and constructivist lens. Aiming to make the rationale for my dramaturgical decisions when constructing *What Remains* clear, the next part discusses both the documentary theatre discourse and more general philosophical theories that influenced my thinking and understanding of these often considered core qualities of documentary theatre. This discussion also evidences why consideration of the complicated nature of reality, truth, and authenticity may be useful for others participating in documentary theatre.

TRUTH, REALITY, AND AUTHENTICITY IN DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

Documentary theatre constructs and occupies a unique liminal space between art and life. Consequently, as Wake (2010) reflects, when we watch documentary theatre "we wonder about issues of authority, authenticity, truth, reality and ethics in a way that we don't always do when watching a play by, say, Chekhov" (p. 5). Terms such as 'truth', 'real' and 'authentic' proliferate documentary theatre discourse. For example, Schulze (2017) suggests that documentary theatre can be considered "one of the most obvious cases of authenticity in contemporary theatre" (p. 189). Additionally, publications with titles such as Robin Belfield's (2018b) *Telling the Truth: How to Make Verbatim Theatre* and Alison Forsyth and Chris Megson's (2009) *Get Real: Documentary Theatre Past and Present* closely link documentary theatre practice with notions of truth and reality. Our everyday usage of terms such as authentic, real, true, fact and fiction indicates a general understanding of these concepts and "reflects a continuing belief in their universal nature" (Canton, 2011, p. 19). Yet, within the context of documentary theatre, notions of reality, truth, and authenticity are arguably more complex, subjective, and ambiguous.

Fisher Dawson (1999) suggests that regardless of the nature of the documentary material, be it written or spoken or from public or private sources, play scripts constructed from documentary material are fundamentally "of reality" (p. 106). This statement serves to identify and articulate the, compared to non-documentary theatre, more proximate relationship with reality documentary theatre makers often claim of their work. However, documentary theatre cannot validly assert to objectively represent reality for, as a postmodern perspective suggests, reality is fundamentally intersubjective. It is not merely

something we exist within, but something we construct and reconstruct relative and responsive to our individual sensibilities, shared experiences, and evolving perceptions of the world around us.

Our perceptions are the products of the internal thought processes we use to interpret and construct reality. As such, they are intrinsically influenced by many different factors, some of which include demographic positionalities, past experiences, and existing knowledge. Consequently, because our experience and comprehension of reality are the products of personal perception, we arguably construct our own intersubjective realities. This is not to suggest that we all live in our own little worlds, nor deny the existence of an external reality. Rather, I intend to highlight our lack of "ability to (unproblematically) *know* that reality" (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 119) and therefore our lack of ability to unproblematically claim to represent an objective external reality in documentary theatre. As Auerswald (2017) reflects, any representation or depiction of reality, such as documentary theatre, "must necessarily be reduced through the use of an inevitably subjective filter [the theatre maker/playwright] and thus, no piece of (documentary) art or even scientific research can ever claim unassailable, absolute, objective truth" (p. 117).

Documentary theatre's use of real-world source material may make it appear and feel closer to 'the truth' than fiction. Yet, the form's merging of 'the real' with theatre, a medium frequently associated with the invented and imaginary, produces "difficult questions about what truth really is and whether theatre can ever faithfully present reality" (Love, 2018, p. 4). Engel (2002) comments that "the most common definition of truth present in the philosophical tradition is the most intuitive one: truth is a relation of correspondence between the contents of our thoughts and reality, or between our judgements and facts" (p. 14). This correspondence theory suggests that truth is predicated upon a connection to reality, and because we each forge subjective connections to reality, there cannot be one objective truth but instead multiple truths that correspond to our simultaneous yet individually nuanced experiences of reality.

Many documentary theatre practitioners embrace this postmodern or constructivist notion of multiple subjective truths over one objective truth and accordingly feature multiple

voices, perspectives, and truths in their plays. Yet, notions of truth/truths in documentary theatre are further complicated by the theatre maker's dramaturgical choices. While, as Belfield (2018b) reflects, documentary theatre "does not knowingly offer falsehoods or propagate myths" (p. 106), simply by re-presenting documentary source material on stage, by giving certain voices and testimonies a platform, the theatre maker tends towards validating the 'truth' of their documentary source material. The theatre maker's individual perceptions of the documentary source material undeniably influence the selection, editing, and arrangement of that material into a play and may too, both consciously or subconsciously, bias the narrative. Moreover, the original documentary source material itself should perhaps be taken with a grain of salt, as narratives of 'reality', even 'official' academic peer reviewed histories, are always inherently mediated and reconstructed *versions* of reality. As Schulze (2017) identifies, "it is not only conscious choices made by directors and writers that bias a production but the very nature of the archive" (p. 221).

Despite Belfield's (2018a) bold claim that "by giving actors only the *actual words of real people,* verbatim theatre is the closest that theatre can get to objective truth…its authenticity is guaranteed" (para. 7), this discussion argues that, while a sense of reality, truth, and authenticity may be evoked by documentary theatre, it cannot always be guaranteed. Martin (2006) crucially reflects that "what makes documentary theatre provocative is the way in which it strategically deploys the *appearance* of truth, while inventing its own particular truth through elaborate aesthetic devices" (emphasis added, p. 10). Or as Stuart-Fisher (2020) similarly observes, documentary theatre makers frequently cultivate an aesthetic in their work that "relocates the play away from [a] fictive context, framing it instead within the realm of testimonial truth telling" (p. 2). These aesthetic devices often have a confessional or metatheatrical element designed to break 'the fourth wall' aiming to forge a more 'authentic' connection between the actor and the audience. Thus, any 'guarantee' of truth and authenticity in documentary theatre is not necessarily the direct result of an innate "truth value" (Wynants, 2020, p. 11) present in the source material but can be aesthetically manufactured by the theatre maker, director, and actors in their re-presentation of that material.

Documentary theatre has developed a reputation for eschewing traditional notions of 'theatricality.' There have been "statements made in the broader field about verbatim [theatre]'s tendency towards un-theatricality" (Peters, 2017, p. 117) and, as Stuart-Fisher (2020) identifies, documentary theatre dramaturgies are often "extraordinarily simple" (p. 65). Many documentary theatre productions forgo elaborate sets, costumes, lighting, special effects, and even the fourth wall, in favour of minimal sets with actors often seated on stage speaking directly to the audience. Soans (2008) goes so far as to state that "the quintessence of verbatim theatre is a group of actors sitting on chairs, or cardboard boxes or a sofa, talking to the audience, simply telling stories" (p. 21). This kind of decidedly simple dramaturgy typically aims to present understated but very 'real' enactments that feel more akin to everyday conversations with ordinary people than actors performing on a stage (Stuart-Fisher, 2020), signposting to the audience the production's adherence to 'truth' and 'reality'. Yet, this unadorned aesthetic may not always endear a work's claim to authenticity. As Peters and Burton (2023) observe, "the most prominent artistic critique may be that this approach to conserving 'truth' can eschew the theatrical imagination. It's in this quest to preserve and identify accuracy that verbatim theatre may get a bad wrap [*sic*]" (p. 179). Part 3 of this thesis: Reflecting on *What Remains*, further explores this notion of 'theatrical imagination' in documentary theatre by reflecting on some of the more abstract dramaturgical aspects of *What Remains* and considers how we utilised elements of non-naturalistic dramaturgy in our exploration and cultivation of an ethically nuanced dramaturgy.

Perhaps documentary theatre's authenticity effect is ultimately a cumulative result of multiple different components. Firstly, the documentary material itself (regardless of its verifiable truth-value) is frequently considered to have an inherently authentic quality. As theatre maker Ivan Cutting reflects, "it does have a sort of 'tang' to it, like salt in stew, that tells you this is authentic" (in Belfield, 2018a, p. 64). Or as Blythe (2008) similarly observes, the everyday speech preserved and re-presented in documentary theatre "is often more mundane and 'everyday' than anyone dares to invent. This is what gives it the ring of truth" (p. 82). Secondly, how documentary material is compiled, edited, and re-presented can influence its perceived authenticity. Schulze (2017) comments that authenticity "is both a strategy of creation and reception" (p. 37), and like how it can be argued that "a narrative is

finished only with the participation of the audience" (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018, p. 126), documentary theatre's authenticity can perhaps only be truly validated if the audience perceives it as such. Thus, documentary theatre performances often "contain few or no elements that have the potential to draw the audience's attention to the differences between them and the material world which they purport to imitate" (Canton, 2011, p. 44) in the hope that it generates an authentic reception.

As a mode and medium of representation that raises questions about the nature of authenticity and the boundaries between fact and fiction, life and art, and reality and representation, documentary theatre is uniquely positioned to contribute to discussions of the nature of reality, truth, and authenticity in theatre practice. My consideration of these concepts from a non-essentialist perspective during the construction of *What Remains* required an ongoing level of self-awareness that became vital to my exploration of ethical considerations in posthumous documentary theatre. Thus, I urge others embarking on documentary projects to, at the outset of their practice, consider the "fundamental gap between reality and its symbolic representation in language, images, or ideas" (Funk et al., 2014, p. 10), to consider how documentary theatre is a dialogue between representation and 'reality' and 'truth' and also to recognise how their interpretation of and relationship with these concepts may influence the nature of both their ethical considerations and dramaturgical approach to their work.

COMPILATION: A DRAMATURGICAL AND ETHICAL TASK

My compilation of Harold and Vita's documentary material was also significantly influenced by the consideration of my research questions. Thus, part of my compilation process was identifying all the material I deemed to explicitly relate to the ethical facet of this research investigation. For example, one of Harold's letters written to Vita in 1918 ends with "burn this my little friend, and don't ever speak of it" (Nicolson, 1992/2007, p. 72). When I first shared this letter with the actors during an early workshop and rehearsal, Harold's uncharacteristically ominous sign-off prompted a discussion (which I audio recorded) about the potential ethical considerations of including it in *What Remains.* The following excerpt,

transcribed verbatim from this conversation (hence its casual and slightly chaotic vernacular), captures some of my ethical uncertainty.

> MISSY: And actually what I like kinda the most is it [Harold's letter] ends with um "burn this my little friend and don't ever speak of it" …as a theatre maker you're automatically like "oh well that doesn't go in" cos then people might think...you know, am I unethical for putting this in? Or is the ethical thing to say well "hey they wanted this to be burnt but it's been published so I'm gonna do it." You know?

I ended up including this Missy comment in Moment 9 of *What Remains* (see Appendix A) as it succinctly yet explicitly encapsulates one of the central ethical tensions that this creative practice aims to explore. That is, the potential friction between my felt ethical responsibility to the ante mortem wishes of my deceased documentary subjects, and the dramaturgical obligations I felt towards living audiences; to provide them with "a good evening's theatre" (Blythe, 2008, p. 94). Paul Brown (2010) articulates this in question form: "How could you [the theatre maker] best balance the tension between being 'true' to real life experience and making 'good drama'?" (p. 81). In one respect, the 'dramatic potential' of "burn this my little friend" is attractive. It has all the makings of a 'good drama' in the sense that it is exciting, tantalising even. Similar to the voyeuristic pull of reality television, this comment suggests that the audience has been given access to a previously private and hidden world. They have been made privy to a letter so personal or perhaps so regrettable that Harold requested it be irreparably destroyed, presumably to ensure it could not be read by others. As Jolly comments, "nowhere is the vitality of a letter clearer than when it is burned" (p. 207).

For some documentary practitioners such as Alecky Blythe, the desire to expose, uncover, or reveal can be a significant part of the intention behind their work. For example, Blythe (2008) reflects that she wanted *The Girlfriend Experience,* a verbatim play that focuses on four female sex workers operating a seaside brothel in Bournemouth, to give audiences "an intimate encounter with an otherwise secret world" (p. 86). I, like Blythe, recognised the 'dramatic potential' of Harold's letter; how it might hook an audience and draw them deeper into a more personal part of Harold and Vita's lives. Yet, as evidenced by my

comment from our recorded group discussion, I still initially felt some uncertainty around the ethics of airing it in *What Remains* and what "people might think". This apprehension perhaps stemmed from the assumption that while Vita saved the letter (despite Harold's request), it is likely that it would not be accessible to the public if they were still alive. It was not included in the volumes of diaries and letters that Harold co-edited and published during his lifetime with his son Nigel Nicolson and it was not until three decades after Harold and Vita's deaths that this letter was published. This scenario presents an ethical quandary specific to posthumous documentary theatre, which is precisely why I ultimately included the "burn this my little friend" letter followed by my verbatim testimony questioning its inclusion in *What Remains.*

As stated at the beginning of Part 2 of this thesis, my creative practice aims not to serve as an exemplar or criterion standard of what is or is not 'ethical', for, as reflected in the core argument running throughout this thesis, I do not regard ethical and unethical as binary opposites. Rather than conceptualising 'ethical' as a static 'one size fits all' state of being to be reached, I consider ethics an undulating, nuanced, ever-evolving process, responsive and (re)evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Thus, *What Remains* was conceived not to provide definitive answers but as a platform or vehicle through which "the grey mists of ethics" (Belfield, 2018b, p. 110) in documentary theatre might be further questioned and explored. Echoing Chekhov, Soans (2008) comments, "the purpose of the theatre is not to provide the solutions, but to state the problems more clearly" (p. 18). The inclusion of *both* the "burn this" letter and my and the actors' apprehension about its inclusion sought to achieve this purpose and highlight some of the ethical questions that could arise during the posthumous documentary theatre process.

The very form of the Missy comment helps to 'state the problem more clearly'. It is a series of rhetorical questions that leads the audience through my thought process and gives them insight into my ethical and dramaturgical approach to navigating these questions. The audience is invited to not only 'judge' my decisions but is encouraged to put themselves in my shoes, perhaps prompting them to consider what they might do if they were in the same situation. Thus, this Moment is an example of how *What Remains* not only contributes to the larger ongoing ethical conversation within the field of documentary theatre practice but

also how it might encourage the audience to develop their own metatheatrical engagement with the ethical conversation beyond the parameters of the performance.

EDITING AND DRAMATURGICAL EXPLORATION

To my knowledge, *What Remains* is the only documentary play to stage Harold and Vita's diaries and letters. However, it is not the first performance-based representation of Vita and Harold's documentary material. Notably, in 1990 the BBC adapted Nigel Nicolson's *Portrait of a Marriage* into a television miniseries starring Janet McTeer as Vita Sackville-West, Cathryn Harrison as Violet Trefusis, and David Haig as Harold Nicolson. Additionally, Vita's relationship with Virginia Woolf has been explored at length in popular culture, most recently in Chanya Button's 2018 film *Vita & Virginia* (adapted from Eileen Atkins' 1992 stage play of the same name) featuring Gemma Arterton as Vita and Elizabeth Debicki as Virginia Woolf. Vita, Harold, and Violet are also more abstractly reimagined in adaptations of Woolf's 1928 novel *Orlando: A Biography* including Sally Potter's 1992 film adaptation and Sarah Ruhl's 2010 stage adaptation, both of which are titled *Orlando.*

"Many stories can be told of the same source material" (Adams, 2023, p. 14) and, similar to *What Remains,* Atkins, Button, Potter, and Ruhl's adaptations all edited and rearranged their source material to best serve the dramatic requirements of their new mediums. Woolf scholar Monica Latham (2018) comments in regard to Atkins' *Vita and Virginia*,

> The autobiographic material does not appear as it was originally conceived and delivered: it is decontextualized and recontextualized, that is to say it is first uprooted from its original epistolary or diaristic context, then it is truncated and reshaped, and finally it is presented anew in the form of a long conversation between Vita and Virginia (p. 21)

My compilation process for *What Remains* resulted in a mass of similarly decontextualised autobiographical material and the following discussion examines my approach to the task of truncating and reshaping it into a performable narrative.

THE FIRST DRAFT

I first collated all the Harold and Vita material I thought I (at the time) might want to include in the play into a large document. Within this document, I organised the material chronologically. Not only was this my instinctive approach but it also seemed to be the most logical, as the letters had an existing order and flow corresponding to the passage of time in which they were written, sent, and received. Furthermore, as a 'complete' correspondence, the letters offer a kind of "'ready-made' story which already contains a distinctive dramatic or narrative arc" (Summerskill, 2020, p. 119). They paint a picture of the ebb and flow of Harold and Vita's marriage over time.

When constructing documentary theatre from the source material of still living subjects, Summerskill (2020) reminds the theatre maker that the person's story "is a continuous one. It will have begun long before you met the narrator who talks to you about their experiences and continues for them long after you have conducted the interview" (p. 122). Contrastingly, in posthumous documentary theatre, although the biographical life of a deceased documentary subject may seem to extend beyond their death, their story still has a finished quality distinct from those of the living. Their completed lifespan is a ready-made narrative with its own implicit beginning, middle, and end dictated by the chronology of their lives. As Paget (1987) observes, documentary theatre practitioners frequently structure their work as "a biographical chronology for the audience to follow" (p. 328). Summerskill (2020) elaborates, identifying that when constructing documentary theatre,

> figuring out where to start is one of the most difficult decisions to make. It can sometimes be a little easier if the plot or the direction of the play is a clearly chronological one… In a play that follows a chronological timeline, the content can then build up to the main event…and the play can conclude when the whole story has ended." (p. 122)

Despite recognising this rationale for a chronological structure, when embarking on the first draft of *What Remains* I did not start at the beginning of Harold and Vita's life together, but at the end of it.

Biographer Hermione Lee (2005) comments that "most (though not all) biographies are about the dead. Most biographers, therefore, have to decide how to deal with the death of their subject" (p. 95). When I first began gathering and compiling Vita and Harold's documentary material one of the fragments that immediately resonated with me was the diary entry Harold wrote on the day of Vita's death:

> It is a lovely morning. I get up early and walk round this garden. [Vita] is asleep, and I do not disturb her. Glen [the Labrador] dances on the lawn with his brother, Brandy. I breakfast with Niggs [Nigel], and then I force myself to do my review of the composite book *Companion to Homer.* I finish it about 12.30, and start reading the newspaper. Ursula is with Vita. At about 1.[0]5 she observes that Vita is breathing heavily, and then suddenly is silent. She dies without fear or self-reproach at 1.15. Ursula comes to tell me. I pick some of her favourite flowers and lay them on the bed. (Nicolson & Nicolson, 2004, p. 433)

Unlike some of Harold's more crafted diary entries and letters, this passage is not rich in descriptive language, metaphors, or similes. It is economical, and precise, composed largely of short sentences with little embellishment. The way Harold lists the routine events of his day is evocative of a timetable or itinerary. Even his description of Vita's death, arguably one of the most significant events of his life, is barely a description at all, but rather a statement of facts. Of this 109-word entry, Vita's death is encapsulated in 16 words: "Vita is breathing heavily, and then suddenly is silent. She dies without fear or self-reproach." It is simple, almost underwhelming, yet I found it a very moving diary entry to read. During a recorded group discussion with the actors, Lily echoed that she too was drawn to its simplicity. She commented that

> the way that it is written is so simple, yet it says a lot without saying it. I just couldn't get the image out of my head, of this man finding out his wife has died then going to the garden cutting some flowers and then putting them on the bed next to her. To me that just says everything. It just summed up their love for each other in that simple gesture.

In this entry, Harold does not explicitly or emotionally lament Vita's death. Yet, as Lily's comment suggests, his final sentence: "I pick some of her favourite flowers and lay them on

the bed", evokes a vivid mental picture, potentially conjuring a strong emotional response in its readers.

Flowers are commonly associated with death, mourning, funerals, and memorials. Floral arrangements often adorn coffins and are frequently left at spontaneous shrines. For instance, "the immense sea of flowers and messages deposited at the entrance to Kensington palace" (Margry & Sánchez-Carretero, 2007, p. 1) following the death of Princess Diana, outside Mosques across Aotearoa New Zealand after the Christchurch mosque attacks, or at roadsides commemorating the site of fatal road accidents. In these scenarios, flowers mark the end of something, yet they can also represent beginnings. The blooming of perennial flowers after winter is frequently considered to signify not just the start of spring but growth, new life, and new beginnings. Additionally, especially in representations of Western culture in media and entertainment, flowers are associated with love and relationships, be it a bridal bouquet, roses on Valentine's Day, an anniversary arrangement, or a nervously handpicked corsage for a dance or first date.

Consideration of some of these occasions where flowers are often given, and the associated social and cultural connotations of such offerings, influenced my perception of Harold's final bouquet gifted to Vita on her deathbed. In one respect, I interpreted it as an act of mourning and commemoration. Yet, I also thought of it as an offering reminiscent of other flower-giving occasions they may have shared during their life together. His last gift to her is evocative of a first date and this sense of cyclical duality informed the construction of Moment 2[2] of *What Remains*. I experimented with juxtaposing and interweaving this diary entry with the first letter Vita ever wrote to Harold, resulting in a Moment that represented both the beginning and end of Vita and Harold's correspondence simultaneously. Vita's early letters to Harold, in which she asks him to a dance, reflects on their kindling romance, details his proposal of marriage, and documents their first kiss, emanate a sense of hope, happiness, and anticipation. Contrastingly, Harold's description of Vita's final moments of life brings a sense of sadness, loss, and even foreboding, and the juxtaposition of

[2] In the first draft of *What Remains* this Moment opened the play. However, after experimentation/exploration during the rehearsal process and multiple subsequent re-drafts of the script, it ultimately became Moment 2. Thus, it will be referred to as 'Moment 2' so as to correspond to the final script (see Appendix A).

documentary material with such disparate tones and moods aimed to produce a sense of incongruity that would engage the audience.

Furthermore, the use of juxtaposition and montage enabled this Moment to concurrently serve multiple functions. It is the first time the audience is introduced to Harold and Vita, that is, Conor and Megan's representations of them. They also get a taste of the kind of documentary material *What Remains* re-presents. This juxtaposition sought to suggest that the rest of the play would explore the 52 years that stretch between Vita's first letters and Harold's last diary entry. However, it also signposts the play's narrative as a construction articulated "according to the rules of space instead of those of time" (Barba, 2010, p. 102). That is, while evocative of dialogue, because their testimony originally comes isolated and fragmented from the polar ends of their relationship's chronology, Vita and Harold are not responding to each other. They are represented out of time and out of sync with one another. Yet, they are united (or perhaps reunited) in space by montage and this conflicting information, instead of creating confusion, can produce a "paradoxical effectiveness" (Barba, 2010 p. 99) where meaning is created from the combining of once disparate occurrences into a new simultaneous event.

BUILDING NODAL SCENES

Aside from Moment 2, in which Vita and Harold's testimony collides from opposite ends of their shared timeline, *What Remains* generally follows a chronological structure. The opening Moments of the play centre on Vita and Harold's early life together and the birth of their children, while the later Moments incorporate more reflective documentary material in which Harold and Vita look back on their marriage and begin to think about "the inevitable end" (Nicolson & Sackville-West, 1973/1999, p. 210). Although overall the Moments are arranged into a consecutive chronological structure, I utilised the nodal technique (as outlined in Part 1 of this thesis) to organise the internal structure of each Moment.

For example, Moment 4 of *What Remains* was developed from a writing or biography node (see Appendix A). During the compilation and editing stage, I grouped together all of Harold

and Vita's material that mentioned biography or writing diaries. I then created a node in which documentary material spanning from the 1920s to the 1950s intersected. The resulting Moment is structured similarly to a conversation as Harold and Vita's speech is interspersed, yet similarly to Moment 2, they are not responding to one another. Evidenced in the following excerpt from *What Remains*' script, the fragments of Harold and Vita's diary entries and letters are re-presented in a way that suggests a moment of connection while also acknowledging their differing relationship to the writing/biography theme.

HAROLD: I do a *Spectator* article on keeping diaries, in which I lay down the rule that one should write one's diary for one's great grandson. I think that is a correct rule. The purely private diary becomes too self-centred and morbid. One should have a remote, but not too remote, audience.

VITA: That I would give every line of this confession into his hands, knowing that after wading through this morass – for it is a morass, my life, a bog swamp, a deceitful country, with one bright patch in the middle, the patch is unalterably his – I know that after wading through it all he would emerge holding his estimate of me steadfast.

Here Harold reflects quite casually and pragmatically about his practice as a diarist while Vita contrastingly delivers a much more emotional commentary on her 'confession'. The juxtaposition of these excerpts aimed to cultivate a sense of dramatic irony and tension, as the audience was made aware of the secret nature of Vita's confession while they simultaneously observed Harold, who appeared to be still 'in the dark'. The audience may have started to wonder about the contents of Vita's confession. What had she done that she felt the need to confess? Did she ever tell Harold? Did he ever read her confession? And if he did, did he "emerge holding his estimate of her steadfast?"

Summerskill (2020) states that "a good piece of verbatim theatre is one where the personal voice is situated at the very forefront of the drama. In order to achieve this, you need to look for incidents in your interviews which convey Tension, Conflict, and Humour" (p. 123). This nodal scene places Harold and Vita's voices at the forefront. It gives the audience insight into Harold and Vita's different approaches to writing diaries, their personalities, and individual perspectives while also building a sense of tension and foreshadowing a potential

future conflict. This sets up a narrative arc that keeps the audience engaged as they wait to see if Vita's confession will be further addressed later in the play.

MAKING MONTAGE

Another example of a nodal scene in *What Remains* is what the actors and I refer to as 'The Love Montage,' a title inspired by a line that appears in Moment 12 of the play (see Appendix A). During the process of compiling Harold and Vita's documentary material, I was struck by how often they declared their love for one another and the array of different metaphors and analogies they used. Thus, I grouped all the different bits of material in which Harold and Vita said, "I love you" into a node and then arranged the fragments into a montage, creating Moment 12.

The prevailing love that Harold and Vita shared is an important and central, if not *the* central, "narrative event" of *What Remains*, and The Love Montage aimed to show an abridged, yet rich picture of the love letters they sent one another for over 50 years. George Custen (1992) reflects in the context of biopic films, that "montage moves the plot forward by presenting an abbreviated version of a narrative event that is important, but too long to be shown in its entirety" (p. 185). However, my use of montage in *What Remains* functions as more than simply a device to truncate narrative events. As made evident earlier in this thesis, implicit in documentary theatre practices are "problematic claims to truth, or authenticity, and objectivity" (Young, 2017, p. 21) and montage was a technique that enabled me to address some of these problematic claims in *What Remains*.

Professor of Theatre Semiotics Franco Ruffini (1986), comments that Montage presents "images predetermined by the director in order to create other images, and therefore *material metaphors*" (p. 34). Preceding The Love Montage in Moment 12 of *What Remains* is the following Missy line (taken verbatim from one of our recorded group discussions during rehearsals): "a bit cheesy. But maybe a montage of all the different ways they said I love you?" This inclusion of my verbatim dialogue and Missy as a character sought to be a distancing and 'meta' mechanism exposing *What Remains* as a constructed re-presentation. Moreover, this line essentially explains how the next moment of theatrical metaphor will

work with the disclaimer, “a bit cheesy,” serving as an acknowledgement of how the montage could be seen as an obvious attempt by the theatre maker to elicit an emotional response from the audience. Positioned within the play, Missy as a character uses this comment to deconstruct the montage before it has even begun. Yet, this deconstruction is not destructive and the montage still ‘works’, perhaps just in a slightly atypical or unexpected way.

In this moment of montage “the spectator not only sees the represented elements of the finished work, but also experiences the dynamic process of the emergence and assembly of the image just as it was experienced by the author” (Eisenstein 1947 as cited in Mueller, 1987, p. 474). In other words, I was able to explore and re-present Harold and Vita’s documentary material in a dynamic and engaging way while also drawing attention to the editing and dramaturgical process. This in turn helped to emphasise to the audience that the play is an edited construction representative of my perceptions of Harold and Vita’s truths as subjectively interpreted from my reading of their documentary material, enabling *What Remains* to become a “representation about representation” (Schneider, 2002, p. 293).

Ruffini (1986) further observes that the director’s montage is usually “set up by the director on the assumption that the perceptual and associative pictures of the audience will be relatable to the … performance communication that the director is aiming for” (p. 36). However, as ethnographer and dramaturg Jane Turner (2018) identifies, “montage is personal” (p. 142). Furthermore, because the audience is “the last key member of the theater community” (Cattaneo, 2021, p. 258), despite the theatre maker’s intention(s), the audience ultimately “decide the montage according to the rhythms of [their] own choices” (Barba, 2010, p. 102). Therefore, while I used montage in *What Remains* with the intent to guide and direct the audience’s attention, I also hoped it would expose my intention to do so. This sought to encourage the audience’s agency and stimulate their recognition of the play, even with its use of documentary material, as an artificial construction as opposed to a “natural or organic unity” (Mueller, 1987, p. 473).

MOMENTS AND THROUGHLINES

As previously alluded to in this thesis, when creating posthumous documentary theatre there can be a sense that 'the end is already written' insofar as death is a prerequisite for this subgenre of documentary theatre. Consequently, often the death of the protagonist in the play will likely not come as a surprise to audiences. As director Kate Gaul comments, "all of the events have happened in the past of any of these plays and we all know the outcome. But the play happens in the present" (as cited in Mumford, 2010b, p. 102). This can present a challenge to theatre makers, which Summerskill (2020) identifies as the task of finding "ways to heighten the dramatic tension of narrated stories that occurred in the past" (Summerskill, 2020, p. 124) and The Tectonic Theater Project's Moment Work method can be useful approach to navigating this task.

Often during the initial phases of The Tectonic Theater Project's process of devising theatre, 'throughlines' or specific narrative strands that run through the story, begin to emerge (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018). These throughlines aim to serve as an organising principle and like a "*dramatic question*, the *premise*, or the *central question*" (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018, p. 157) they inform the work's plot. Kaufman and The Tectonic Theater Project often have multiple throughlines operating and interweaving throughout their work and they identify that three prominent throughlines emerged when creating their documentary play *The Laramie Project.* Constructed from interview transcripts, *The Laramie Project* was catalysed by the homophobically motivated murder of 21-year-old Matthew Shepard in Laramie Wyoming. The play explores how theatre might contribute to and participate in the national dialogue(s) about homophobic hate crimes that emerged following Matthew's death. "The play interweaves interview responses from Laramie locals with journal entries from the visiting Tectonic Theater Project and tells a story of an American town struggling in the wake of tragedy" (Mooney, 2023, p. 158). Consequently, *The Laramie Project* is composed of the following throughlines: the Laramie/town throughline, the Matthew Shepard throughline, and the Tectonic Theater Project/company throughline, and the intersection and interaction of these different throughlines became the play.

Similar to other documentary theatre makers, Kaufman and the Tectonic Theater Project faced the challenge of creating dramatic tension in the present from documentary material that narrates the past, posing the question: "Since so much of the text of the play dealt with real events that occurred in the past, how could we keep the audience leaning forward in their seats[?]" (Kaufman & McAdams, 2018, p. 203). Here, one of Moment Work's strengths becomes apparent, as by juxtaposing different Moments and throughlines they were able to construct tension while causing little disruption to the original context or verbatim integrity of their documentary source material. Kaufman and McAdams (2018) reflect that "as moment makers we often use the ticking bomb image as a reminder that we need to give the audience something to desire" (p. 137), and similar to books that alternate narrators every chapter, *The Laramie Project* jumps between throughlines not only as a way to offer multiple perspectives but also to create 'ticking bombs' that will keep the audience engaged and 'on the hook.' For example, "when something dramatic was happening to the town, we could leave it unresolved and switch to the company throughline" (p. 205).

Comparably to *The Laramie* Project, during the editing and dramaturgical exploration stage of constructing *What Remains,* three main throughlines began to emerge: The Harold and Vita throughline, the Vita and Violet throughline, and the present-day theatre maker/actors throughline. Once I had identified these distinct narrative strands, the actors and I experimented with how their interaction might produce moments of tension throughout the play. Furthermore, we explored how the moments of conversation between Missy and the actors could disrupt the Vita and Harold throughline and draw attention to the mechanics of the play's construction. We recognised that the theatre maker/actor throughline could serve as a kind of ethical framing strategy throughout the play. For example, Moment 7 (see Appendix A) begins with the following dialogue:

> MISSY: They had their first son, ah, Ben in 1914.
>
> HAROLD: Vita says I may tell you of our great secret and you will guess what it is. She saw the doctor today, who says that he will state his reputation on it-/
>
> MISSY: I was thinking maybe not having you write any letters?
>
> CONOR: Oh yeah
>
> MISSY: And read them instead because like although like a lot of it is prefaced with, you know, Vita writes or Harold wrote or, you know, they kind of have the

citation a lot of the time. I think reading might be more obvious that you don't own the material, that it's not from you. Whereas the act of writing is very much an externalizing [of] the internal.

CONOR & MEGAN: Mmmm

MISSY: And I'm not fully sure about it.

MEGAN: We can play around with it.

Here, Missy interrupts Harold mid-speech and takes control of the scene, changing the expected direction of the narrative. This potentially leaves the audience in a state of anticipation as they are poised on the brink of learning the "great secret" Harold was about to divulge, thus creating dramatic tension. In performance, Conor (the actor voicing Harold), swiftly 'transformed' back into 'himself', that is, a version of his past self that was captured in the recorded group discussion from which the conversation originates. This sudden shift results in the audience's attention being diverted away from the world of Harold and Vita and redirected back to the present day. Young (2017) comments that

> drawing attention to the devices of documentation and representation, together with other strategies for breaking the realist frame . . . explicitly acknowledge theatre makers' presence and agency. Moreover, it alerts the spectator to the contingent scope for manipulation of subjects and their stories. (p. 38)

This dialogue between Missy and the actors explicitly refers to the theatre-making process disrupting the audience's suspension of disbelief, reminding them that they are watching a play. It draws attention to our dramaturgical decision making and manipulation of documentary material during the construction and rehearsal process. Moreover, Megan's "we can play around with it" line reminds the audience that the performance they are experiencing is the product of dramaturgical exploration and experimentation and only one possible version of how the material could be staged.

Comparable to the "burn this" letter discussion, this Moment provides the audience with an example of how ethical consideration and dramaturgical decision making might intertwine during a documentary theatre process. My apprehension at having the actors physically perform writing the letters, should they be wrongly perceived as the originators or owners

of the material, shows how ethical consideration may influence the actors' performances and the physical dramaturgy of the work. Ultimately, the actors and I came to the resolution that "the distance is there" and that:

> CONOR: realistically we are, we're, we're learning the lines and in some ways performing the lines to make it a more interesting show.
>
> MISSY: Mmmm.
>
> CONOR: We're not trying to be Harold and Vita. We're just trying to get across your vision-
>
> MISSY: Mmm.
>
> CONOR:-in a way that's interesting. And a more interesting way sometimes is typing rather than standing beside a typewriter.
>
> MISSY: Yeah, yeah.
>
> CONOR: I do feel ultimately that's what we're doing. We're not trying to be the characters, we're trying to put on a show.

This exchange was also included in Moment 7 of *What Remains* and serves as a kind of disclaimer, suggesting to the audience that when the actors are seen physically writing or typing the letters, it should be understood as a presentational performance act, generally representative of past acts of letter writing. The actors are not aiming to convince the audience that this is an accurate re-enactment of exactly how Harold and Vita composed their letters. Additionally, this dialogue once more articulates the tension between the desire to create, as Conor comments, an "interesting" and entertaining piece of theatre for the audience and my perceived ethical responsibilities to Vita and Harold.

In the process of highlighting some key moments of reflection-in-action that took place during the process of creating *What Remains,* I considered how my perceived ethical considerations impacted not just the compilation and editing of the documentary material into a script, but also the actors' physical performances. The final part of this thesis: Reflecting on *What Remains,* further comments on the play's construction process but details some of the dramaturgical decisions and strategies that were explored and discovered with the actors on our feet in the rehearsal room and incorporates reflection on the live performance of the play from a post-performance positionality.

PART 3: REFLECTING ON *WHAT REMAINS*

THE PERFORMANCE TEXT

Throughout the rehearsal period for *What Remains* the script remained an evolving document that the actors and I collectively and continually questioned, experimented with, and edited. As actor Megan Goldsman reflected in our final post-performance recorded group discussion, "you [Missy] compiled it, you were the one who chopped and changed it, but it always felt like we were all working on it constantly, all the time. It always felt like it was in progress." The actors were crucial to the development of *What Remains* and, as playwright and dramaturg, Jacqueline Goldfinger (2022) reflects, "writing for the stage often means seeing a work on its feet (putting words in the air) before you know whether or not it will work" (p. 25). Experimenting with how the actors could 'put Vita and Harold's words in the air' during rehearsals was how we found 'what worked', both dramaturgically and ethically, which in turn, enabled the collective revision of the script and collaborative construction of the performance text.

Here I use the term performance text to encapsulate not just the written text or script, but all the other layers and elements that work collaboratively to produce the theatrical event. This includes the actors' performance and physical dramaturgy as well as production design elements such as set, staging, lighting, sound, costume etc. While the performance text could be considered the physical realisation of the script, it is more than a transposition of the script from page to stage. It is a separate artefact distinguished by its live and embodied existence in time and space and Part 3 considers the ethical dimensions of some of the significant dramaturgical decisions made during the construction of *What Remains'* performance text.

PHYSICAL DRAMATURGY

The term 'dramaturgy' can mean many different things to different people. Dramaturg Fiona Graham (2013) offers a variety of metaphors "to conceptualise methodology and evoke the different roles of the dramaturge" (p. 247). These include "the dramaturge as midwife (supporting), conservationist (balancing preservation with innovation), architect (constructing), navigator (guiding), bridge builder (meditating) and catalyst (changing)" (p. 247). The dramaturg can also be an explorer, sleuth, artist, and problem solver, the list is infinite. While "no single, clear definition of dramaturgy exists" (Scanlan, 2019, p. 1), the variety of active roles a dramaturg might play in a theatre making process reflects dramaturgy's status as "a nomadic practice" (F. Graham, 2017, p. 5), ever in motion, constantly evolving, responsive to context, time, and place.

Traditionally, dramaturgy referred to a literary practice that prioritised the written text, with the dramaturg functioning primarily as a kind of script advisor. For many contemporary dramaturgs, the process might still begin with the text (Cattaneo, 2021). However, conceptions of dramaturgy frequently extend beyond written scripts and beyond even the realm of theatre, "every performance has an identifiable structure and form that can be analysed and developed. Installations, poetry readings, ballets, musicals, folk dances, realist plays and exhibitions all have their own dramaturgy" (F. Graham, 2017, p. 6). Theatre practitioner Robert Scanlan (2019) considers the term 'dramaturg' to be "analogous to *shipwright,* or *wheelwright,* in that it focuses attention on craft and construction" (p. 2). Recognising the craft and construction that occurs beyond the written script, I consider dramaturgy a process concerned with the convergence of the different elements and components of a performance event and how they might interact to generate a performance text.

In my introduction to the performance of *What Remains* (see Appendix H), I identified that the play's creation took place in two distinct dramaturgical stages. The first was the construction of the script; the selection, editing and arranging of the material into a performable narrative, and the second was its physical realisation in the space with the actors. Theatre practitioners Rachel Bowditch, Jeff Casazza and Annette Thornton (2018)

suggest that 'physical dramaturgy' acts as "the bridge" between the written text or script and the audience, commenting that 'traditional' dramaturgy can be understood as "the 'what' and physical dramaturgy as the 'how'" (p. 5). Our exploration of physical dramaturgy during the rehearsal process effectively bridged the two dramaturgical stages of *What Remains*' creation, enabling them to become concurrent and reciprocal. Early drafts of the script influenced our experimentation with physical dramaturgy during rehearsals which then informed further development of the script. In other words, as we developed both the script and the physical dramaturgy, they informed each other and became mutually symbiotic.

I use the term physical dramaturgy to refer to everything the actors did on stage to develop *What Remains* from "the two-dimensional space of the text on paper" into "the tri-dimensional theatrical space" (Barba, 2010, p. 192). When, where, and how they moved, their moments of stillness, all contributed to the physical dramaturgy of the work. Simply having the actors stand on stage speaking Harold and Vita's letters out loud can be considered an act of physical dramaturgy, as it physically gave body, voice, and 'life' to otherwise silent, two-dimensional documentary materials. In my work, I prefer to cultivate a more equitable and dialogic relationship between the different elements of a performance text, eschewing the historically hierarchical dramaturgical binary of script/text and physicality/movement. Yet here I make a distinction between the written script and the physical performance score to ensure a clear articulation of aspects of the dramaturgical process for *What Remains.* The following discussion highlights specific moments of physical dramaturgy in *What Remains* and how it helped me and the actors to consider, explore, and navigate the interrelation of ethics and dramaturgy during our posthumous documentary theatre process.

THE PHYSICALITY OF VITA AND VIOLET

In the final month of rehearsals when asked which specific Moments they wanted to work on before running the play as a whole, the actors always replied, "a recap of Moments 8 to 10." This is because they found this section to be the most technically complex and physically and mentally demanding of the play. Moments 8 to 10 (see Appendix A) explore aspects of the reputedly tumultuous and intense love affair between Vita Sackville-West and Violet Trefusis that thrust Harold and Vita's marriage into crisis, nearly destroying it (Nicolson, 1992/2007). Reflective of the most precarious period of Harold and Vita's 50-year relationship, if I were to map out the 'dramatic arc' of *What Remains* in a traditional Aristotelian sense, that is, as a linear narrative arc with a through-line that runs from beginning to end, these Moments would serve as the play's peak moment of tension.

Sexual activity between women has never been illegal under British legislation; however it was not until the passing of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 that homosexual acts between men were legalised in England, five years after Vita's death and one year before Harold's. Although Vita was never at risk of legal consequences for participating in same-sex relationships, she could not benefit from the social acceptance and legal protection that has developed for members of the LGBTQIA+ community in the years following her death. Social and cultural historians Alison Oram and Annmarie Turnbull (2001) comment that

> until the mid-twentieth century lesbians rarely identified themselves as such. 'Lesbian identity' is a late twentieth-century concept […] In the past women who loved and/or had sex with other women, or who cross-dressed, or who resisted heterosexuality, did not necessarily have a language to describe themselves as lovers of women, or to claim any particular identity based on their sexuality. (p. 1)

Thus, during Vita's lifetime, the 'lesbian identity' as it might be conceptualised and articulated now had yet to be explicitly developed or acknowledged, let alone accepted by society. Nevertheless, in the decades following their deaths, both Harold and Vita have been posthumously adopted as LGBTQIA+ icons.

The National Trust UK, the conservation charity that now cares for both Vita's ancestral home and Vita and Harold's shared home and garden, names them notable figures in the

exploration of LGBTQIA+ heritage and history at National Trust places (National Trust, n.d.a). Vita's 'lesbian identity' in particular has certainly been amplified since her death, if not entirely posthumously constructed and retrospectively assigned. The National Trust (n.d.b) cites Vita as a person "who challenged conventional ideas of gender and sexuality" (para. 1) and while Vita explicitly expressed her love and attraction to women in her personal writings, she did not label herself with what might now be considered an LGBTQIA+ identity. She reflects in a letter to Harold forty years after the end of her affair with Violet:

> 23 Nov 1960
>
> […] When we married, you were older than me, and far better informed. I was very young, and very innocent. I knew nothing about homosexuality. I didn't even know that such a thing existed, either between men or between women. (Nicolson, 1992/2007, p. 432)

I included this letter in *What Remains* at the beginning of Moment 8 to introduce Violet Trefusis, the affair, and Vita's non-heteronormative sexual identity. The Moment then unfolds into a montage exploring Vita's memories of her affair with Violet and the letters she and Harold sent to one another during this 'crisis point' of their marriage. During this Moment, Lily became representative of Violet and, along with Megan as Vita (see Figure 1[3]), completed a choreographic sequence inspired by UK theatre company Frantic Assembly's choreographic exercise 'Hymns Hands,' producing a multidimensional montage of spoken text and physical action.

[3] The photos included in this thesis were kindly taken by Ben Whitehouse (2022) during rehearsals for *What Remains*. The copyright for the images is attributed to/owned by Missy Mooney.

Figure 1: Lily and Megan as Violet and Vita.

HYMNS HANDS

Hymns Hands is so titled because it was introduced to Frantic Assembly by director and choreographer Liam Steel when creating the company's 1999 original work *Hymns* (S. Graham & Hoggett, 2009). In *The Frantic Assembly Book of Devising Theatre,* company co-founders Scott Graham and Steven Hoggett (2009) provide instructions for Hymns Hands in its simplest form involving two people:

> One of the partners places their hands firmly on the other, or manipulates their partner's hands, placing them on their own body. They can also place their partner's hands on the partner's body […] Each partner should take turns placing their partner's or their own hands on their bodies. Allow each partner to be in control for between two and four moves before control switches to the other partner. They start from where the first partner finished. (p. 156)

One of the reasons I chose to experiment with Hymns Hands was because, as S. Graham and Hoggett (2009) identify, it is a simple yet effective way to "demonstrate how choreography meets context to create meaning" (pp. 155-156). In *What Remains* Lily and Megan's rendition of Hymns Hands (the movements themselves) has no objective or implicit meaning or story but when performed in conjunction with Vita and Harold's letters contributed to the storytelling and constructed a layer of meaning that words alone could not. During the rehearsal process, the actors experimented with applying different variations to the movement. We explored how performing the sequence faster or slower might alter the audience's production of meaning and the story being told. We also observed that changing the direction of the actors' eye line and the intent of their gaze could offer the audience different potential interpretations of Vita and Violet's unfolding narrative. During Moments 8-10, Megan and Lily repeated the Hymns Hands sequence a total of three times, with each repetition corresponding to a different stage of Vita and Violet's relationship.

Representative of my perception of the early stages of their relationship as an intense and explorative infatuation, the first repetition was slow with both actors intently watching the hand that was moving (see Figures 2 & 3). The second repetition was faster and while Lily/Violet looked and Megan/Vita, Megan's attention was focused on the unpictured Conor/Harold (see Figure 4). When a third person is added to the Hymns Hands equation "what usually emerges is a complex love triangle" (S. Graham, Hoggett, 2009, p. 157), making it a befitting dramaturgical strategy for exploring the intersecting relationship(s) between Vita, Violet, and Harold in *What Remains*. Vita now appears to be having her head turned by the intention of Harold while Violet stoically continues, desperately trying to regain her attention. Vita is (literally) going through the motions of the relationship but part of her has already left. Vita's letters and personal writings indicate that she loved Harold deeply "more than anything – so dearly, so protectively, so respectingly, so much more than anything else, so eternally" (Nicolson, 1992/2007, p. 353) but was at the same time in love with Violet: "There is a bond that unites me to Violet, Violet to me; […] but what that bond is God alone knows; sometimes I feel it is as something legendary" (Nicolson & Sackville-West, 1973/1999, p. 27), and this repetition sought to outwardly express the internal tug-of-war she appeared to feel within.

The final variation of Hymns Hands was faster still, almost frantic, with Megan and Lily looking determinedly at each other (see Figure 5). Coupled with a letter in which Vita likens Violet to an 'unexploded bomb' and tells her: "You and I can't be together" (Glendenning, 1983, p. 307), as they progress through the letter the movement gets faster and faster until it 'explodes' and Hymns Hands stops, ending just like Violet and Vita's relationship.

Figure 2: Megan and Lily watching the hand that's moving.

Figure 3: Megan and Lily watching the hand that's moving.

Figure 4: Megan looks towards the un-pictured Conor/Harold while Lily continues to focus on Megan.

Figure 5: Megan and Lily focus on each other.

Vita kept hidden away over 500 letters from Violet that were written during the peak of their 1918-1921 affair (Lilley, 2019, p. 1458). While Vita lived, women did not openly acknowledge, physically or verbally, their relationships with or sexual desire for women. Thus, Vita's sexual identity remained a secret she kept from many people, including her children, for many years. Harold and Vita's son, Nigel Nicolson (1966), reflects that "others knew her better than I did. She kept private from her family whole sides of her life and nature" (p. 16). The incorporation of physical dramaturgy into the representation of Vita and Violet's relationship sought to symbolically and retrospectively 'liberate' Vita from the unaccepting socio-political conditions she may have experienced in early twentieth-century England. Being able to represent love and physical intimacy between two women on stage without fear is a hard-fought freedom. It is something that I, as a twenty-first-century theatre maker in Aotearoa New Zealand (a relatively LGBTQIA+ liberated country), can do that Vita could not. Hymns Hands strove to be a way to explore, represent, and even posthumously validate Vita and Violet's relationship, the deep love they shared, and a 'side of her life and nature' that, for fear of social rejection, she had to keep private or hidden.

Another reason I was drawn to using Hymns Hands in *What Remains* was because there are multiple references to hands in the letters I included in Moment 8 (see Appendix A). For example, Vita writes "she [Violet] took my hands, and parted my fingers to count the points as she told me why she loved me" (Nicolson & Sackville-West, 1973/1999, p. 100). Harold replies, "we seemed, you and I to be running hand in hand on the downs" (Nicolson, 1992/2007, p. 71) and "when you fall into Violet's hand you become like a jellyfish addicted to cocaine" (Nicolson & Sackville-West, 1973/1999, p. 154). Nigel Nicolson (1966) similarly reflects that his relationship with his mother (Vita) "was one of reaching out with finger-tips to grasp what can only be grasped by the whole hand" (p. 17). As articulated in one of recorded group discussions included in Moment 9 of *What Remains,* Harold and Vita's letters to each other during this time evoke a sense of desperation and yearning, the feeling of reaching for something only to have it slip further away.

Furthermore, while I've had access to hundreds of Vita and Harold's letters and diary entries, in the final Moment of *What Remains* (see Appendix A, Moment 21) I reflect, similarly to Nigel Nicolson, that "I should probably acknowledge, that the reality is, that I

don't know you at all." All theatre makers whose work aims to represent deceased historical figures are faced with the limitation that they cannot know their subjects in the same way that they might if they were living. They cannot meet or talk with them but can only reach for them and forge an imaginary connection that is one-sided, diluted, and muted by distance and time. In *What Remains* I have constructed the image of a people I want to know, and feel like I know, but can never truly know as they are eternally beyond my reach.

The physical dramaturgy of Hymns Hands, of Violet, Vita, and Harold physically reaching for one another also mirrors the explorative nature of *What Remains* as a research activity. Throughout the course of the play, the audience observes Missy, and the actors explore and 'reach' for answers to my research questions; for the 'right' and 'ethical' way to tell the story and for the story itself. This becomes a core through-line of the play's narrative and the framework that grounds the posthumous re-presentation of Harold and Vita's documentary material.

When reflecting on the process of creating *What Remains* during my final recorded group discussion with the actors, we had the following exchange:

Lily: The movement and the physicality were there to support the words, not to overpower them. It was like they were sitting behind the words to further push them forward.

Missy: Or even to support the act of representation. The almost 'hyper-real' Violet-Vita sequence- For me, this kind of dramaturgy is not naturalistic, not 'documentary' or 'verbatim' at all. It's obvious that it's not 'real', that this is Missy "doing a theatre thing", and that kind of dramaturgy supported my ethical endeavour, to draw attention to theatre's production of a certain reality.

Megan: I always felt like that moment lent into what Harold was writing about [in his diary entries and letters to Vita during the affair]. I always felt it took the audience inside his mind, it's what he's imagining. That's what's between the lines. For him, it was almost a visualisation of what could be happening.

My abstract depiction of Vita and Violet's relationship using Hymns Hands was clearly interpretive and imaginative. It was a mode of storytelling that, as Megan comments, gave a bodily presence to "a visualisation of what could be happening." The obviously choreographed movements, while arguably contradictory to the 'real world' aesthetic documentary theatre frequently strives for, became a process through which I could explore ethical considerations of the form. It sought to draw attention to the editing process and my authorial control, highlighting that *What Remains* is (and could only ever be) a subjective representation fuelled by my perspective, perception, and positionality. Missy comments in Moment 13, "it's almost like this whole thing [*What Remains*] is happening inside my head. I'm not trying to show Vita and Harold as if I'm doing a David Attenborough documentary. It's almost like my versionings and imaginations of them" (see Appendix A). The symbolic, almost surreal and dream sequence-like physical dramaturgy aimed to remind the audience that everything they see enacted on stage is not objectively or exactly what happened, but a version of Harold and Vita based on fact but filtered through my imagination.

THE PHYSICAL REPRESENTATION OF PAST LIVES VIA PRESENT ONES

Notions of life and death, past and present, and the passage of time are central to this research's proposed definition of posthumous documentary theatre. Barba (2010) reflects that "in theatre, time is created artificially" (p. 195) and in posthumous documentary theatre audiences are frequently required to suspend their real-world conceptions of the nature of time and become adept at reading multiple timelines simultaneously. In *What Remains* the actors become akin to time travellers. Their embodied delivery of the letters evoked images of the past, yet the actors themselves had an implicit anachronistic quality of being from the future/present.

In my introduction to the performance of *What Remains* (see Appendix H), I suggested that the play serves as "the acknowledgement of past lives via present ones." The actors achieved this acknowledgement by traversing worlds; that of Harold and Vita, that of Missy and the actors during the rehearsal process, and the present world of the audience in which the play was being performed, never fully submitting to either. Yet, this did not result in a perplexing, untethered performance but transformed the actors into active conduits through which multiple strands of time flow. Or, as Barba (2010) suggests, "time is neither outside me nor does it flow around me: *I am time,* it is me who flows" (p. 195, original emphasis). The actors constructed time(s) and their flow through past and present became the play.

The dialogic relationship between past(s) and present in *What Remains* was most obviously established in the script by juxtaposing Harold and Vita's historical letters and diaries with mine and the actors' contemporary verbatim material, but it was also realised in the performance text through physical dramaturgy. While the documentary material was from the past, the actors' posthumous delivery of that material and all the physical action was 'live' and of the present moment. Love (2017) comments that on stage "any given body or object is always at least two different things at once" (p. 3). It is the actors' bodies and voices on stage, and, even when 'being' Harold, Vita, and Violet, they always remain, to some observable degree, themselves. They did not 'disappear' into their parts (Kaufman, 1998) because our use of physical dramaturgy did not attempt to "conceal this doubling and

transformation" (Love, 2017, p. 3) but aimed to support the telling of a story from the past by acknowledging its retelling and the actor/character/audience relationship in the present.

For example, Vita and Harold's only moment of physical contact in *What Remains* took place near the end of the play (see Appendix A, Moment 16). During the following dialogue, Megan and Conor performed a precise choreographic sequence.

VITA: It may still be all right,

HAROLD: I think she is getting better.

VITA: -but I doubt it.

Figure 6: Megan and Conor reunite Vita and Harold in time and space.

One positioned on either side of the stage; Megan and Conor delivered these lines out to the audience. As they said their line(s) they each extended their inside arm, hands outstretched reaching towards each other, their attention still focused outwards to the audience. After Vita's last line, they suddenly turned their heads to look at one another. It is the first time during the whole play that Harold and Vita appear to really 'see' and acknowledge each other and exist together in the same moment in space and time. They then slowly crossed the stage with their hands still reaching towards each other (see Figure 6). Palms pressed together, Harold and Vita physically meet in *What Remains* for the first

and final time. Earlier in the play, Vita and Violet's Hymns Hands sequence established the joining or connecting of hands as a symbol of intimacy which was echoed in this moment. When Harold and Vita finally connected in the performance space it was through the hands and fingertips that held the pen, hit the keys of the typewriter, and produced the letters that united them across countries and continents and sustained their love and marriage for decades.

The simplicity of this instance of physical dramaturgy aimed to give this moment and Harold and Vita's relationship a timeless quality. The nature of the movement was not particularly evocative of any specific time or place which enabled it to 'fit' in both the past and present. It did not seem jarringly modern or misplaced within Harold and Vita's world, yet the deliberateness and specificity of the physical action drew attention to the present moment in which it was taking place, and in turn the act of representation itself. Up until this point, the play's dramaturgy had encouraged the audience to read Megan and Conor's bodies as those of Vita and Harold and therefore view this action as a meeting between Harold and Vita. However, somewhat ironically, having Harold and Vita physically meet in the space further emphasised their real world absence, because it was Conor and Megan's bodies that the audience observed. The physical dramaturgy was neither wholly natural activity nor abstract movement and simultaneously was (and was not) a meeting of both Harold and Vita and Megan and Conor.

Philosopher Walter Benjamin (1970) comments "even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking one element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it happens to be" (p. 222). Whether representing the living or the dead, documentary theatre can evoke a sense of a past reality. However, for all its attempts to reach back in time, this illusion of temporal traversal and resurrection cannot transcend the circumstance of the present moment in which it is occurring. Abstract physical dramaturgy such as Hymns Hands will not always be appropriate for all documentary theatre productions. However, it was a useful ethical-dramaturgical strategy that helped me navigate the potential tension caused by the metaphorical collision of timelines and interflow of past and present in *What Remains*. The physical dramaturgy (inherently of the present) and Vita and Harold's letters (artefacts from the past) were woven together into a

performance text that enabled us to 'tell a story', or add another interpretive layer to Harold and Vita's existing historical narrative while simultaneously making evident our editorial attitudes towards that material in the present. This grounded *What Remains* not as an act of resurrection or revival but as a more personal acknowledgement, commemoration, and representation of past lives via present ones.

THE USE OF PAPER ON STAGE

In addition to physical dramaturgy and the dramaturgical techniques used in the script (montage, the nodal technique, and Moment Work), elements of the production design, such as the use of paper on stage, also sought to evoke a simultaneous sense and acknowledgement of past and present in *What Remains*.

Figure 7: Megan, Lily, and Conor celebrate Vita and Harold's wedding.

One of my favourite moments during the performance of *What Remains*, expertly captured in Ben Whitehouse's photo (see Figure 7), was when the actors, celebrating Harold and Vita's wedding, tossed handfuls of paper up into the air like a flurry of confetti. Although Harold and Vita's real-life marriage took place over a century ago, the unpredictable shower of paper, how each page twisted and turned in the air and where it landed was inherently dependent on the conditions of the present moment in which it occurred. This moment was never able to be repeated in exactly the same way and encapsulated the ephemeral magic of theatre. It could also be considered a physical metaphor for how the representation of history, in both theatre and other mediums, is similarly always shaped by the conditions of the time in which it is being re-presented. The performance of posthumous documentary

theatre takes place at a certain moment in time, and the audience is an essential and active part of shaping the conditions of that moment. Like the currents of air that may influence the pages' descent to the ground, the audience's perceptions and interpretations of the theatrical event dictate how it 'lands' and ultimately decide the meaning(s) that are made.

Reflecting on Vita's reluctance to refurbish or upgrade her writing room in the tower at Sissinghurst, Nigel Nicolson (1973/1999) comments that "as the wallpaper peeled and faded, and the velvet tassels slowly frayed, she would never allow them to be renewed. Her possessions must grow old with her. She must be surrounded by evidence of time" (p. 203). The throwing and dropping of paper became a recurring motif in *What Remains*, resulting in the stage becoming strewn with abandoned letters (see Figure 8). The gradual accumulation of the pages on the floor served as a physical representation and tangible 'evidence' of the passing of time on multiple levels. It served as a visual marker of the performance's progression. It also became a persistent reminder that *What Remains* is largely constructed from source material written in the past, and that from the letters of the deceased Vita and Harold the live actors draw the 'life' of their performances in the present. Furthermore, representative of the historical source material from which *What Remains* was wrought, the papers carpeting the stage form the literal foundation on which the actors stand, and they too become surrounded by evidence of time.

Figure 8: Megan, Lily, and Conor in Moment 7 as paper begins to cover the stage.

In *What Remains t*he actors interacted with and manipulated the pages in different ways, ripping them, taking them from others' hands, offering them outwards, gently letting them fall to the ground or tossing them aside (see Figure 9). On numerous occasions throughout the play, they also used the paper to perform a kind of physical citation for the source material. For example, in Moment 6 (see Appendix A) when reporting historical headlines, Megan and Conor held up newspapers, physically referencing the original publication format of the words they were speaking (see Figure 10). Other times they would appear to read articles to the audience directly from the newspapers (see Figure 11) or read aloud letters from the loose pages strewn across the performance space (see Figure 12).

Figure 9: Megan exalts Vita's love for Harold, tossing papers in the air during the 'love montage' in Moment 12.

Figure 10: Megan and Conor with newspapers aloft, cite source material.

Figure 11: Megan reads a historical newspaper article from the Auckland Star.

Figure 12: Megan reads one of Vita's letters.

This overt and tactile acknowledgement of the source material was both a dramaturgically and ethically motivated convention inspired by Kaufman's posthumous documentary theatre play *Gross Indecency: The Three Trials of Oscar Wilde* (1998). Reflecting on *Gross Indecency,* Stephen Bottoms (2006) comments, that the play's performance text cultivated a kind of "theatrical self-referentiality" and suggests that this "is precisely what is required of documentary plays if they are to acknowledge their dual and thus ambiguous status as both 'document' and 'play'" (p. 57). The physical performance of citations in *What Remains* similarly sought to recognise the 'real-world document' origins of the play's source material while once more highlighting the re-presentation of that material as a play.

PHYSICAL PERFORMANCE OF CITATIONS IN *GROSS INDECENCY*

Similar to *What Remains, Gross Indecency* is a contemporary representation of historical figures and events that incorporates the use of books and papers on stage to perform its citations and explicitly acknowledge its documentary theatre status. Constructed from

fragments of letters, historic newspaper articles, court transcripts and official documents, *Gross Indecency* follows a resurrected Wilde as he navigates arguably the most theatrical spectacle of his career. It focuses on Wildes's three 1895 trials in which his relationships with men were deemed acts of 'gross indecency' and Wilde's struggle to defend the morality of his art in a court of law (Kaufman, 1998).

In the author's note prefacing *Gross Indecency*'s script, Kaufman (1998) instructs that included in the performance space should be "a long table covered with books from which the narrators quote. This should be the same level as the audience" (n.p.). The books that Kaufman refers to are (or at least are representative of) the compendiums of documentary source material that inform the play's content, including court transcripts, correspondence, and Wilde's published works. The directive that the documentary material resides on "the same level as the audience" is intriguingly specific. It suggests that Kaufman wanted the source material to exist not above or below but equally on the audience's level, perhaps to prevent or bridge any physical or architectural gap between the reconstructed historical world of the play and the contemporary world of the audience in which it is being performed.

Another parallel between *Gross Indecency* and *What Remains* is that the documentary source material functions not just as the jumping-off point or inspiration for the work. *Gross Indecency* is not 'based on' the documentary material, rather the documentary material and the theatre maker and actors' interaction with it, is the play. Therefore, having the documentary material literally exist on the same level as the audience might also serve to physically indicate that the play's content comes not from some place of higher imagination, nor has its source material been reduced to unseen 'base' research, but that it comes from the same 'real' world as the audience. In other words, the historical documentary material and its present-day audience reside in "an equal level of reality" (Elias, 2021, p. 23).

Both mine and Kaufman's decision to physically represent our documentary source material on stage reflects a desire to tangibly bring the past into the present and liberate historical documents from any potential confines of the archive. Unlike in a museum where it can appear that "time is frozen" (Crane, 2006, p. 100), in *What Remains* and *Gross Indecency* the

documents of the dead are no longer static or fixed in time as things that cease to progress after the death of their originators. They are instead resituated in the evolving present and made 'live' once more. Additionally, the actors' interaction with the paper and sourcebooks on stage could also be considered a physical metaphor for the audience's cognitive interaction with the historical documentary material when experiencing these plays.

The introduction of this thesis suggests that commemoration can be considered an inherent quality of posthumous documentary theatre. Museologist Susan Crane (2006) comments that "forgetting is a naturally occurring process which museums disturb" (p. 100). Works of posthumous documentary theatre such as *Gross Indecency* and *What Remains* can similarly be considered interventions against the process of forgetting. For, the reconstructed Oscar Wilde, Harold Nicolson, and Vita Sackville-West are made live not just vicariously in the actors' bodies in space, but they are recalled, recontextualised, reconsidered, and revitalised in the minds of the audience. These plays invite the audience to participate in an act of commemoration, to think of something or someone(s) in their absence and as the audience acknowledges aspects of past lives via present ones, they prevent the dead from completely disappearing beyond recall into the void of the past.

When reflecting on their physical performance of citations in *Gross Indecency* Kaufman and McAdams (2018) comment, "we created many moments with our source books. . . An actor would approach the table, pick up a book, quote the title and the author, and start reading from it" (p. 164). For example, the play begins as follows:

> *The actors come on stage. The actor playing Oscar Wilde holds up a copy of De Profundis and reads:*
>
> **Actor** This is from *De Profundis* by Oscar Wilde:
>
> 'Do not be afraid of the past. If people tell you it is irrevocable, do not believe them. The past, present and future are but one moment in the sight of God. Time and space are merely accidental conditions of thought. The imagination can transcend them.' (Kaufman, 1998, p. 9)

The metatheatricality of this moment operates on multiple levels. Firstly, the presentational style of performance, the actor citing their source material and then reading it directly to

the audience, instantly acknowledges the audience's presence, breaking the fourth wall. This makes the presence of the actor telling *a* story visible (Kaufman, 1998) and foregrounds the theatrical event as one of direct and self-aware communication of documentary material from the actors to the audience. Secondly, this immediate and explicit reference to the play's source material identifies *Gross Indecency* as a representation that is "highly self-conscious about its own status as a collage of appropriated historical texts" (Bottoms, 2006, p. 61) and establishes the play as the "performance of documents as documents" (Martin, 2013, p. 38). Furthermore, the selected *De Profundis* quote suggests a self-awareness of the transcendent nature of posthumous documentary theatre itself. Wilde deconstructs linear conceptions of time and space, deeming them "conditions of thought," and this could reflect the 'created' nature of time in posthumous documentary theatre, where a sense of the past and present, the live and dead can exist not just simultaneously but harmoniously.

My use of physical dramaturgy in *What Remains*, the actors' bodies in space, their interaction with paper on stage, and the physical citation of source material sought to present the audience with a commemorative but also dynamic re-presentation of Vita and Harold's documentary material. Yet, perhaps more importantly, it exposed "the mechanics of theatrical magic – how one thing stands in for another, how transformations occur" (Love, 2017, p. 35), once more drawing attention to the work as an act of exploration and subjective representation.

THE AUDIO MONTAGE

Another key element of *What Remains'* performance text that aimed to draw attention to "the mechanics of theatrical magic" was my use of audio recordings. When reflecting on biography and life writing practices Lee (2009) suggests that "the opening move sets up the whole approach. And this will vary depending on the subject" (p. 125). In Part 2 of this thesis, I reflected on the opening scenes of *What Remains,* specifically Moment 2, which marked the audience's first encounter with Harold and Vita (as physically represented by the actors) and their documentary material. Yet, this is not the play's 'opening move', which was technically my welcome and introduction to *What Remains* (see Appendix H). However, a prologue, in the form of an audio montage, proceeds Harold and Vita's 'physical appearance' on stage and marks the 'official' commencement of the performance text.

The script for *What Remains* begins with the following stage directions:

> "*The three actors are already on stage/in the performance space.*
> *The Audio Montage plays.*
> *When it finishes, MOMENT 1 begins"* (see Appendix A).

Underscored by the sound of typing, the Audio Montage (see transcript in Appendix I) is edited together from the recordings of the first few introductory rehearsals with the actors. Less dialogic than later recorded group discussions, it is primarily Missy's voice the audience hears as they are thrust into the aurally re-presented world of the rehearsal room. This 'opening move' sought to foreground the creation process of *What Remains* and relocate the play away from a fictive context (Stuart-Fisher, 2020). The Audio Montage offers the audience insight into what it was like to be in the actors' 'shoes' during the process of creating *What Remains,* for they, like the actors at the beginning of the rehearsal process, listen to Missy introduce Harold and Vita's letters and her relationship to them.

The distinct everyday vernacular preserved verbatim in the recordings instantly grounds the Audio Montage not in the historical world of Harold and Vita, but in the recognisably 'real world' and recent past of the actors' rehearsal room. This aimed to signpost *What Remains* as a theatrical experience that strives to be not simply a time-travelling ride through history, but a research activity and self-aware exploration of posthumous documentary theatre

practice. Furthermore, the Audio Montage is the first time the audience is invited into the theatre maker/actor throughline. Missy is introduced not as objective, omniscient, and aloof, but as an emotionally invested, subjective, and even slightly uncertain theatre maker and researcher. In the Audio Montage, my statement that "there's something about them [the letters] that I want to hear them out loud" alludes to my personal, romanticised, and almost whimsical relationship with Harold and Vita's letters. Then, a few seconds later, the audience hears me openly question what *What Remains* could be. The Missy character states "you know, is this a documentary play? Is it a love story? Who knows" (see Appendix I). These comments help to set up *What Remains* as the product of an inherently personal and explorative endeavour. As Bottoms (2006) comments, "the inclusion of such material invites the audience to question the role and assumptions of the interviewer-actors and writer-director in making the piece, just as they are asked to scrutinize the words of their interviewees" (p. 65).

An obviously edited amalgam of different clips of audio, the Audio Montage can be viewed as a microcosm of the whole play. Similar to how evidence of textual montaging remains visible in other Moments in *What Remains,* the patchworked construction of the Audio Montage is not concealed but is deliberately collaged so as not to resemble an organic whole. The audio excerpts come from multiple recorded group discussions that took place over several weeks in different locations, some in person and others via online video Zoom calls. Therefore, the audio quality; how echoey the room was and the proximity of the speaker to the recording device, differs between soundbites. Mirroring the actors' efforts to deliver Harold and Vita's letters word for word as they had been written, the Audio Montage re-presents the audio material, aside from its obvious truncation, as unedited as possible. With the intent to re-present the recordings in a way that aurally displayed their 'quotation marks' and make their recontextualization audibly evident, I did not adjust or edit the sound levels of individual audio clips to be uniformly regulated. In this way, as Fisher Dawson (1999) comments, "the montage acts as an authenticating sign" (p. 46).

Ruhl (2015) states that "language invents worlds" (p. 79) and it is from Harold and Vita's language, preserved in their letters and diaries, that the actors and I constructed and 'invented' a representation of their world on stage in *What Remains*. In the re-presentation

of documentary material that is inherently reflective, such as diaries and letters, the telling or reporting of action can sometimes be "criticised for burdening the audience with too much expository information" (Maloney, 2013, p. 170). Yet, it can also present the audience with vivid "verbal images" (Wake, 2018, p. 117). In order to construct and understand these reported 'verbal images' and 'invent' the theatrical world, the audience must navigate the sometimes chaotic rhythms and idiosyncratic uses of language synonymous with personal writings and verbatim speech. Consequently, as Blythe (2016) reflects, documentary theatre frequently invites a "very forensic approach to listening" (17:20). In the performance of *What Remains*, while the Audio Montage played, Conor, Lily and Megan were static on stage listening along with the audience. Aside from stillness, there was no observable layer of visual or physical storytelling to accompany the words. The audience had to rely only on what they heard to build a picture and make sense of what was going on. As an 'opening move' the Audio Montage also aimed to foreshadow this 'forensic approach to listening' often associated with documentary theatre, 'setting up' the audience for the rest of the performance, during which, largely by listening, they had to continually 'invent (and maintain) worlds.'

AUDIO IN *LONDON ROAD* AND *THE GIRLFRIEND EXPERIENCE*

My use of an Audio Montage to begin *What Remains* was also partly inspired by the work of British verbatim theatre veteran, Alecky Blythe. As briefly touched on earlier in this thesis, Blythe's work is characterised by her self-titled recorded delivery technique which involves actors wearing headphones during performance through which an audio script, edited together from the original recorded interviews with documentary subjects, plays. The actors then speak along in time with the recording to ensure their vocal delivery matches the people they are representing on stage as closely as possible, preserving the individual "voiceprint" (Brown as cited in Cantrell, 2013, p. 141) of their documentary subjects. Blythe has incorporated 'verbatim audio' from these interviews into several of her productions, with her verbatim play *The Girlfriend Experience* (2008) and verbatim musical (co-created with composer Adam Cork) *London Road* (2011) both opening with audio recordings.

Although not a recorded delivery play, as the actors did not wear headphones during performance, The stage directions for the beginning of *London Road* instruct:

> "ACT ONE
>
> Section One
>
> *Church hall just off London Road.*
>
> *The original audio recording of* RON*'s opening speech is heard over the PA in the auditorium. It fades out as* RON *starts to sing.*" (p. 5)

Belfield (2018b) identifies that "the use of the audio recording instantly reminds the audience that what they are about to hear are real words from real people" (p. 75). However, this moment also highlights that the actor on stage is not the 'real' Ron, but a representation of him. In a moment of aural fusion, the recording of the 'real' Ron fades out as the actor-Ron on stage begins to sing and the relationship between 'reality' and 'theatre' in documentary theatre is encapsulated. Evocative of a Venn diagram, at the intersection of original and reproduction, Ron simultaneously exists in two spheres, as both a 'real person' and a documentary character. He is momentarily "caught in between the representational process of playwriting and the actuality of the real events themselves" (Stuart-Fisher, 2020, p. 34). It is in the overlap of these two spheres; a past 'real world' reality and its representation in the (re)created reality of the theatre, that the play exists.

This is not the first time Blythe has used audio to begin her work. Her earlier verbatim play *The Girlfriend Experience* also incorporates audio in its opening moments. However, it takes the form of a recorded voice-over of Blythe herself. The first scene of *The Girlfriend Experience*, "Prologue – Technique", begins as follows:

> ALECKY (*voice-over*). I feel like I should explain – what I'm doing with m-microphones an' stuff like that - / just so that you know –
>
> TESSA. Mmm – We did sort of / - a bit.
>
> POPPY. Yeah –
>
> ALECKY. (*voice-over*). Um (*Beat*.) – I kindof make (*Beat*.) – um (*Beat*.) – they're sortof documentary plays. (*Pause*.) But – I don't – *film* anything (*Beat*.) – I just re*cord* – hours and hours of-of – audio. (*Pause*.) Um (*Beat*.) – and I – edit it (*Beat*.)
>
> (Blythe, 2008, p. 5)

Like *London Road*, this use of audio draws the audience's attention to the real-world origins of the play's content. However, the inclusion of Blythe's theatre maker-voice adds another layer that more explicitly displays the editorial process of the play's creation. The audience are introduced to Blythe as the interviewer, theatre maker, and playwright but she also identifies herself as an editor: "I just record – hours and hours of-of – audio. . . and I – edit it." Comparable to Missy's dialogue in the Audio Montage, this comment subtly reveals that the play does not come directly uncensored from the interviewees, but is filtered, mediated, edited, and reconstructed through the mind of the theatre maker.

In the 2008 production of *The Girlfriend Experience* directed by Joe Hill-Gibbins at the Royal Court Theatre, similar to *London Road,* during this opening scene*,* "as the woman on the audio replied to Blythe's introduction, the actors repeated their words so that the audience heard both the actual women and the actor's voices." (Cantrell, 2013, p, 150). The audio then faded out so only the actors' voices remained. Cantrell (2013) identifies that "the decision to stage the moment at which the actors stepped into the role very clearly created an alienating effect. It was designed explicitly to demonstrate to the audience that the actors were repeating the words they were hearing via headphones" (p. 150). Although the actors do not speak along with the Audio Montage in *What Remains*, my use of audio was designed to cultivate a similar kind of alienation effect.

Developed from the traditional Brechtian verfremdungseffekt, notions of alienation, estrangement, and distancing are frequently associated with documentary theatre, with practitioners such as Kaufman (1998) citing Brecht's techniques as inspiration for their work. The Audio Montage in *What Remains* strove to create a sense of alienation by drawing attention to the process of theatrical representation, 'estranging' the story and marking it off from naturalism (Maloney, 2013). Yet, it was a distinct kind of alienation that had the "ability to blend distance with closeness" (Woods, 2019, p. 195). That is, while the audio foregrounded the performance as a re-presentation and disrupted the audience's metaphorical transportation to an illusory theatrical world, it also fostered a level of intimacy between the theatre maker and the audience. This cultivated a simultaneous sense of detachment and intimacy for the audience, as they were invited into the theatre maker's

ethical and dramaturgical process but were then asked to engage not just with the story or characters but with the construction of the theatrical event itself.

THE THEATRE MAKER AND ACTORS AS CHARACTERS IN *WHAT REMAINS*

The Audio Montage was just one of the ways *What Remains* began to explore strategies of alienation in documentary theatre. The other more obvious method was the inclusion of myself and the actors as characters in the play and the construction of the theatre maker/actor throughline. Summerskill (2020) suggests that "it is by no means a common practice for playwrights creating scripts from interviews to include the interviewers' voices in their productions" (p. 41) and that "in much verbatim theatre work, it is only the narrators' words that will be used in the script, not your own" (p. 103). Many documentary theatre practitioners make sure to omit their voices from their scripts. Yet, as evidenced earlier in this discussion, some such as Blythe (2008, 2011, & 2014) conversely choose to include themselves as interviewer/theatre maker characters in their work and re-present their own verbatim dialogue alongside their documentary subjects'. The following discussion details the inclusion of myself and the actors as characters in *What Remains* and identifies how this dramaturgical decision also contributed to my exploration of ethical considerations in posthumous documentary theatre.

When initially approaching the publishers that represent Vita and Harold's literary estate to enquire about permission to use a selection of their published material to create *What Remains*, I was not certain of the exact amount of their material I would be permitted to use. Due to potential copyright permission restrictions, it was possible that my use of their material would be limited, and therefore insufficient to construct an hour-long piece of theatre. In preparation for such an outcome, I considered alternative documentary material that I could use to supplement Harold and Vita's while still serving my research objectives. This prompted me to think about the possible dual purpose of the material gathered in my recorded group discussions with the actors. In addition to serving as a useful research method and mode of documentation, I was inspired by theatre makers such as Blythe, Kaufman, and New Zealand director and playwright Stuart McKenzie (who have all represented themselves and their theatre-making processes in their plays) to explore how testimony from these recorded group discussions and the inclusion of myself and the actors

as characters could work dramaturgically to contextualise Harold and Vita's material in *What Remains*.

When reflecting on her practice as a documentary theatre maker, Blythe (2008) comments, "I am not just a voyeur, I am also a participant" (p. 86), and this is part of the reason she has frequently included herself as a character in her verbatim plays. However, the nature of and opportunity for 'participation' differs from practitioner to practitioner and project to project. Theatre makers such as Blythe, who construct their work from recorded interviews with living subjects, can participate in the documentary theatre process in a way that posthumous documentary theatre makers cannot. To some extent, they can influence the nature of the material they collect as they gather it, whether it be by asking certain questions or steering the interview in a particular direction. In my own past documentary theatre projects with living subjects, seeking to acknowledge my 'participation' and influence on the work, I experimented with including myself as a kind of 'interviewer'/narrator character. I inserted my own verbatim testimony between different interviewees' responses, hoping that the Missy character would give structure, context, and clarity to the different intersecting testimonies, while also exposing my active role in the gathering of those testimonies. Primarily this involved the Missy character re-enacting sections of the interview verbatim by asking interview questions or conversing with the interviewees. However, when embarking on this creative practice, it became apparent that due to its posthumous nature, the way the Missy character could function in *What Remains* would need to differ from my past verbatim theatre endeavours.

Although posthumous documentary theatre makers work largely with pre-existing material and cannot interact with their subjects, "biography is bound to incorporate the relationship of the writer and their subject, even if only subliminally. There is no such thing as an entirely neutral biographical narrative" (Lee, 2009, p. 134). It became clear very early on in the creation of *What Remains* that my 'relationship' with Harold and Vita, how I felt about their documentary material, was and would continue to influence both consciously and subconsciously the nature of *What Remains*. Furthermore, as we moved through the rehearsal process, the actors began to develop their own personal relationships with the material which additionally impacted our dramaturgical decision-making and construction of

the performance text. Consideration of this led to the expansion of the theatre maker-as-character convention to include the actors and the development of the theatre maker/actor throughline.

In *What Remains* excerpts from our recorded group discussions are juxtaposed with Harold and Vita's historical documentary material and consequently, our theatre maker/actor process chat became the contextualising lens or frame through which the audience encountered Harold, Vita, Violet, and their letters. This placed autobiographical performance (mine and the actor's exploration of Harold and Vita's material), and the performance of history (the verbatim representation of that documentary material on stage) in dialogue (Heddon, 2008). The intertwining of historical documentary material and the actors' contemporary response to it enabled *What Remains* to explore practices of posthumous documentary theatre, re-presentations of history, and historiography itself. Additionally, it was via the theatre maker/actor throughline and its intersection and juxtaposition with other throughlines in the play, that my investigation into the interrelation of ethical considerations, representation, and dramaturgy during the posthumous documentary theatre process was not only able to be explored but expressed, communicated, and disseminated.

For example, when reflecting on the theatre maker/actor throughline in *What Remains*, actor Conor Maxwell commented:

> When people had any questions about the process of creating the show, I'd be like, "Oh yeah, well we had this scene when we discussed this or we had this scene where we discussed that." And obviously, not all our discussion scenes answered *every* question my friends had, but many of the questions they had related to discussions we had in the show.
>
> I think that says a lot about how *What Remains* was a representation of the process. . . We made it accessible and understandable to people like us if we were in the audience. The questions that we had were answered by us and then, by including our discussions in the show, we were able to answer those questions for other people.

One example of this is Moment 13 of *What Remains* (see Appendix A). Lifted verbatim from one of our recorded group discussions during rehearsals, this Moment re-presents a conversation about whether Megan and Conor should use British accents when voicing Harold and Vita in the play.

MEGAN: This was a question I had; do you want accents? Cos they were English?

CONOR: I was thinking about that.

[. . .]

MISSY: So part of me is like maybe go for like a neutralize.

ALL: Yes / yeah.

MISSY: Maybe like a slight general British…but like in reality they [Harold & Vita] had real snobby like- "Persia" (*pronounced per-see-ah),* like snobby talking like that. I don't wanna do that, cos you know, it'll seem a little bit like taking the piss as well.

CONOR: Yeah.

MISSY**:** But just a neutralization

MEGAN: Ok

MISSY: And then when we're kind of us, actually take the time to speak - talk how we talk.

Our consensus to forgo British accents in favour of a slight neutralisation of the actors' existing 'Kiwi' accents would have been obvious to the audience from the beginning of the play when Conor and Megan started speaking (without British accents). Yet, I still included our accent conversation in *What Remains* because of its potential to create a sense of metatheatricality that might alienate the audience, disrupt their immersion in Harold and Vita's world, and pull them back to the present (or more recent past), enabling us to show our exploration of the potential dramaturgical and ethical considerations of using accents when representing Harold and Vita on stage.

Vita was born into nobility and, together with Harold, enjoyed a life in the upper echelon of the British class system. Yet, as evident in the Missy comment, I was apprehensive that if Megan and Conor were to perform Harold and Vita's letters with accents that accurately represented how they spoke it could potentially add a negative and unwanted layer of

judgement or even mockery to Harold and Vita's representation in *What Remains*. In Moment 7 of the play, I comment:

> MISSY: […] I think a lot of actors and um verbatim and documentary theatre playwrights say, you know, it's not about judging them but it's, -as an actor you've gotta try and understand, find some kind of understanding.

This statement reflects my endeavour to embrace cultural relativism throughout this research and strive not to judge Harold and Vita and the facet of society and culture they participated in and contributed to against the norms and values of my own society. However, despite anthropologist Thomas Hylland Eriksen's (2020) suggestion that "it is perfectly possible to understand other people on their own terms without sharing their outlook and condoning what they do" (p. 19), I could not guarantee that the audience would adopt a similar position.

Aotearoa New Zealand has historically been deemed a relatively classless society, especially in relation to the well-established British class system in which social status has traditionally been hierarchical and heavily influenced by the hereditary transmission of status, titles, and intergenerational wealth among the aristocracy. As leading New Zealand historian Keith Sinclair (1988) comments in *A History of New Zealand,* "there were, of course, classes, in the sense of rich and poor. . . But there was little of the forms or trappings of the English class system" (p. 98). Furthermore, perhaps in part a response to the colonisation of New Zealand by the British, a tendency to criticize the British class system has become an embedded aspect of 'Kiwi' culture. This attitude has been perpetuated by recurring satirical and ridiculing representations of the English upper class in media and entertainment, their mannerisms and style of speech parodied and often deemed 'posh' or 'snobbish'.

Considering this, I recognised the possibility that if Megan and Conor had adopted British accents it may have resulted in the audience experiencing an undesired or uncomfortable kind of alienation. Firstly, if they found the actors' accent attempts inaccurate or unnatural it could result in an unpleasant and unwanted level of distraction. They may be so focused on evaluating the quality of the accents that their experience of the performance text might be compromised. Secondly, because *What Remains* was going to be performed to an Aotearoa New Zealand audience, Harold and Vita's received pronunciation style of speech

might trigger in spectators' judgements and contentions about classism, privilege, and misuse of wealth. While these are valid and important objections, they may have detracted, distracted, or derailed the audience's engagement with not just the play and Harold and Vita, but my research and the questions around ethics and representation *What Remains* aimed to provoke and explore.

In *What Remains* the actors were required to shift between representing Harold and Vita and performing themselves as characters, and this brought with it a unique layer of metatheatrical intricacy. The performance involved the actors representing past versions of themselves, speaking about a play that will happen in the future, which they are currently performing in the present. The complexity of the actor-as-character convention is also subtly alluded to in Moment 13's accent discussion. I suggested to the actors that "when we're kind of us … speak – talk how we talk." In other words, when delivering their own past verbatim testimony, do so in their everyday accents. However, the fact that I say "when we're *kind of* us" instead of simply 'when we're us' is revealing. The hesitant and non-committal nature of the phrase 'kind of' indicates my awareness that, even when portraying themselves on stage, the actors will always be performing a *version* of themselves.

This links back to notions of representation that are explored throughout this thesis, specifically the conclusion that no matter how seemingly 'real,' 'truthful,' or 'authentic' a re-presentation, it will always be bound by the limits of representation. It can never be the thing itself. Even though Conor *is* Conor, he cannot transcend his temporal existence in space and time, he can only ever be the Conor of the present moment. Thus, even when performing himself, because it is a self from the past, he can only ever be *a version* of that past self, modelled from the memory of that past Conor. As I reflected in our final recorded group discussion,

> [*What Remains*] is not about being the 'right,' or the 'perfect,' or the 'truthful' representation, but just being a representation of a representation. And that was the whole point of having the Missy character and you guys [the actors] as characters. It's constantly trying to expose the fact that it is a representation of the thing.

TRANSFORMATION IN *WHAT REMAINS*

Related to notions of representation and 'versioning' is the idea of 'transformation', which can be a contested concept in documentary theatre.[4] Some practitioners suggest that transformation is an inherent part of documentary theatre actors' work and there are numerous terms used to describe the actor/documentary subject relationship that imply a degree of transformation, incarnation, manifestation, or embodiment. For example, earlier in part 3 of this thesis, I described the moment between the recording of 'real' Ron and actor-Ron at the beginning of *London Road* as a moment of 'fusion,' a word that could be perceived to have transformative connotations. Aotearoa New Zealand-based actor/researcher Cindy Diver describes actors in documentary theatre as "avatars" of their interviewees (F. Graham, 2017, p. 120) and Blythe and Cork (2011) similarly commented in the introductory note prefacing the script of *London Road* that, "the actors find they are inhabited (or possessed) by the voices they represent" (p. x).

While documentary actors may feel that they become vessels or vehicles, inhabited, possessed, or even haunted by the voices of their documentary theatre subjects and are therefore 'transformed', some documentary practitioners contrastingly discourage notions of transformation in their work. For example, Paul Brown suggests that "the best way" for actors to think about performing documentary theatre is

> to say to yourself as an actor, 'well, I'm not trying to transform into this person, I'm trying to tell the story to the audience.' As soon as you identify as a storyteller rather than as an actor transforming, it feels a lot easier.
>
> (as cited in Mumford, 2010b, p. 98)

Director Kate Gaul similarly reflects that frequently in documentary theatre "the actor [is] confronting the audience as the actor . . . The actor is always the actor and they report the words of the character. The transformation process is taken out" (as cited in Mumford, 2010b, p, 98).

[4] 'Versioning' is a term used by Australian playwright Alana Valentine to describe non-literal representations of documentary theatre characters. Reflecting on *Paramatta Girls*, Valentine (2021) comments "It's not pure verbatim. They're not literal transcripts. They're 'versioning' what the characters were" (p. 8).

In one respect, the Audio Montage and theatre maker/actor throughline in *What Remains* sought to disrupt the notion of transformation, as it identified the actors as storytellers and reporters positioned outside Harold and Vita's narrative. I did not encourage the actors to disappear or transform into any of their roles. During rehearsals, I expressed to Lily that I did not want her to try to mimic me to the minutest detail when playing Missy on stage. Rather, similarly to Megan and Conor's approach to Vita and Harold, I suggested she try and find a version of Missy that was in harmony or a middle ground somewhere between Lily and Missy. As we concluded in the following excerpt from our final recorded group discussion, the Missy character ended up being a kind of hybrid of both of us.

Lily: A challenge for me in this process was finding a way to represent you [Missy] that wasn't me, because I think initially, I was saying your lines more how I would say them. So more like going up at the end – a rising inflection at the end of a sentence. Whereas your intonation is more downward. So, then it's trying to find a balance between not being you [Missy] but having an essence of you that isn't me. And I guess that was -I know we don't have 'characters' per se in verbatim theatre, but that was how I got into the Missy character.

Missy: I think it is a character, and it has to be. I refer to myself in *What Remains* not as 'me' or 'I' but as the 'Missy character' because how I view myself in the play is inherently tied to you now Lily. Yes, the words came from me, but I don't always think about that when I read them. I think about you saying them and I think about the Missy character as being like some kind of meeting point-

Lily: A kind of hybrid.

Missy: -of me and you, and to me that's perfect. And I think it's the same for you, Megan and Conor, as well. I don't think of you as being Harold or Vita, I think of you as Megan and Conor reading it, or representing it, and I love seeing 'you' in there. . . It's about finding how that person fits in you. It's not about trying to 'become' them or be something that you're not because what makes them [Harold and Vita] live now is that they are in you. So, to deny the 'you' part of the equation is I think to do a disservice to the act of re-presentation.

Lily: And also unachievable. Like that's impossible – to be somebody else.

Yet, although the actors were not aiming for transformation in *What Remains*, it seemed that our verbatim speech had an inherent transformative power that encouraged the audience to believe in Lily as Missy. After the performance, multiple audience members remarked to me how 'spot on' Lily was as Missy. Even people who know me well, including my brother, reflected that she sounded "exactly like me", implying that Lily had successfully 'transformed' into Missy. Belfield (2018b) identifies that "like with documentary films or news items, when something is presented as truth, an audience will more often than not receive it as such" (p. 105) and while Lily did not feel like she was presenting herself as *being* Missy, many different aspects of the dramaturgy, the audio montage and preservation of verbatim speech in the theatre maker/actor throughline, actively encouraged the audience to endow Lily with the qualities of Missy. Thus, in *What Remains*, and perhaps many other works of documentary theatre, it was not the actor that transformed, but the audience and the suggestive power of the theatrical event itself that transformed the actor.

The creation and inclusion of the Audio Montage and theatre maker/actor throughline were dramaturgical decisions that sought to acknowledge and explore some of the ethical considerations that arose during the creation of *What Remains.* My 'ethical agenda' as a posthumous documentary theatre maker was centrally concerned with communicating to the audience how my subjective perspectives as a PhD researcher, theatre practitioner, and historian significantly influenced the nature of the work, its 'truth,' and the story it might tell. To communicate this, the actors and I tried to build a dramaturgy that would continuously make the audience cognisant of *What Remains* as a (re)constructed subjective reality. Correspondingly, the Audio Montage and theatre maker/actor throughline were both devised as strategies to produce a sense of metatheatricality and audience alienation that could invite the audience inside the construction of *What Remains,* giving context to the process of Harold and Vita's re-presentational resurrection, while also preventing transformation and disrupting the audience's willing suspension of disbelief.

Yet, on reflection, I realise that transformation is the very quality that *What Remains* is predicated upon. Flynn (2020) identifies that "theatre can come to constitute a ritual space"

(p. 67) in the sense that theatre, like a ritual, has the potential to construct a transitional or liminal space in which "entities are neither here nor there; they are both betwixt and between" (V. W. Turner, 1969, p. 95). Furthermore, as Ruhl (2020) remarks, "ritual conjures the invisible" (para. 6) and "theatre, like ritual, creates a space for transformation" (Flynn, 2020, p. 68). In posthumous documentary theatre practices such as *What Remains* that physically represent the deceased documentary subjects on stage, the dead are inherently transformed as they shift from being invisible, from existing only in the past tense and 'alive' only within the boundaries of memory, into something that can be of the present. And there is something inherently ritualistic about that transformation. Evocative of the perceivable energy that might be felt during a moment of silence, there is a similar sense of phenomenon produced by a theatre audience collectively thinking of something in its absence, and it is this that can make the invisible visible, endow the living actors with the spirit of the dead, and grant transformation.

Favorini (2008) comments that "documentaries tend to make history an object rather than a subject" (p. 76), and this is true in the sense that Harold and Vita's letters, as historical artefacts, are objects or things receiving an action as opposed to people or things doing an action. Yet in the process of crafting *What Remains*, I also found the opposite to be true. As I alluded to earlier in this discussion, multiple documentary theatre actors have reflected that they have felt 'possessed' by the voice of their documentary subjects and that the faithful recreation of documentary material can be "quite transformative" (Blythe as cited in Megson, 2018, p.224). In other words, the actors become subject to the 'power' of the object(s) they represent. Adams (2023) states that "people whose voices have outlived their bodies through the words they wrote by hand on paper. That's a magic only letters and a few other types of private writing can achieve" (p. 160). There is a magic to Harold and Vita's letters. Their words vividly preserve the vitality of their lives that were, and when said out loud, embodied, and given life on stage by the actors, these historical objects are transformed into something more. While the deceased Vita and Harold cannot technically be subjects in the sense that they cannot 'do' anything, their representation on stage makes it feel as if they can, if only for the duration of the performance.

At the outset of this research, I likely would have argued that posthumous documentary theatre was not a site of transformation. Yet, after undertaking *What Remains* I have come to recognise that representation and transformation are far from exclusive, and that to deny the potential for transformation out of a perceived sense of ethical consideration to documentary subjects would be to deny "theatrical magic – how one thing stands in for another, how transformations occur" (Love, 2017, p. 35). It would be to deny the very thing that arguably makes theatre, theatre. Furthermore, it would be to deny the unique commemorative function of posthumous documentary theatre as a vehicle that allows us to make the past present, remember our dead, and make them live once more.

THE MISSY LETTERS

In my introduction to the live performance of *What Remains* (see Appendix H), I stated that "*What Remains* is many different things: a research activity, a documentary play, a love story, a work of art, even a bit of a history lesson" and I think 'biographical narrative' could also be added to that list. However, while I have drawn from theories and practices of biography and life writing in my conceptualisation and exploration of posthumous documentary theatre and *What Remains* does present a rudimentary account of Harold and Vita's lives, the play is perhaps more accurately characterised as meta-biography. A distinct kind of biographical narrative, Ursula Canton (2011) defines meta-biography as "narratives that interrogate the process of representing past lives through the presence of biographer figures or structural devices that direct the audience's attention to the way in which the past is evoked" (p. 10). In the previous discussion, I began to reflect on the Missy character as a biographer figure and how the inclusion of myself and the actors as characters in the play sought to try and direct the audience's attention to my exploration or 'interrogation' of how the past might be evoked and represented in posthumous documentary theatre. I now build on that discussion by reflecting on the 'Missy Letters' as a dramaturgical mechanism through which this sense of meta-biography is arguably most evident in *What Remains.*

Included in *What Remains* are three of what the actors and I referred to as 'Missy Letters'. I wrote these eponymously titled letters to Harold and Vita (or my imagined, reconstructed perceptions of them) before I had begun constructing *What Remains*. Similar to Harold and Vita's correspondence, I did not write these letters with the intent that they would be made public and available to others or be included in *What Remains*. Rather, after spending many hours immersed in Vita and Harold's personal writings, I felt compelled to write them each a letter. It is not a real correspondence, in the sense that I cannot actually send these letters to Harold and Vita or communicate with them in any way. I now recognise that the symbolic adoption of their primary method of communication (letter writing) was a way for me to empathise, identify with, and forge what felt like a more intimate feeling of connection with them, albeit wholly one-sided. My research and *What Remains* are focused on exploring how Harold and Vita can be re-presented in the present, in *my* world, and writing these letters felt like a way to take a small figurative step back into theirs.

When I began working on the very first draft of the play's script, one of the first Moments I created was developed from a biography or writing node, the construction of which I detail in the Building Nodal Scenes section in Part 2 of thesis. During the process of constructing this Moment, I realised that I am one of Harold and Vita's predicted "future biographer[s]" (Nicolson as cited in Glendinning, 1983, p. 159) and that to include my Missy Letters in the play would explicitly acknowledge my status as such, and this motivated me to experiment with incorporating them into *What Remains*. Initially, there were only two Missy Letters, one that I had written to Vita and one to Harold. The early drafts of the script incorporated Vita's at the beginning of the play (directly after the Audio Montage) and Harold's around the halfway point (Moment 11). However, it became apparent during the rehearsal process that *What Remains*' dramaturgical structure might 'work better' with a third Missy Letter to bookend and conclude the play (see Appendix A).

Although *What Remains* was performed straight through with no intermission or official act break, it can be broken down into a three-act structure. Act One (the set-up) introduces Harold and Vita, Act Two (the confrontation) adds Violet as a conflict-inducing disruptive force, and Act Three (the resolution) solidifies Harold and Vita's relationship as a surviving and long-lasting love. The play is also performed by three actors and composed of three throughlines: the Vita and Harold throughline, the Vita and Violet throughline, and the theatre maker/actor throughline. Belfield (2018b) reflects that "the rule of three: [is] a golden rule for writers; examples, adjectives, reasons and so on seem to work best in sets of three" (p. 136) and there was an appealing sense of symmetry that could potentially be created by having three Missy Letters to corresponded to each of the play's three throughlines and acts. *What Remains* also essentially follows the story of a marriage, a concept that could be understood to inherently incorporate three components; two individuals that form a unified entity. Incorporating three letters, two acknowledging Vita and Harold as individuals followed by one that references their marital union, was also a way to symbolise this.

In Moment 13 of the play, during a conversation with the actors, I state that "it's almost like this whole thing [*What Remains*] is happening inside my head." Obviously, the performance

did not literally happen or exist only inside my head but was co-constructed by the actors and audience in their shared theatrical encounter. As Erika Fisher-Lichte (2008) comments, "the bodily co-presence of actors and spectators enables and constitutes performance" (p. 32). Harold and Vita were arguably 'made live' in the minds of all those who experienced the play and thus transcended the boundaries of only Missy's mind. However, I was the catalyst for *What Remains*' construction and responsible for setting and shaping the nature of Harold and Vita's onstage posthumous return. Consequently, the versions of Harold and Vita (as represented and embodied by the actors) that the audience encounters and bases their own mental reconstructions on have been filtered and refracted through the prism of Missy's mind. Harold and Vita have already been subjected to a representational process and bookending *What Remains* with Missy Letters sought to be another way to recognise and acknowledge this. It aimed to dramaturgically frame the entire theatrical event, the performance text, the narrative story, and Harold and Vita's symbolic resurrection, within the subjective context of Missy's mind.

While I was able to recognise the 'dramaturgical need' for a third Missy Letter, I was initially apprehensive and reluctant to include it. My stated desire when embarking on this research was for *What Remains* to be constructed entirely from existing/found documentary material and I felt that writing a new third letter would be an act of fabrication disingenuous and contradictory to my preferred 'documentary' intent for the work. Therefore, instead of writing a new Missy Letter, I experimented with chopping up the two existing letters and taking fragments from each to create the third. While a substantial act of editing, the creation of the third Missy Letter was not entirely unlike my treatment of Harold and Vita's historical documentary material during the scripting process. That is, while I did not amalgamate excerpts of Harold and Vita's letters to form new, seemingly organic wholes, the deconstruction, reconstruction, and recontextualization of their letters and diaries was a significant part of their re-presentation in *What Remains*. In a way, this created another kind of uniting symmetry and connection between myself and Harold and Vita, insofar as I applied the same dramaturgical treatment and editorial attitude to my own documentary material as theirs. Missy too became a documentary subject, and my documentary material was accordingly not exempt from the perceived demands of the creative dramaturgical process.

RECORDED GROUP DISCUSSIONS VS THE MISSY LETTERS

While comparable to the excerpts of recorded group discussions included in *What Remains*, the Missy Letters sought to encourage the audience to empathise and identify with Missy in a slightly different way. The fragments of recorded group discussions invite the audience into our theatre making process, giving them backstage access to my and the actors' ethical and dramaturgical decision-making and rationale. This aimed to foster a sense of proximity and an insider-positionality where the inherent and unavoidable subjectivity of the representational process of documentary theatre could be highlighted. While I could not dictate or control exactly how these re-presented recorded group discussions would be received by the audience or the meaning(s) they might make from them, they did distinctly foreground my role as a theatre maker.

I was aware that the portrait of Missy that might be constructed by the audience from my recorded discussions with the actors would likely be that of a researcher, someone knowledgeable of documentary theatre and Vita and Harold's lives and documentary material. In the Moments that re-present our recorded group discussions, the audience observes the actors refer to the Missy character as a well-informed and authoritative figure. Furthermore, Missy would sometimes even interrupt Harold and Vita mid-speech to clarify or elaborate on something for the actors/audience. For example, in the following exchange from Moment 14 of *What Remains*:

> HAROLD: These may be the last words I ever type on my beloved tikki-
>
> MISSY: His typewriter.
>
> Fun fact, Harold typed all of his letters on a typewriter and Vita wrote all of hers.
>
> CONOR: Interesting
>
> MISSY: Yeah and he typed his diary as well. So, he would do his diary every day after breakfast. He'd type out like one or two pages and then chuck them in like this filing cabinet thing forever. (see Appendix A)

This Missy interruption aimed to operate on multiple dramaturgical levels. First, by encouraging a sense of alienation in the audience. Missy's clarifying commentary stalls the momentum of this Moment and the audience's suspension of disbelief is potentially disrupted as they are pulled out of Harold and Vita's unfolding narrative and transported back to the rehearsal room. Missy's dialogue, transcribed verbatim from a recorded group discussion, is colloquial and conversational, indicative of Missy and the actors' friendship and this once more sought to present the audience with an opportunity to identify with the actors. The casual tone of Missy's "fun fact" aimed to make Missy relatable and 'accessible' so that a sense of our rehearsal room camaraderie might be extended to and experienced by the audience.

In conjunction with fostering and maintaining the audience/theatre maker/actor dynamic initiated by the theatre maker/actor throughline, this Missy interruption was also designed as an informative metatheatrical technique. This exchange gives insight into Harold's ritualistic daily writing habits, enabling "the audience to better imagine the world in which the narrative unfolds" (Maloney, 2013, p. 168) but it does so with a poignant sense of metatheatrical irony. Missy interrupts Harold and Vita's historical world by directing the audience's attention back to the source material's origins, highlighting its re-presentation on stage and acknowledging that Harold's diaries and letters did not remain tucked away in a filing cabinet forever, as it is their very re-presentation that Missy has interrupted.

The Missy character was a vessel or channel through which the audience began to access and navigate Harold and Vita's material and served as their 'way in' not only to Harold and Vita's story but this PhD research as well. Yet, despite my efforts to embed an awareness of my own subjectivity within *What Remains'* dramaturgy, my captaining role in this research and the representation of Missy as a knowledgeable and authoritative researcher in the play potentially endowed the Missy character with an exaggerated sense of validity and objectivity. Throughout *What Remains*, the audience witnesses the actors trust and agree with Missy's judgement and decisions. Additionally, the audience has been encouraged to identify with the actors, and even perceive them as representative of themselves. As actor Megan Goldsman comments, "It's like the 'us' [actor] characters have become the audience representation." Consequently, the audience may regard Missy's version of Harold, Vita,

and their story as *the* story, as 'right', 'true,' or 'correct' simply because it is presented as being received as such by the actors. Part of the reason for including the Missy Letters in *What Remains* was to try and counteract this.

In contrast to the excerpts of recorded group discussions included in the play, the Missy Letters are less focused on my theatre maker process and Missy-as-researcher persona. Instead, they more explicitly detail and express my personal relationship with Harold and Vita, my emotional response to their letters, and my investment in their story. In the first Missy Letter (see Appendix A, Moment 1) I state: "I feel like I understand your letters…or perhaps reading your letters makes me feel understood?" I comparably reflect in the final Missy Letter (see Appendix A, Moment 21) that "I have a tendency towards melancholy and desperately want to believe in love." Both these comments highlight or expose *What Remains* as an intrinsically personal endeavour. The Missy Letters reveal information about me as an everyday person and consequently have a kind of honest, confessional, emotive personal quality that may not necessarily be initially associated with my academic researcher identity.

The confessional tone of the Missy Letters might draw the audience deeper into Missy's subjective mind and figurative personal relationship with Harold and Vita. Yet, inherent in the process of exploring, reflecting, and expressing my felt affinity with Harold and Vita is the acknowledgment of the essential distance between us and the essential distance between the living and the dead. This simultaneous sense of closeness and distance is perhaps most obviously encapsulated in the final line of the play which appears in the last Missy Letter:

> I like to think that you [Harold & Vita] would marvel at the fact that in a small country floating in the middle of the Pacific Ocean, miles away from the geography of your life and decades after your death, that people are thinking of you.

When re-presented in the performance of *What Remains,* this sentence acknowledged the audience as active participants in the construction of the performance text. For it is the audience, prompted by the play, that enables Harold and Vita to be imagined, conjured, reconstructed, and remembered simultaneously in numerous slightly different ways.

Furthermore, by exposing my personal relationship to Harold and Vita's material via the Missy Letters the audience may have felt motivated to scrutinize not only my relationship with Harold and Vita's documentary material but the practice of posthumous documentary theatre itself as a vehicle through which we might think of the dead. This once more brings to the fore the inherent commemorative facet and potential memorialising function of posthumous documentary theatre; how it can serve as a medium through which the dead can be made live again and again and again in numerous different ways. And while this may not be conventionally understood as immortality, perhaps it is something more.

Psychiatrist R. D. Laing (1967) comments:

> We wish to die leaving out imprints burned into the hearts of others. What would life be if there were no one left to remember us, to think of us when we are absent, to keep us alive when we are dead? And when we are dead, suddenly or gradually, our presence, scattered in ten or ten thousand hearts, will fade and disappear. How many candles in how many hearts? Of such stuff is our hope and despair….
> (as cited in Shneidman, 1995, p. 459).

When represented in posthumous documentary theatre, the dead are given the opportunity to continue to impact numerous lives. The memory of them can burn on in the minds and hearts of many, seemingly unbounded by time and space. In their non-existence, they can be infinite.

DIRECT ADDRESS

It was not only the content of the Missy Letters that potentially cultivated a sense of confession and honesty, but the way in which they were presented to the audience. The Missy Letters were delivered by Lily (as Missy) in what some might deem direct address. A dramaturgical convention that "has existed in drama for millennia" (Maloney, 2013, p. 164), direct address is used in multiple mediums including theatre, film, and television. Yet, it "has become something of a distinguishing element of verbatim theatre" (Stuart-Fisher, 2020, p. 85). Paul Brown (2010) similarly reflects that "just about every verbatim play uses direct address to the audience as the principal mode of delivery" (p. 82). A deliberately anti-illusory tactic, direct address "occurs when individuals speak directly to the camera or audience" (Nichols, 2017, p. 6), generally with the aim to break the 'fourth wall' and create a sense of connectedness between actor and spectator. In the process of speaking directly to the audience, the actor simultaneously takes a metaphorical step back from the world of the play and a step forward (sometimes literally) into the real world of the audience where the performance is taking place. Direct address "is often a gesture of open and honest expression" (T. Brown, 2012, p. 15) intended to "cross the boundary between the real and fictional world(s)" (Gibbons & Whiteley, 2021, p. 107) and unite actors and audience inside the theatrical event and their shared spatial-temporal existence.

One of the potential boundary crossing effects of direct address can be that it demands active spectatorship, "not in the sense that spectators might leap out of their seats and become politically active, but in the sense that they can become intrigued, engaged and involved in a process of consideration" (Grehan, 2009, p. 5) of not just the play's plot or story, but the nature of theatrical event itself. Summerskill (2020) reflects that in documentary theatre that is primarily constructed from recorded interviews, "one outcome of the device of direct address is that the audience is invited to share the role of the interviewer" (p. 133). This can garner a kind of active audience engagement that may differ from more passive styles of spectatorship associated with other kinds of theatre. The audience may feel more directly implicated or invested in the narrative if they feel they are being spoken to directly. As Soans (2008) reflects, the audience "become a key, if silent, character in the performance" (p. 21). Consideration of the prevalence of direct address in

documentary theatre and my exploration of some of the potential dramaturgical effects of its use in *What Remains* led me to reconsider my understanding and conceptualisation of the technique.

Soans (2008) reflects that in documentary theatre "ten per cent of the time you interact with your fellow actors on stage, but ninety per cent of the time your attention is directed towards the audience" (p. 21). However, I suggest that just because an actor's attention may appear to be directed towards the audience it does not necessarily always follow that they are directly addressing them. For example, some may deem Conor and Megan's delivery of Harold and Vita's letters to be direct address as in the performance they did not face each other but generally directed their dialogue outwards towards the audience. However, when discussing the nature of direct address in *What Remains* during one of our recorded group discussions, Megan and Conor had the following responses.

> Megan: It [Megan's performance] is directed to the letter's recipient, whatever that might mean. And even when I'm playing it out to the audience, it's not playing it out to the audience *as the audience*, it's the audience as receiver of letter, and that can vary, how intimate that is.
>
> Conor: I don't consider what Megan and I are doing direct address. [...] Yes, I might make eye contact [with the audience] and if I make eye contact you are now Vita, but it's not to the audience *as the audience*. But when Lily as Missy explains things it's absolutely direct address. The difference is, is the audience a character in my story? I think with Megan and I, I don't think, at least in my opinion, my performance would change at all if there was no audience and that's the difference there. I'm not being inspired by the audience or won't react to them because I'm talking to Vita.

These responses suggest, at least for Megan and Conor, that a core component of what makes direct address, direct address is breaking the fourth wall by acknowledging the audience as an audience. Considering this, when direct address is used to 'cast' the audience as someone else, be it the interviewer/theatre maker, or in the case of *What Remains* Harold or Vita, it creates a different kind of connection between the actors and the audience. When delivering Harold and Vita's letters in *What Remains* the audience (as the

audience) are not characters in the story, rather, they are projected onto, reimagined, and transformed into pre-existing characters from Harold and Vita's story. They become surrogates for the original recipients of the letters.

In contrast, as Conor identifies above, a more clear-cut example of direct address in *What Remains* occurs when the Missy character explains things to the audience. For example, in Moment 3 (see Appendix A) when Lily delivered the following Missy line:

> I do actually have like all the dates and stuff but I didn't go super hundy on the referencing because you don't really care. But if you want the references, I can give them to you. [5]

The inclusion of this comment aimed to highlight the play's academic foundations while also acknowledging the audience as themselves; not a strictly academic audience but a gathering of everyday individuals, family members, and friends who did not necessarily desire or require precisely formatted references. This Missy line was followed by Conor and Megan delivering, also in direct address, alternating citations for the primary sources used. Missy then comments in response to Megan's citation of Vita Sackville-West's *Knole and the Sackville's* (1922): "Actually- it's in the public domain if anyone wants to read it." In contrast to how Megan and Conor describe their experience(s) performing Vita and Harold, here, the audience was not transformed into surrogates for the original recipients of the dialogue. Rather, the audience *as the audience* becomes the intended recipient. The spectators do not sit in the theatre voyeuristically observing a distant world, nor are they 'cast' as someone else and made representative of absent entities. Their presence is acknowledged, and they are directly told things, they are even explicitly posed questions.

Conor and Megan's recitation of the list of primary sources from which *What Remains* is constructed ends with:

> MISSY: And recorded group discussions and rehearsals with Missy Mooney-
> CONOR & MEGAN: and her actors.
> MISSY: Recorded and transcribed in 2022.

[5] Here the term 'hundy' can be understood as slang/an abbreviation of 'one hundred per cent.' In this instance, I am referring to how I didn't 'give 100%' or 'go all out' on making sure my referencing was precisely formatted.

Oh yeah, so anything you want in the play, -

ALL: Say it now.

MISSY: It's also a way to acknowledge my, our, positionality, right? […]

In this moment of metatheatricality, the audience was not just directly addressed but was presented with a symbolic opportunity to respond. Although, in the performance, the suggestion: "anything you want in the play, say it now" was received rhetorically (no one called out responses) it did implicate the audience as active participants in the performance text. This moment enabled the actors to not only show an awareness of the audience's presence but also make the audience more aware of their own presence and role within the theatre experience, resulting in a unique moment of mutuality and a loop of reciprocal acknowledgement between the actors and the audience. This then facilitated the succeeding statement: "It's also a way to acknowledge our positionality", to refer to both the positionality of Missy and the actors to Harold and Vita's documentary material and the positionality of the audience to the representation and performance of that material. It was this kind of direct acknowledgement of the audience *as an audience* that marked this Moment as one of direct address in *What Remains* and distinguished it from moments of non-direct address where the actor happened to be facing outwards, such as the delivery of the Missy Letters.

Maloney (2013) suggests that "direct address can be considered as language, thought and even image" (p. 165). Lily's delivery of the Missy Letters to the audience created a striking metatheatrical image (see Figure 13) as it mirrored my real-life-Missy welcoming address to the audience before the commencement of *What Remains* (see figures 14 & 15). When welcoming the audience, I stood in the same spot on stage and in the same light as Lily-as-Missy does in the play. Furthermore, my choice to 'read' my introduction to *What Remains* from a piece of paper was deliberately conceived to function as an authenticating sign that would foreshadow and mirror Lily's delivery of the Missy Letters. As a kind of dramaturgical allusion to the written origins of the letters and that their content did not come from the recorded group discussions, when re-presenting the Missy Letters Lily appeared to read them aloud from pieces of paper. This use of paper also sought to differentiate the Missy Letters from other Missy moments in the play. Similar to Conor and Megan's delivery of Harold and Vita's letters, the audience was not the originally intended recipient of the Missy

Letters and their presence as physical objects on stage aimed to symbolise and evoke a sense of these absent others. Jolly (2008) suggests that “letters possess a physical authority rooted in closeness to the writer’s body” (p. 207). This authority is perhaps felt even more so in posthumous documentary theatre, as the letters become “abstractions haunted by the concrete value of the body’s presence” (p. 208) that once was.

Figure 13: Lily delivers the final Missy Letter.

Figure 14: Missy Delivering her introduction to What Remains.

Figure 15: Lily delivering a Missy Letter.

Unlike my introduction to *What Remains* during which I directly acknowledge and address the audience, the delivery of the Missy Letters is arguably not direct address at all, or at least a different kind of direct address to other Missy moments. While Lily's attention is directed towards the audience, she is not actually talking *to them*. Lily elaborates on this in the following extract from a recorded group discussion.

Missy: Do you feel that you're speaking to the audience or do you imagine that you're kind of speaking to the original recipient of the letter? So, if you're directly delivering a letter to the audience do you think that you're connecting with them or do you think that you're talking to Vita or Harold or some kind of removed other?

Lily: I was thinking about when I've got the Missy letters to Vita and Harold. . .Yeah, I guess I am talking to Vita and Harold, but I don't picture her in front of me standing there. I'm reading a letter to the audience that I wrote to Vita and she comes up in my mind.

While Lily did not necessarily picture Vita physically standing there in front of her, Lily's attention was also not fully focused on the audience but was still directed towards an

imagined Vita or Harold that 'came up' in her mind. Consequently, the audience experiences the Missy Letters from a more voyeuristic position compared to other parts of the play. Their presence is not acknowledged, and they are not being spoken to but are bearing witness to a private communication between Missy and her deceased documentary subjects that happens to be being re-presented in public.

Ultimately, as with many dramaturgical decisions, the theatre maker's intent, and the actors' choices in performance account for just a fraction of what an audience might make of or receive from a theatre experience. The audience is the final author of the performance text. Therefore, whether the actors perceive the audience as characters in their story or consider "the role of the audience in the world of this play" (Contini, 2007, p. 116) will not ensure that the audience will receive it as such. Perhaps defining direct address is merely a matter of whether the audience feels they are being directly addressed or not. As Conor commented in our recorded group discussion,

> we've kind of gotten to this place where for it to be direct address it needs to be like there are these barriers that have been broken down, to make that 'honest' connection. And I don't think it's quite that complicated. I think it's more 'do you see the wall?' [the fourth wall]. And if you don't see the wall then it's direct address.

The Missy character and her connection with the audience via the theatre maker/actor throughline and the Missy Letters are central to this research's exploration of the ethical and dramaturgical construction of posthumous documentary theatre. Stevens (2016) comments that direct address is a "metatheatrical technique that acknowledges and exposes the manipulative and persuasive devices of the monologue form on the audience" (p. 60). It can highlight the tension between the represented and the representation, between the performer and the performance. Yet, I would urge others working in documentary theatre to consider that in trying to expose theatre's "persuasive devices" direct address can turn into a potentially manipulative dramaturgical convention itself. The seemingly innate "confessional quality" (Woods, 2019, p. 209) of direct address may endow subjective meta-biographical figures such as the Missy character in *What Remains* with a sense of validity simply because they break down the wall.

LETTING GO: THE FINAL STAGES OF POSTHUMOUS DOCUMENTARY THEATRE

> *The final stage of writing a biography is separation and letting go, and the recognition that the version that has been constructed is bound to be partial and temporary. At the end of all the labour of reconstruction and representation, the biographer is left looking at the receding view of the person they have been obsessed with, moving away from them into the silence of the past.* (Lee, 2009, p. 140)

Many aspects of Lee's comment; the notions of reconstruction, representation, partiality, and temporality, resonate with my experience of creating *What Remains*. Moreover, the final three Moments of the play (see Appendix A, Moments 19-21) essentially stage my separation from and 'letting go' of Harold and Vita. Yet, we are not left looking only to the past and the end of the play is not the end of this research. The following concluding section of this thesis is an estuary where discussion of the final moments of *What Remains* and reflections on the research process so far flow into a confluence, and while the actors have left the stage and the lights have gone dark, Harold and Vita are not forced to retreat back into the silence of the past. Instead, they are projected into the future as together we turn forward to face not only what remains after *What Remains,* but what comes next in this research process, for both Harold and Vita's legacy, and for posthumous documentary theatre.

Moment 19 marks the beginning of the end of the play. The stage directions instruct that "an audio recording of Vita Sackville-West's voice introducing her long narrative poem, *The Land,* plays. When it finishes, the actors move centre stage and recite the following excerpts from *The Land*." [6] The dramaturgy of this Moment can be broken down into three distinct phases. First, the playing of the recording of Vita's voice. Second, the actors' vacation of Vita's armchair and Harold's bureau with typewriter atop, and third, their recitation of passages from *The Land.* The following discussion reflects on each of these dramaturgical

[6] *The Land* is a long narrative poem first published in 1926. One of Vita's most popular and celebrated literary works, it was awarded the Hawthornden Prize for literature in 1926.

phases and how they cumulatively sought to cultivate a metatheatrical, transitional, and transformative environment from which Missy, the actors, and by proxy the audience, could begin the process of letting go of Harold and Vita.

THE VOICE OF THE DEAD: VITA'S AUDIO IN *WHAT REMAINS*

As discussed in the Audio Montage section of this thesis, some documentary plays such as *London Road* and *The Girlfriend Experience* begin with recordings of the real voices of their documentary subjects. As this real-life audio plays, the actors on stage gradually begin to speak along in time with the recording, their voice(s) eventually taking over completely as the recording fades out. This synthesis of the actor's voice with the recording of their real-life counterpart effectively stages the moment they step into character, encouraging the audience to view the actor as representative of the absent documentary subject. Yet, it also potentially produces a sense of alienation, as the theatre maker is essentially inviting the audience to judge the fidelity of the representation by exposing the mechanics of the theatrical event and highlighting the reality it purports to represent. While Megan and Conor adopted a more presentational acting approach to representing Vita and Harold in *What Remains* and were not strictly 'in character', playing the recording of Vita's real voice at the end of the play aimed to produce a similar sense of alienation, but in reverse. It sought to mark the beginning of the actors' separation from and letting go of their constructed representations of Harold and Vita.

Additionally, the audio of Vita's introduction to *The Land* is the last piece of historical documentary material included in the play. No more excerpts from Harold or Vita's letters and diaries are spoken by the actors after this point. This aimed to suggest a kind of symbolic relinquishing, and that part of the actors' process of letting go was giving Harold and Vita's words back to them. Although not a physical artefact like Harold and Vita's letters and diaries, the recording of Vita's voice is still a kind of auditory sensory object that when (re)played literally gives Vita's voice back to her, allowing her to speak from the past her final words in the present. Vita's voice, as captured and preserved on the recording, is distinct from any of the voices the audience had heard in the play thus far, perhaps even jarringly so. The audience may not have even initially recognised the voice as Vita's.

However, if they did, the polarity between Megan's vocal delivery of Vita's documentary material and Vita's real voice, was plainly apparent. Consequently, Megan's vocal performance is once more[7] exposed as a historically inaccurate representation of how Vita spoke. By reiterating that Megan's representation of Vita was not a carbon copy of reality but a mediated version, I again sought to remind the audience of *What Remains'* essential subjectivity and acknowledge the disparity between reality and history and its creative and dramatic representation.

Although both Vita's audio and Harold and Vita's letters are historic documentary artefacts, to me the recording of Vita's voice felt more 'of the past' than the letters spoken by the actors. This is perhaps because an inherent component of a recording, as both a process and a product, is the capturing and preservation of a 'live' past moment. The audio of Vita's voice used in the play was extracted from a YouTube upload of the 1931 recording by Columbia Records for the International Education Society (York, 2007). While the context of its re-presentation in *What Remains* differs greatly from the circumstances of its original recording, the words, and the voice itself; the rhythm and cadence of Vita's speech (barring some potential degradation of audio quality over time), remain the same, unchanged from their original utterance almost 100 years ago.

Letters also capture time and evoke a past reality but in a more mediated and less immediate sense. Despite the actors' diligent efforts to accurately represent the content of Harold and Vita's written historical documentary material verbatim, in the process of being relocated from page to stage, the letters have necessarily been mediated through the actors' bodies. Their auditory quality as spoken words and as an audible play script is intrinsically dependent on the actors' deliveries, which are similarly tied to the ever-changing nuances of the present moment in which the performance is taking place. Because Vita's introduction to *The Land* did not come from the actors, the audio recording had an almost non-diegetic effect. A prominent sensation of simultaneous presence and absence was produced, where Vita (or some aspect or essence of her) felt both immediate and

[7] See discussion about the actors' use of accents [or lack thereof] in *What Remains* in the earlier 'Theatre Maker & Actors as Characters' section of this thesis.

remote. Like a voice from beyond the grave, the transcendental or external quality of Vita's recorded voice could be considered to mirror Vita's real life (or 'real death') corporeal absence in *What Remains.* That is, due to her deceased status and the inherent limitations of representation, Vita, and indeed any dead person depicted on stage, remain fundamentally separate and distanced, unable to exist in the reconstructed world of the play in anything other than a symbolic or representative sense.

Kaufman (1998) reflects in reference to *Gross Indecency,* that the play

> did not imitate reality but, rather, created a separate reality on the stage - a reality that followed only its own internal logic. The performance style, the body language of the actors, their vocal techniques, the treatment of the theatrical space, each of these elements had been developed and combined to create a new world on the stage - a new world that could exist *only* on a stage. (pp. ix-x)

The playing of Vita's audio was the first step in *What Remains*' closing acknowledgment that its exploration and representation of historical documentary material on stage did not imitate reality. Similar to *Gross Indecency, What Remains* can be understood as a construction of a new world; an impossible world where the long dead can be here and now, a world "that could exist *only* on a stage" (p. x). The other two phases of Moments 19 that immediately follow Vita's introduction to *The Land* sought to collaboratively deconstruct and bid farewell to that world.

PHYSICAL DRAMATURGY AND *THE LAND*

After the recording of Vita's introduction to *The Land* finished playing, one by one the actors rose from their respective character zones, Lily from the upstage Missy platform, Conor from Harold's desk stage left, and Megan from Vita's armchair and paper-strewn coffee table stage right. They then one by one moved centre stage to deliver their excerpt from *The Land*. The actors' withdrawal from the established character zones of the performance space literally and figuratively represented Harold and Vita as receding figures. Their physical relocation on stage suggested a stepping out of the historical world of the play, causing Harold and Vita's constructed sense of corporal existence, as embodied by Conor and Megan, to begin to ebb away. A similar kind of physical stepping away is alluded to in

the script for the posthumous documentary theatre play *My Name Is Rachel Corrie.* As the play draws to a close, stage directions instruct: "*a door opens*. . . . *She leaves"* (Rickman & Viner, 2005, p. 50). The actor playing the deceased Rachel Corrie leaves the stage, perhaps suggesting that they are "gone from the stage, just as Rachel is gone from this world." (Mooney, 2023, p. 169).

In *What Remains* none of the actors actually left the performance space. Yet, up until this point in the play, aspects of the dramaturgy such as where the actors had been physically positioned on the stage when delivering certain lines, paired with the nature of the words themselves, had been largely consistent. While Harold and Vita's century-old epistolatory vernacular is easily discernible from Missy and the actors' twenty-first-century chatter, the establishment of distinct Harold and Vita performance zones aimed to help the audience quickly identify which character Conor and Megan were representing at any given moment. However, when delivering their excerpts from *The Land,* this may not have been as definitively clear. The language in *The Land* is more aligned with Harold and Vita's historical documentary material. However, its poetical and stanzaic style distinguishes it from both Harold and Vita's letters and Missy and the actors' contemporary dialogue previously heard in the play. Furthermore, the actors' position on the stage during their delivery of *The Land* was neither the previously established Harold/Vita performance zones nor the stage area associated with Missy and the actors' re-presented group discussions.

Together these two factors, *The Land*'s poetic form and the nature of its physical delivery in space, made it potentially ambiguous for the audience as to who was voicing the poem. Whether it was the actors as themselves paying homage to Harold and Vita, or the actors as Harold and Vita performing some kind of self-eulogy and these are just two of the possible different 'readings' of this moment. I consider the actors' delivery of *The Land* as creating and taking place in a kind of transitional conduit, where Megan and Conor might be simultaneously perceived and 'read' by the audience as both themselves and as Harold and Vita. Barthes (1984) asserts that "the text is not a coexistence of meanings but a passage, a traversal" (p. 171) and *What Remains*, from its construction and development in rehearsals to its ultimate performance, was similarly a process of constant traversal. The performance text while blocked into Moments and structured by the three core throughlines is more than

a coexistence of meanings. It flows. The actors are a passage through which the audience can traverse the confluence of tides past and present until the barrier of space and time becomes a mere condition of thought. The potential ambiguity around who exactly is delivering *The Land* reflects this intertextual, intergenerational, international, and most importantly, interconnected passage that the actors enable *What Remains* to be.

The process of representing *The Land* additionally sought to double as a process of letting go and provide a passage (in multiple senses of the word) for transformation, through which Missy and the actors could say goodbye to Harold and Vita both symbolically and physically. The audience witnessed Megan and Conor's transition and 'passage' from character to actor as they 'let go' and physically separated themselves from Harold and Vita via a eulogistic and poetic tribute. This simple act of physical dramaturgy also marked the beginning of the 'death' or end of the performance and the theatrical world constructed by *What Remains.* Reflecting on the potentially transformative power of the actors' withdrawal from the performance space has once more raised questions about the nature of transformation in *What Remains* and posthumous documentary theatre in general. When the actors retire upstage or leave the performance space is the transformation rendered undone? Now that the actors no longer actively endowed the stage, set, and props with story, does their symbolic and representative power begin to fade? Does Vita's chair stop being Vita's chair? Do the letters that litter the stage floor transform back into the pages torn from a free second-hand book fair novel?

Considering the sense of intimacy that can come from reading historical private correspondence, interpersonal communication scholar Jennifer L. Adams (2023) reflects that "their words were never intended for me or you, but now they can only have meaning for us" (p. 11). The very construction and performance of posthumous documentary theatre around the world suggests that theatre makers and audiences alike continue to find 'meaning' from the words the dead leave behind. But how long does this 'meaning for us' last beyond the temporal parameters of the performance? While the physical dramaturgy of *What Remains'* ending Moments strove to symbolically allude to Harold and Vita's physical deaths and begin the deconstruction of theatrical event, it aimed to do so in a way that also

highlighted the lasting impact of the dead and offer an opportunity for the audience to continue to think of them.

THE LAND: A EULOGY

Reflecting on Vita's funeral, her son comments in a diary entry, "I had the idea of printing a passage from 'The Land' on the back of the service-sheet" (Nicolson & Nicolson, 1968, p. 415). Learning of this detail inspired the inclusion of excerpts from *The Land* at the end of *What Remains,* and the actors' delivery of these excerpts aimed to be evocative of a eulogy. Acting as figurative resurrectionists, posthumous documentary theatre makers produce representations that can influence how their deceased subjects continue to be thought of and memorialised. Yet, the representation and nature of memorialisation is always an "encounter shaped through the successor's gaze" (Jestrovic, 2020, p. 113). *The Land* passages included in *What Remains* differ from those used in Vita's real-life funeral service sheet because this Moment sought not to recreate, reconstruct, or even represent Vita's actual funeral. Rather it was designed to serve as a more personal tribute, an encounter shaped through Missy's specific successor gaze. Similarly to how one might personally choose a poem or passage to read at a loved one's funeral because it reminds you of them, I selected the three passages from *The Land* because I felt they better encapsulated my feelings towards Harold and Vita.

I felt that my chosen passages from *The Land* would help to construct a sense of closure and catharsis for both the actors and the audience. Many Posthumous documentary plays including *Gross Indecency, My Name Is Rachel Corrie,* and *What Remains* end in death. Yet, these plays do not leave the audience in a despondent or melancholic state. Rather, these plays "manage to explore the fear, struggle, grief and inevitability of death without nihilism, but with a sense of acceptance and hope" (Mooney, 2023, p. 171). The last stanza of *The Land* included in *What Remains* is:

> And all the harmonies were joined and whole,
> Silence was music, music silence made,
> Till each was both or either, and the soul
> Was not afraid. (Sackville-West, 1926/1955, p. 57)

I chose this verse to end my eulogy and to bid farewell to Harold and Vita in *What Remains* because it encapsulates a wish. Vita's words eloquently articulate my hope that in death Harold and Vita are once more "joined and whole", reunited "till each was both or either". But most importantly, this passage captures the hope that *What Remains,* and other works of posthumous documentary theatre, might help us consider or even face death with our 'souls not afraid'.

THE FINAL MISSY LETTER

The final words of *What Remains* are "warmly, Missy Mooney." This sign-off succinctly announces both the end of the letter and the end of the play, while also capturing my feelings of fondness and warmth for Harold and Vita. Yet, I was initially reluctant to end *What Remains* with a Missy letter, let alone have the last words the audience hear be my name. Although *What Remains* was constructed to be a meta-biographical narrative and includes my and the actors' voices, I still wanted the play to be essentially about Harold and Vita, as it is primarily *their* words and *their* story (or at least my perception and understanding of it) that is represented. I was wary that giving Missy 'the last word' might make the play too much about me and undermine the telling of Harold and Vita's story, like putting a photo of the biographer instead of the subject on the cover of a biography.

Yet, as discovered during this research process and articulated in the reflective analysis included throughout this thesis, the telling of Harold and Vita's story in *What Remains* is crucially underpinned by Missy. My subjective positionality influenced and guided every phase of the play's construction from conception to performance, and many of my dramaturgical decisions, including the final Missy Letter, sought to acknowledge this. Included in the final Missy letter is the line: "I've remained true to your words in this play. I've also decided the truth of them" (see Appendix A). This somewhat contradictory statement not only articulates my experience of crafting *What Remains*, but it encapsulates what could be considered a central tension or paradox pertinent to many kinds of documentary theatre. That is, despite the real-world origins of its source material, despite theatre makers' claims of veracity, and despite actors' efforts towards accuracy, documentary theatre can never be an objective representation.

Moreover, *What Remains* was constructed with the aim to be not just a commemorative representation of history, or a figurative lighting of memorial candles for Harold and Vita. It was designed to be both a research tool and output and one phase of this practice-based PhD investigation. It was my insider-researcher positionality; the intersection of my personal, practitioner, and researcher sensibilities, that enabled *What Remains* to serve as a rigorous, critical, yet creative exploration of posthumous documentary theatre. To omit or downplay my ubiquitous influence on the work and its academic origins in the play would be to potentially disregard the fundamental essence of work. Considering this enabled me to realise that giving Missy the final words of *What Remains* would not 'rob' or further silence Harold and Vita but could be a way to bring closure not just to their story but to this stage of my research process as well.

Summerskill (2020) comments that documentary theatre

> can resemble fictional forms of theatre, whereby an audience is able to meet the characters at the beginning of their story, follow them as they go through certain experiences and see what their situation is at the end of the play. (p. 120)

What Remains is largely structured as a chronological progression through time, with each Moment building upon the last. Similar to Summerskill's aforementioned description of 'fictional forms of theatre', this structure sought to enable the audience to 'meet' Harold and Vita at the beginning of their relationship and then follow them through the duration of their lives together. However, by the time the audience is presented with the final Missy Letter, Missy has arguably become just as much a protagonist in *What Remains* as Harold and Vita. The interweaving of our recorded group discussions throughout the play enabled *What Remains* to chronicle not just the lives of Harold and Vita, but my life during this part of the research process. The audience was able to meet Missy and the actors at our first rehearsal, follow us through the experience of constructing *What Remains,* and at the end of the play, consider what our 'situation' is going forward. That is, what some of this research's findings might be and what could be the next step in considering and constructing ethically nuanced dramaturgies in posthumous documentary theatre.

I suggest in the Physical Dramaturgy section of this thesis that "throughout the course of *What Remains* the audience sees Missy and the actors explore and 'reach' for answers to my research questions; for the 'right' and 'ethical' way to tell the story and for 'the story' itself." A compound of the prefix r*e-* meaning "back from the point reached" ("re-," n.d.) and the noun *search,* meaning "an attempt to find someone or something" ("Search," n.d.), the term research could be understood as a process of finding something by looking back from the point reached. In addition to telling a story of Harold and Vita, *What Remains* tells a story of a crucial part of this research and some of the discoveries made along the way. The final Missy Letter, serving as a kind of 'full stop' at the end of the performance text, sought to bring closure to the audience's experience of the creative practice component of this research. It marks a 'point reached' from which Missy and the audience might look back and 'find something.' Moreover, it can also serve as a point from which we look forward and contemplate not just how Harold and Vita might continue to be thought of and represented, but how practices and processes of posthumous documentary theatre might evolve and be further explored in future creative and research contexts.

CONCLUSION: WHAT REMAINS

Similar to the final Missy Letter at the end of *What Remains*, the conclusion of this thesis hopes to be a contemplative juncture of past, present, and future, and a site of both reflection and illumination. I begin by summarising my research, identifying how *What Remains,* as both a creative artefact and research activity, has added to the wider field of documentary theatre theory and practice. I then highlight some of this research's unique discoveries and original contributions to knowledge, consider its limitations, and suggest potential areas for future research.

Posthumous Documentary Theatre: Re-presenting Historical Documentary Material on Stage explores some of the previously unplumbed depths of documentary theatre. This research is the first to introduce and conceptualise posthumous documentary theatre and this is a finding of operational significance. It establishes posthumous documentary theatre as a distinct subgenre and specific area of practice within the wider and overlapping spheres of documentary theatre and performing history. This enables future researchers and practitioners concerned with representing the dead in documentary theatre to more accurately locate their work within in the field. My investigation into the potential dramaturgical and ethical considerations of constructing posthumous documentary theatre drew not only from existing theories and practices of documentary theatre but also considered and incorporated concepts from other disciplines and mediums that represent the dead, including practices of history, historiography, biography, and life writing. This interdisciplinary synthesis of existing literature and practice with rigorous reflection on the insights and discoveries produced by *What Remains* has resulted in PhD research that has not only generated new knowledge but contributes that knowledge in an original way, by engaging with praxis and offering practical considerations for documentary theatre practitioners.

One of the strengths of this research is its reflexive methodology. Operating within a practice-based research framework built around continual reflexivity greatly enriched the depth of my exploration of posthumous documentary theatre. Embedded throughout the research were opportunities for individual and collective reflexivity which served both my

ethical and dramaturgical thinking and discovery. This reflexivity and its integration into all stages of the creative process was a practical ethical-dramaturgical strategy that I will certainly incorporate into my own future documentary theatre endeavours and would highly recommend it to others working in the field.

As a new play and creative artefact, *What Remains* is an addition to both the existing repertoire of posthumous documentary theatre and the broader field of documentary/verbatim theatre. As a representation of history, mode of historiography, and constructed meta-biography, it provides a unique opportunity for consideration of how documentary theatre might contribute to the living archive. Additionally, as a re-presentation and representation of the letters, diaries, and love of Harold Nicolson and Vita Sackville-West, *What Remains* adds a 'new chapter' to Harold and Vita's biographical lives. This not only contributes to their ongoing legacy but also makes a unique and notable contribution to the established historical narratives and ongoing scholarship on the life, letters, and legacy of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson.

As a research activity and creative practice component of this PhD, *What Remains* has enabled me to position and identify posthumous documentary theatre as a unique theatrical process with distinct ethical challenges. In my discussion of the nuanced and complex ethical considerations that might impact, inform, and inspire the dramaturgical process(es) of documentary theatre practices, I coin the phrase 'ethically nuanced dramaturgy' and chart new territory for the consideration of ethics in documentary theatre. Notably, my discussion of ethics in posthumous documentary theatre in Part 1 of this thesis presents an unprecedented and currently unparalleled dialogue that considers philosophical arguments and theories of posthumous harm in relation to ante mortem and post mortem persons and the conceptualisation of reputational harm within the context of staging the lives of the deceased in documentary theatre.

Both *What Remains* and this thesis document and disseminate my exploration of what Peters and Burton (2023) refer to as "'traditional' verbatim theatre conventions" (p. 114), such as juxtaposition, montage, direct address, metatheatricality, and the potential ethical dimensions of these conventions in a posthumous documentary context. Furthermore, I also

utilised *What Remains* as an opportunity to experiment with dramaturgical methods that are less commonly incorporated into documentary theatre dramaturgy, such as abstract physical dramaturgy, symbolic production design, audio montage, and the inclusion of the theatre maker and actors as biographer figures in the play.

My expansion of the theatre maker-as-character convention to include the actors was a key development that moved this research into new terrain and offers new practical considerations for others working in documentary theatre. Seeking to prioritise their documentary subjects' voices, many theatre makers edit themselves out of their work and if they do include themselves as characters in the play, it is often only as an occasional and unobtrusive guiding and clarifying presence. The establishment of the theatre maker/actors throughline in *What Remains* became the central component of the play's ethical-dramaturgical framework. It exposed the mechanics of our dramaturgical process, and this transparency contributed towards our cultivation of an ethically nuanced dramaturgy.

Furthermore, my recognition that verbatim re-presentation and creative representation and transformation need not be mutually exclusive in documentary theatre adds a new perspective to prevailing ideas about reality, truth, and authenticity that are frequently associated with the form. So too does this thesis' deconstructive investigation of direct address and its prevalence in documentary theatre practices. Considering both existing literature and Conor, Lily, and Megan's experiences of working with direct address in *What Remains,* I offer a unique discussion of the technique and its use in documentary theatre, ultimately suggesting that direct address is more than the actors simply directing their attention out to the audience. It is a nuanced quality of connection where the actors acknowledge the audience as an audience and as observers, recipients, witnesses, and co-constructors of the theatrical event.

Stuart-Fisher (2020) reflects that "processes of replication and reiteration are common within the dramaturgy adopted in contemporary verbatim and tribunal theatre" (p. 29). This research challenges notions that replication and reiteration might be the most 'truthful' or ethical processes to ensure that documentary subjects are represented with respect, empathy, and sensitivity. For, as evidenced by *What Remains*, the incorporation of more

abstract physical dramaturgy and production design in conjunction with strict adherence to the written and oral archive can be effective in navigating the potential ethical tension between theatrical representation and reality. It is a dramaturgical approach that can aid the production of a multidimensional, self-aware, and self-reflective performance text, that is, an engaging narrative that tells a story while simultaneously exposing or even deconstructing the telling of that story. As Bean (2014) comments, "perhaps making the dramaturgical process transparent can become the next step in the project of ethically nuancing the "truth" in documentary theatre" (p. 193). This research suggests that it is not just the truth that is nuanced, but ethics as well. I cannot ask Harold and Vita how they feel about *What Remains* and their representation in it. Yet, striving to make my ethical consideration an embedded element of the dramaturgy and my dramaturgical process transparent was my next step and my contribution to what is ultimately an ongoing discussion.

This research concludes that both dramaturgy and ethics can be considered nomadic practices. The best documentaries "throb with a sense of discovery, of searching for and attempting to fix meaning, and of the elusiveness of meaning and truth: a sense of journey rather than of arrival" (Favorini, 1995, p. xxix). It is impossible (and arguably undesirable) to pin down a single right, ethical and dramaturgical approach, method, or process. Adams (2022) similarly suggests that "there is no absolutely authentic way to represent others" (p. 9). However, she follows this acknowledgement with the proposal that one should always strive to represent others "only with sincere sympathetic understanding" (p. 9). This is a common ethical objective among documentary theatre makers. Yet, precisely what 'sincere sympathetic understanding for others' means, and how it might be applied to the documentary theatre process will vary from practitioner to practitioner. Landsburg (1966/2013) reflects that, "each death is as unique as each person's manner of being present" (p. 200). Similarly, theatre makers' 'sympathetic understanding for others' (living or dead); their considerations, processes, and ways of working will necessarily differ, change, and evolve in response to context, time, place, and the individual ethical demands of each new documentary theatre endeavour.

Furthermore, how we remember the dead will continue to evolve and consequently, how we will tell their stories and represent them on stage will too. Ethics in documentary theatre practice invites continuous critical reflexivity and *Posthumous Documentary Theatre: Re-presenting Historical Documentary Material on Stage* is the tip of the iceberg for what could be a really exciting area of research.

Despite my efforts to acknowledge the inherent subjectivity of ethical considerations in documentary theatre, my subjectivity remains one of the crucial limitations of this research. *What Remains* can only identify and explore *potential* ethical considerations that *may* arise in this kind of work. Correspondingly, this research considers only some of the possible dramaturgical methods and tools theatre makers could experiment with as they navigate the symbiosis of ethics and dramaturgy in their work. Consequently, there are numerous potential avenues for future research exploring ethics, practices, methodologies, and dramaturgy in posthumous documentary theatre.

For example, this research has only begun to consider the intersection of posthumous documentary theatre practices and thanatology. There are opportunities for further investigation into how posthumous documentary theatre can participate in the ever-changing and increasingly digital, social grief-scape. Plays such as *What Remains* not only posthumously construct identities of the deceased but may also potentially impact the pre-death constructions of their post-death selves. The post-self can be understood as an enduring image of the self that is thought to linger and continue after death. Naylor (2010) suggests that the concept of the post-self has expanded "to include not only the pre-death construction of the self by an individual" but also "the assembling and re-assembling of that self by the bereaved family and friends" (p. 251). Or as is often the case in posthumous documentary theatre, strangers. Additionally, many works of posthumous documentary theatre, including *What Remains*, *Gross Indecency,* and *My Name Is Rachel Corrie,* focus on 'extraordinary dead'. These are documentary subjects who have become notable historical figures, or who led extra-ordinary or infamous lives, or in Rachel Corrie's case, fell victim to an extra-ordinary and shockingly tragic death. How might the ethical-dramaturgical approach to representing the 'ordinary dead' or more recently deceased differ from long-

dead historical figures? Is there a kind of 'ethical safety' that comes with distance, space, and time?

Earlier in this thesis, I described the final Missy Letter as a 'full stop' that marked both the end of *What Remains* and that stage of the research process. It sought to communicate a sense of finality mirroring the end of Harold and Vita's biological lives while also highlighting the potential for the dead to endure in the minds of the living. Similarly, the biographical lives of the dead and the potential to construct and identify reflections, findings, and conclusions from this research extend beyond both the end of *What Remains* and this written thesis. Research is an ongoing process of perpetual echo and reverberation, as we can always continue to look back from the point reached to consider 'what is known' anew.

Yet, as this thesis approaches its concluding full stop, I consider once more the final moments of *My Name Is Rachel Corrie.* Although the actor representing Rachel leaves the performance space, "audiences are not left with only an empty stage [for] memories of Rachel will live on in the minds of spectators long after the performance ends" (Mooney, 2023, p. 169). *What Remains* similarly aimed to offer a representation of Harold and Vita that would linger beyond the literal boundaries of the performance. This desire is alluded to in the following excerpt from one of our recorded group discussions that appears in the penultimate Moment of the play:

> you know the saying goes that you die twice. The first time when your heart stops and the second time when someone says your name for the last time.
> And I think I do believe that a little bit, the power of that. And that, you know, that's kind of all… that's what you've got. That's all you can give them. (see Appendix A)

Posthumous documentary theatre knocks loudly at the door of the dead, yet never will we be able to knock loud enough for it to open. Representing the dead in their own words on stage might produce a kind of ghostly quality or "a sense of coming back in the theatre" (Carlson, 2003, p. 2), but it cannot resurrect those we've lost, that would be a miracle beyond even the magic of theatre (Mooney, 2023). However, posthumous documentary theatre is an inherently commemorative and potentially memorializing practice, and this research argues that how theatre makers remember, re-enact, reconstruct, and represent

the dead on stage warrants ethical consideration. At the outset of a documentary theatre process, the ethical-dramaturgical route may not always be known, but I hope that theatre makers continue to explore practices of posthumous documentary theatre and make their own maps. As they chart unknown territory, I hope they continue to reach out their hands to the dead and say their names out loud to forestall their 'second deaths'. And while the living's exact ethical responsibilities to the dead may be unclear, it is a road that we can cautiously navigate together. So let us continue to knock at the door of the dead and continue to provide opportunities and spaces to encounter representations of those gone before so that we might feel them still, standing with us, as we journey on.

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APPENDIX A - THE SCRIPT FOR *WHAT REMAINS*

What Remains:

The Love and Letters of Vita Sackville-West & Harold Nicolson

Constructed by Missy Mooney

The first performance of *What Remains* took place in 2022 in the Playhouse Theatre at the Gallagher Academy of Performing Arts in Aotearoa New Zealand. The cast was as follows:

MISSY, VIOLET	**Lily Whitehouse**
VITA, MEGAN, LILY	**Megan Goldsman**
HAROLD, CONOR	**Conor Maxwell**

Foreword

The different historical source materials used to construct this script have been edited. Chunks of Vita and Harold's letters and personal writings have been omitted and occasionally larger paragraphs have been split up into a series of smaller more dialogic sentences. However, every word comes verbatim from the original documents. No words have been added, altered, or 'corrected.' I have not put any words in Harold and Vita's mouths, except for their own. Nor have excerpts from their letters been cross-merged or amalgamated to form 'new' composite letters. Additionally, as well as preserving verbatim the slightly chaotic vernacular of my and the actors' rehearsal room conversations, all the um's and ah's, misspeaks, stutters and grammatical errors littering our speech have been transcribed word for word from our recorded group discussions. The internal chronological structure of these discussions has also been re-presented as unedited as possible.

"Both ethics and theatre are concerned with possibility" (Read, 1995, p. 83) and although a work of documentary theatre and representation of history, this script still aims to be one of possibility and open to interpretation and imagination. Consequently, the stage directions are sparse, and I offer the script as a document from which a series of different dramaturgical choices might be made.

Published Primary Source Material used to construct *What Remains*

Glendenning, V. (1983). *Vita: The life of V. Sackville-West.* Weidenfeld and Nicolson.

Nicolson. H & Nicolson. N. (Eds.) (1968). *Harold Nicolson: Diaries and letters 1945-1962.* Collins.

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Nicolson, N. (2007). *Vita and Harold: The letters of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson 1919–1962*. Phoenix. (Original work published 1992).

Nicolson, N., & Sackville-West, V. (1999). *Portrait of a marriage.* Weidenfeld & Nicolson. (Original work published 1973).

Sackville-West, V. (1955). *The land.* Heinemann. (Original work published 1926).

Key

[ ] - Square brackets are used to enclose any clarifying information that was included in the editor's footnotes in the published collections of Harold and Vita's letters and diaries. Their contents are still spoken by the actor.

[…] - An ellipsis in square brackets indicates that a section of text or dialogue has been omitted by the theatre maker during the editing/scripting process.

… - When a standard ellipsis (not in brackets) appears in Harold and Vita's dialogue, it means the ellipsis was present in the original documentary material.
- When a standard ellipsis appears in the transcribed verbatim material from the recorded group discussions with the actors it indicates a pause.

/ - a forward slash signals overlapping dialogue. When it appears in the middle of a sentence it marks when the actor with the next line begins.

PROLOGUE

The three actors are already on stage/in the performance space.
The Audio Montage plays.
When it finishes, MOMENT 1 begins.

MOMENT 1

MISSY: Dear Vita,

It is strange to be writing this to you 60 years after your death.
It's also strange because I live in New Zealand in the 21st century and am actually not writing at all. I'm typing at a computer in the university library. You wouldn't even know what a computer is…they didn't really get properly invented until after you died.
I just wanted to write and say that I really enjoy your letters. I like to think that you're actually quite stoked that they got published and hope that you don't feel betrayed or embarrassed or like your privacy has been assaulted.
I also really liked reading *Knole and the Sackvilles*. The way you write about the house and the grounds-

VITA: The long brown-red roofs are broken by the chimney-stacks with their slim, peaceful threads of blue smoke mounting steadily upwards. One looks down upon the house from a certain corner in the garden. Here is a bench among a group of yews—dark, red-berried yews; and the house lies below one in the hollow, lovely in its colour and its serenity. It has all the quality of peace and permanence; of mellow age; of stateliness and tradition. It is gentle and venerable. Yet it is, as I have said, gay. It has the deep inward gaiety of some very old woman who has always been beautiful, who has had many lovers and seen many generations come and go, smiled wisely over their sorrows and their joys, and learnt an imperishable secret of tolerance and humour.

MISSY: - well it's a kind of love letter in itself.

It's strange that I'm writing to you because you are dead, and we are from such fundamentally different worlds that I think there is no way we could ever truly understand each other. Yet, I feel like I understand your letters…or perhaps reading your letters makes me feel understood?

Warmly,
Missy Mooney

MOMENT 2

VITA: My dear Harold, -

MISSY: Vita Sackville-West wrote to Harold Nicolson on the 5th of November 1910.

VITA: -I've been asked to "ask a man" to dine on Thursday with Mrs Harold Pearson and go to a dance, so would you like to come? I promise you shan't be made to dance! It might be amusing.

MISSY: 51 years later, on the 2nd of June 1962, Harold wrote in his diary:

HAROLD: It is a lovely morning. I get up early and walk round this garden. V. [Vita] is asleep, and I do not disturb her. Glen-

MISSY: [the Labrador]

HAROLD: -dances on the lawn with his brother, Brandy.

VITA: He had never made love to me – not by a single word – and I only knew he liked me because he always tried to be with me.

HAROLD: I breakfast with [Nigel], and then I force myself to do my review of the composite book *Companion to Homer.* I finish it about 12.30, and start reading the newspaper.

VITA: That night at the [Hatfield] ball he asked me to marry him, and I said I would […] He didn't kiss me, but we sat rather bewildered over supper afterwards, and talked excitedly though vaguely about the flat we would have in Rome. I had on a new dress.

HAROLD: Ursula is with Vita. At about 1.[0]5 she observes that Vita is breathing heavily, and then suddenly is silent.

VITA: One evening when we were out in the wet garden after a rainy day, he kissed me for the first time.

HAROLD: She dies without fear or self-reproach at 1.15. Ursula comes to tell me. I pick some of her favourite flowers and lay them on the bed.

MOMENT 3

MISSY: Ok. So, the official title of my PhD is Posthumous Documentary Theatre: Representing Historical Documentary Material on Stage. So that's just the title I came up with when I applied to do a PhD back in 2020 and I haven't changed it. Um, so yeah, so that's that. And I'm actually gonna start... Oh yeah, so we've got a nice picture of Harold and Vita here. Oh, here we go. So that's another picture of um Harold and Vita and I'm pretty sure this is before they're married but when they're engaged, so that's probably -photo taken somewhere between 1910 and 1913.

MEGAN**:** Look how cool they are in that second photo though.

CONOR: Mmmm

MEGAN**:** Right! They're just like "what's up".

MISSY**:** Yeah, pretty baller...No one used to smile in photos back then.

CONOR: Everyone knows that looking away from the camera is still, still the most cool you know.

MISSY**:** Yeah. It probably took like 2 hours to take the photo. So, they're just like yeah. I actually really, I think the photos when they're old are very sweet. I do actually have like all the dates and stuff, but I didn't go super hundy on the referencing because…you don't really care. But if you do want the references, I can give them to you.

CONOR: *Diaries & Letters of Harold Nicolson* (originally three volumes) edited by Nigel Nicolson. Published in 1966.

Megan: *Portrait of a Marriage* by Nigel Nicolson and Vita Sackville West. Published in 1973.

CONOR: *Vita and Harold: The Letters of Vita Sackville-West & Harold Nicolson 1910-1962* edited by Nigel Nicolson. Published in 1992.

MEGAN: *Knole and the Sackville's* by Vita Sackville-West. Published in 1922.

MISSY: Actually- it's in the public domain if anyone wants to read it.

MEGAN: *The Land* by Vita Sackville-West. Published in 1926.

CONOR: *Vita: The Life of V. Sackville-West* by Victoria Glendinning. Published in 1983.

MISSY: And recorded group discussions and rehearsals with Missy Mooney-

CONOR & MEGAN: and her actors.

MISSY: -Recorded and transcribed in 2022.
Oh yeah, so anything you want in the play -

ALL: say it now.

MISSY: It's also a way I think to acknowledge my, our positionality, right? Cos, I think - notions of history, people view history as objective when any kind of historical narrative is inherently subjective so by saying "this is Missy and her crew. This is what they think about the letters." I'm not trying to say-

MEGAN: this is exactly what happened,

CONOR: this is the truth,

MEGAN: this is history.

MISSY: Because I think that's actually impossible, and I think

CONOR: that's a lie,

MEGAN: and unethical.

MOMENT 4

VITA: Now that is where biographers go wrong. If ever any biographer undertook to write our lives, yours and mine, using our letters as copy, he would say '[Vita Sackville-West] could not by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as a well-dressed woman, or indeed as a woman who gave sufficient consideration to the smartness of her appearance, yet here we find her, at the somewhat advanced age of 62, writing to her husband to inform him that she got a new hat. We may assume therefore, that such feminine and frivolous interests occupied her mind far more urgently than has been supposed.'
You just wait till you see my new hat.

HAROLD: Oh my future biographer! On reading this my diary do not say "What an empty life!" Look rather for my letters to [Vita] which give a fuller picture of my noble and incessant activities in the cause of life and literature.

VITA: Of course I have no right whatsoever to write down the truth about my life, involving as it naturally does the lives of so many other people, but I do so urged by a necessity of truth telling, because there is no living soul who knows the complete truth; here, may be one who knows a section; and there, one who knows another section: but to the whole picture not one is initiated.

HAROLD: I explain to Vita, Ben and Nigel that this diary, of which they know the industry and persistence, is not a work of literature or self-revelation, but a mere record of activity put down for my own reference only.

VITA: Having written it down I shall be able to trust no one to read it; there is only one person in whom I have such utter confidence.

HAROLD: I do a *Spectator* article on keeping diaries, in which I lay down the rule that one should write one's diary for one's great grandson. I think that is a correct rule. The purely private diary becomes too self-centred and morbid. One should have a remote, but not too remote, audience.

VITA: That I would give every line of this confession into his hands, knowing that after wading through this morass – for it is a morass, my life, a bog swamp, a deceitful country, with one bright patch in the middle, the patch is unalterably his – I know that after wading through it all he would emerge holding his estimate of me steadfast.

HAROLD: I must try and render it less of an engagement book, as otherwise I agree that it is not worth the trouble entailed. So henceforward my diary will be an expression of deep internal thoughts and emotions. But no gossip. I do not think it right to record day by day all the turpitude or sexual aberrations of my friends. I love them too dearly for that.

VITA: I don't know how to go on; I keep thinking that Harold, if he ever reads this, will suffer so, but I ask him to remember that he is reading about a *different person* from the one he knew.

HAROLD: I just look on you as the person I love best in the world, and without whom life would lose all its light and meaning.

MOMENT 5

MISSY: Right. So, I've been thinking a lot about this. For a long time. […] thinking about, in preparation for this, like what kind of play this could be? You know, is it just a documentary play? Is it a history play? Is it a love story? Is it probably a bit of all of those, um all of those things? And I mean Harold and Vita were married for almost 50 years and I guess the events of their marriage, or the events surrounding their marriage, are kind of like the main part of their kind of enduring legacy, right? As everyone knows, "oh she's the chick who had a, had a thing with Virginia Woolf."

VITA: I simply adore Virginia Woolf,

MISSY: [Vita first met Virginia on the 14th of December 1922].

VITA: You would fall quite flat before her charm and personality […] Mrs Woolf is so simple: she does give the impression of something big. She is utterly unaffected: there are no outward adornments – she dresses quite atrociously. At first you think she is plain; then a sort of spiritual beauty imposes itself on you, and you find a fascination in watching her […] She is both detached and human, silent till she wants to say something, and then says it supremely well. She is quite old-

MISSY: [forty].

VITA: I've rarely taken such a fancy to anyone, and I think she likes me. At least she's asked me to Richmond where she lives. Darling, I have quite lost my heart.

MISSY: Or um you know they've definitely been adopted as kind of LGBTQ+ kind of icons and stuff like that.

VITA: I want to be frank. I have implied, I think, that men didn't attract me, that I didn't think of them in what is called 'that way'. Women did.

I hold the conviction that as centuries go on, and the sexes become more nearly merged on account of their increasing resemblances, I hold the conviction that such connections will to a very large extent cease to be regarded as merely unnatural, and will be understood far better […] I believe that then the psychology of people like myself will be a matter of interest, and I believe it will be recognized that many more people of my type do exist than under the present-day system of hypocrisy is commonly admitted.

MISSY: They were also both authors and writers. You know, Harold was -they were celebrated, won awards and literary achievements and stuff like that and their books are quite well known.

MEGAN: Auckland Star, Volume LXV (65), Issue 59, 10th March 1934, page 2.
"LOVE OF THE LAND: MISS SACKVILLE-WEST'S POETRY
When Miss Vita Sackville-West's "The Land" was published in 1926 it was at once recognised as one of the most notable long poems of the time and was crowned with a prize. Since then, Miss Sackville-West has won fame as a novelist with "The Edwardians" and "All Passion Spent."

MISSY: Harold was a diplomat and a politician.

HAROLD: I see out of the corner of my eye that Winston-

MISSY: [Winston Churchill]

HAROLD: -is edging in my direction and I am embarrassed. He slouches up.

MEGAN (as Churchill): 'I see you have been speaking in Scotland?'

HAROLD: 'Yes.'

MEGAN (as Churchill): 'Was it a good meeting?'

HAROLD: and so on. He seems better in health than he has ever seemed. The pale and globular look about his cheeks has gone. He is more solid about the face and thinner. But there is something odd about his eyes. The lids are not in the least weary, nor are there any pouches or black lines. But the eyes themselves are glaucous, vigilant, angry, combative, visionary and tragic. In a way they are the eyes of a man who is much preoccupied and is unable to rivet his attention on minor things (such as me). But in another sense they are the eyes of a man faced by an ordeal or tragedy, and combining vision, truculence, resolution and great unhappiness.

MISSY: They were both like super into gardening. You know, Vita wrote a gardening, a weekly gardening column for *The Observer* magazine for 15 years till she died and their gardens, you know, are still like celebrated and visited to this day. So, this play could legit be about gardening and still be about them you know?

MOMENT 6

MISSY: So now we'll do a little bit of background um just on like family tree kind of stuff. So, Harold was born in 1886-

HAROLD: Oh God, how I wish that life were twice as long and that the days consisted of 100 hours each! Every morning I wake up thinking how I want to write a book about Puritanism, and spend a winter in Tahiti, and learn how to fish for salmon, and go on a walking-tour through Patagonia, and try and get at the secret of Cezanne's landscapes (I am really wild about Cezanne just now) […] and through all this go on being a diplomat having Long Barn, and seeing every autumn the wood-smoke drift across the dear remembered woods.

MISSY: -and Vita was born in 1892

VITA: I love books and flowers and poetry and travel and trees and dragons and the wind and the sea and generous hearts and spacious ideals and little children.

MISSY: So, he was a little bit older. Um they met in 1910 and then Harold proposed at the Hatfield ball in 1912 and we're talking like they hadn't even held hands or kissed or anything um until after they got married pretty much. And yeah, they got married in 1913 on the 1st of October.
Um, actually, what's quite cool is, I looked up old newspapers on a site called Papers Past and it's a whole bunch of New Zealand newspapers that have been digitized and Harold and Vita's wedding was like announced in a number of like local newspapers in New Zealand-

CONOR: *The Christchurch Star*

MEGAN: *Wairarapa Daily Times*

MISSY: Which I thought was pretty cool. Um that it was kind of big enough deal that you'd report it all the way over here.

CONOR: "A SOCIETY WEDDING.
MISS SACKVILLE-WEST AT THE ALTAR"

MEGAN: "FASHIONABLE WEDDING.
There was a great gathering at
Knole House for the wedding: of Miss
Victoria Sackville-West to Harold, son of

Sir Arthur Nicholson."

MISSY: So Knole is Vita Sackville-West's ancestral home right. So, think like Downton Abbey style, it's like this massive old house on over a thousand acres of land and it's got a massive deer park so there's a lot of deer chillin'. Megan's actually been there. So, if you wanna-

MEGAN: Yeah, it's huge you don't even realise. It's like- I walked from the train station to the house so there's a little old town right, around it: Sevenoaks. And […] then from the first entrance of the house you walk literally about two and a half kilometres to even get there.

CONOR: Shit.

MEGAN: And that's all front garden. Like that's the front part of the section.

CONOR: Imagine doing the lawns.

General laughter

MISSY: You'd need a solid ride on for that, (*in a 'blokey' voice)* "bloody need a John Deere."

MEGAN: It's massive. It's huge.

MISSY: Yeah, like, I think one of the letters that Vita wrote to her mother, or her mother wrote to her, that it was something like-

VITA: Mother said, "there were 300 steps between her room and mine."

MISSY: And that's inside. That's quite a lot of steps. Yeah, […] it's ridiculous.

MEGAN: And the family still live there. Well, the family that inherited it still live there.

MISSY: Yeah.

MOMENT 7

MISSY: They had their first son, ah, Ben in 1914.

HAROLD: Vita says I may tell you of our great secret and you will guess what it is. She saw the doctor today, who says that he will state his reputation on it-/

MISSY: I was thinking maybe not having you write any letters?

CONOR: Oh yeah?

MISSY: And read them instead, because, like, although like a lot of it is prefaced with, you know, Vita writes or Harold wrote or, you know, they kind of have the citation a lot of the time. I think reading might be more obvious that you don't own the material, that it's not from you. Whereas the act of writing is very much an externalizing of the internal.

CONOR & MEGAN: Mmmm.

MISSY: And I'm not fully sure about it.

MEGAN: We can play around with it.

MISSY: Yeah, it probably would, it would change Conor the most I would think.

CONOR: Yeah, yeah.

MEGAN: The typewriter.

CONOR: Yeah, I'm thinking about it, and I don't -Like off the- my immediate reaction, I don't like it.

MISSY: Yeah.

CONOR: And that's not because it's a Missy thing, it's a, it's a, um I think the distance is there.

MISSY: Yeah.

CONOR: But you're right because um yeah um are we embodying them writing it or are we actors reading it? So, I see where you're coming from, and we can have a play with it.

MISSY: Yeah, and I'm not sure about it and part of it might be me just worrying about it. […] but it was just something that I had thought about, you know.

MEGAN: But at the end of the day, you're still making a play. Like at the very end it's still gonna be a play.

CONOR: Yeah.

MISSY: Yeah, this is the thing.

CONOR: Cos, realistically, we are, we're, we're learning the lines and in some ways performing the lines to make it a more interesting show.

MISSY: Mmmm.

CONOR: We're not trying to be Harold and Vita. We're just trying to get across your vision-

MISSY: Mmmm.

CONOR: -in a way that's interesting. And a more interesting way sometimes is typing rather than standing beside a typewriter.

MISSY: Yeah, yeah.

CONOR: I do feel ultimately that's what we're doing. We're not trying to be the characters; we're trying to put on a show.

MISSY: Yeah. And 100%, and I think, and I think I've said this before, that I think there is in... Like making your subjects interesting is an ethical thing to me. You know, like I think that is something you can do that is ethical. Like-

CONOR: Show the best version of them ay?

MISSY: Yeah! And I think a lot of actors and um verbatim and documentary theatre playwrights say, you know, it's not about judging them but it's, -as an actor, you've gotta try and understand, find some kind of understanding.

HAROLD: Vita says I may tell you of our great secret and you will guess what it is. She saw the doctor today, who says that he will state his reputation on it, but of course Vita is particularly anxious not to tell people so you will keep it to yourselves. V. has such

bright eyes today that I felt it was true – and we have hoped for some weeks that it might be. It all sounds so ordinary when written down, but to us it seems the most extraordinary thing that has ever happened. The doctor said it will be born in July or early August…V. is so happy it would make you cry to see her. She is the most beautiful angel in the world.

MISSY: And believing she might not survive the birth of her child [Vita] wrote a letter to Harold to be opened if she died:

VITA: If you marry again, which I expect you will, don't be just the same with her as you were with me; give her a place of her own, but don't let her take mine exactly. Don't teach her our family expressions. Darling, it is so lovely in the garden, and I hope I shan't die. I want years and years more with you as my playfellow. I love you so, my own darling husband. We are so young, and we have such fun together always that I refuse to believe it can be cut off. If you ever get this, we shall have had nearly a year of absolutely unmarred happiness together, and you will know that I have loved you as completely as one person has ever loved another.

MISSY: In 1915 they had a second son, but he was stillborn. I just include that because there is, there's some particularly grim letters about it.

VITA: Harold I am sad. I have been thinking of that white velvet coffin with that little still thing inside. He was going to be a birthday present to you next Sunday. Oh darling I feel it is too cruel. I can't help minding, and I always shall. I mind more when I see Ben, how sweet and sturdy he is, and the other would have been just the same. It isn't so much that I grudge all the long time or the beastly end, as everybody thinks. I mind his being dead because he is a person. Darling I do mind so: I can't be really happy. I love you and I know you love me and nothing can alter that except to make it more, but I do mind this and it clouds everything and I can't be happy. It is silly to mind so much. Ben makes it worse as well as better. I can't bear to hear of people with two children.
Oh Harold darling, why did he die?
Why, why, why did he? Oh Harold, I wish you were here – I am meant to be asleep. I haven't got any more paper.

MISSY: [But she tears out of her bible a map of St Paul's journeys, and continues on the back]:

VITA: I try and stave it off, not to think about it, but when I am alone, it rushes at me. I am frightened of being alone now. Darling, it isn't because I am ill, because I am not ill now any more; it is real. Harold, I want you so badly, I wish I could go to sleep.

CONOR: I was reading those today. They are hard to read.

MISSY: Yeah, it's rough aye?

CONOR: Really beautiful but yeah really rough.

MISSY: Their second son, well third son I guess, Nigel Nicolson was born in 1916.

HAROLD: I Love you. I will write again. I love you very much. Kiss my two babies.

MISSY: Harold wrote to Nigel aged 9:

HAROLD: I do hope you won't make Mummy nervous by being too wild. Of course men must work and women must weep, but all the same I do hope that you will remember that mummy is a frightful coward and does fuss dreadfully about you. It is a good rule always to ask before you do anything awfully dangerous. Thus if you say,

MISSY (as 9-year-old Nigel): 'Mummy, may I try and walk on the roof of the green-house on my stilts?'

HAROLD: She will probably say,

VITA: 'Of course, darling',

HAROLD: since she is not in any way a narrow-minded woman. And if you say,

MISSY (as 9-year-old Nigel): 'Mummy, may I light a little fire in my bed?'

HAROLD: She will again say,

VITA: 'Certainly, [Nigel].'

HAROLD: It is only that she likes being asked about these things beforehand.

MOMENT 8

MISSY: Nigel Nicolson writes that Vita "had no concept of any moral distinction between homosexual and heterosexual love, thinking of them both as 'love' without qualification"

VITA: Isn't life odd?
There was once a time when Violet and I were so madly in love, and I hurt you dreadfully – and now how dead that is, passion completely spent – and the true love that has survived is mine for you, and yours for me. I think it was partly your fault [Harold]. When we married, you were older than me, and far better informed. I was very young, and very innocent. I knew nothing about homosexuality. I didn't even know that such a thing existed, either between men or between women. You should have told me. You should have warned me. You should have told me about yourself, and warned me that the same sort of thing was likely to happen to myself. It would have saved us a lot of trouble and misunderstanding. But I simply didn't know. Oh what an unexpected letter to write you suddenly. You won't like it, because you never like to face facts.

HAROLD: I wish Violet was dead: she has poisoned one of the most sunny things that ever happened. She is like some fierce orchid, glimmering and stinking in the recesses of life and throwing cadaverous sweetness on the morning breeze. Darling, she is evil and I am not evil.

VITA: She lay on the sofa, I sat plunged in the armchair; she took my hands, and parted my fingers to count the points as she told me why she loved me. I hadn't dreamt of such an art of love […] I was infinitely troubled by the softness of her touch and the murmur of her lovely voice.

HAROLD: Oh my darling, what is it that makes you put her above me? We seemed, you and I, to be running hand in hand on the downs, and now a fog has come and you have gone into someone else's conservatory, and I am wandering about cold and rather frightened in the fog.

VITA: She appealed to my unawakened senses; she wore, I remember, a dress of red velvet, that was exactly the colour of a red rose, and that made her, with her white skin and the tawny hair, the most seductive being.

HAROLD: You have stayed in Paris nearly a week without word to me as to when you were going south or where. The result is that I haven't the least idea where to get hold of you.

VITA: She pulled me down until I kissed her – I had not done so for many years. Then she was wise enough to get up and go to bed; but I kissed her again in the dark after I had blown out our solitary lamp.

HAROLD: I know how extremely busy you are and how much of your time is taken up by playing tennis and talking to your dirty little friend […] Of course I know this is a lot to ask - but you might at least send me a post card when you have no time to write […] Damn! Damn! Damn! Violet. How I loathe her. I refuse absolutely to see her – and if you arrive with her I shan't meet you. I don't think I could trust myself to touch her. I feel I should lose my head and spit in her face.

VITA: My Darling, it is dreadful of me not to write to you. I know. Don't think it is just indifference, or forgetfulness, it is not. But as I've often said to you in talking, it's so difficult for me to write to you when I am staying with V.; it seems to me indecent.

HAROLD: When you fall into Violet's hands, you become like a jellyfish addicted to cocaine.

VITA: There *is* a bond that unites me to Violet, Violet to me; […] but what that bond is God alone knows; sometimes I feel it is as something legendary.

HAROLD: I feel you are slipping away, you who are my anchor, my hope and all my peace. Dearest, you don't know my devotion to you. What you do, can never be wrong. I love you, in a mad way, *because* of it all.

VITA: Oh Harold, I couldn't ever hurt somebody as tender and sensitive and angelic and loving as you – at least, I mean – I know I *have* hurt you, but I couldn't do anything to hurt you dreadfully and irrevocably. What a hold you have on my heart; nobody else would ever have had such a hold.

HAROLD: I fear I am going downhill without you – and I get so awfully depressed that I drink too much, and I spend my time with rather low people, but I am ashamed to go into society, so I live in the demimonde and I don't think I like it much.

VITA: Darling, I will tell you something which although I say it quite casually in a letter is really very true and illuminating: the fact of loving you has made of me a quite different person, or rather it has entailed the renouncement of all in me that wasn't compatible with loving you. That part isn't quite dead yet, it's flickering and struggling to live, it struggles on its knees and puts its hands together, and says,

VIOLET & VITA: "O PLEASE!"

VITA: And I say,

VIOLET & VITA: “NO”

VITA: and it lies down again in its corner, very sick, and I look the other way and go to a dance.
O [Harold], it is so neat, the division in me, more neat than you’ll ever know.
Darling, I suppose you needn’t worry: I shan’t do anything ‘excessive’, as you say. I love you more than myself, more than life, more than the things I love. I give you everything – like a sacrifice.
I love you so much that I don’t even resent it […] This isn’t meant to be a worrying letter, but a reassuring one.

HAROLD: I have torn up the rest of this letter. It was too cross and despairing to send. I don’t want to write to you at present much – as I don’t want to say things which I shall regret.
You see, I have been terribly over-worked and all this sorrow and confusion has made me quite unnaturally upset – so I can’t trust myself to write.
I don’t want to say things which I shall regret. Only day and night there is a voice in my ear,

VIOLET: “She lied to you! She broke her promise to you! She hurts you like this to spare the other!”

HAROLD: Would [Violet] have suffered as I have this dark week? I wonder. If so I am sorry for her. But I feel quite different and aged – and all my joy in life and work has left me. What frightens me so, is that I feel now I don’t *want* to see you.

HAROLD: I don’t hate her. No more than I should hate opium if you took it.
Burn this my little friend, and don’t ever speak of it.

MOMENT 9

MISSY: And actually, what I like kinda the most is […] it ends with um "burn this my little friend and don't ever speak of it."

CONOR & MEGAN**:** Mmmm

MISSY: And as a theatre maker you're automatically like "oh well that doesn't go in" cos then people might think...you know, am I unethical for putting this in? Or is the ethical thing to say well "hey they wanted this to be burnt but it's been published so I'm gonna do it" You know.

MEGAN: And there's like 3 letters all at once and it's just like him.

MISSY: Yep.

MEGAN: Talking to her and it's almost- it's like this desperation.

CONOR: Yeah, yeah.

MEGAN: Yearning and um and there's just no, there's noth- She doesn't say anything back.

CONOR: Yeah.

MEGAN: And it's, it's almost like you know, like modern-day how like people would leave you on "seen" or something you know. And I think it was um for me too, I was like "well what- there are two other people in this situation. What do they think about it?"

MISSY: And obviously there's a lot more to that story.

MOMENT 10

VITA: I am trying to be good, [Harold]. I want so dreadfully to be with her.

HAROLD: I have been worrying all day about Violet. […] I think she is the only person of whom I am frightened.

VITA: When I come back this time [Violet] and I [will] give each other up forever. It is the only thing we can do, but it is going to break me for the time being. I'm not

grumbling about it, or suggesting any other course; only, simply, there it is . . . Please, darling, don't write to me and say why is this necessary? *Please* don't do that, or refer to it; I know you are such an angel that you wouldn't ever want me to do anything so drastic, but you must let me decide this for myself, and I *have* decided.

MISSY: 1918 - 1920 were the years of Vita's passionate love affair with Violet Trefusis, which nearly wrecked her marriage. But the summer of 1921 marked the gradual end of the affair.

VITA: I am writing now-

MISSY: on the 28th of March 1921

VITA: -in the light of later events, and writing in the midst of great unhappiness which I try to conceal from poor Harold, who is an angel upon earth. It is possible that I may never see Violet again, or that I may see her once again before we are parted, or that we may meet in future years as strangers; […] it gives me an awful sense of doom.

MISSY: Vita and Violet did not correspond for eighteen years. Then in 1940 another war brought them together again.

VITA: Yes, it was good to see you – and the absurd happiness of having you beside me in the car, - even the sudden pain of saying goodbye to you was vivifying.
The past does not worry me. I hold it for ever. The present does not worry me. It formed the past today. The future does worry me,

VITA & VIOLET: *our* future,

VITA: - and I must clarify my own feelings about it to you. I shall have to do this in a memorandum form.

VITA & VIOLET: 1)

VITA: I told you that I was frightened of you. That's true.

VITA & VIOLET: I don't want to

VITA: -fall in love with you all over again, or to become involved with you in a way that would complicate my life as I have now arranged it.

VITA & VIOLET: You and I can't be together.

VITA: I go down country lanes and meet a notice saying,

VIOLET: 'beware – unexploded bomb.'

VITA: So I have to go round another way.
You are the unexploded bomb to me.
I don't want you to explode.
I don't want to disrupt my life.
My quiet life is dear to me, I hate being dragged away from it. This letter will anger you. I don't care if it does, since I know that no anger or irritation will ever destroy the love that exists between us.
And if you really want me, I will come to you,

ALL: always, - anywhere.

MOMENT 11

MISSY: Dear Harold,
I think you are just as good a writer as your wife.
You refer to your diary as:

HAROLD: Not intimate enough to give a personal picture. The really important things I know I cannot record.

MISSY: I disagree with you. I've read your diaries and your letters, well those that have been published anyway, and think they paint an incredibly detailed and personal picture. The imagery…there is something almost cinematic about them. Like the one where you talk about going to the front during World War I.

HAROLD: I went to the front on Saturday […] they were fighting just behind the field hospital and the maxims-

MISSY: [machine guns]

HAROLD: -made a noise like a motor bicycle, and I get so nervous and the wounded came in, and there were heaps of them and they sobbed when they were moved, and when their coats were taken off they screamed […] And in the garden there was a cherry tree in full blossom and under two pails full of bits of soldiers that they had cut off.

MISSY: I feel like they give me a sense of how you viewed the world, and what is more personal than that.
Vita talked on multiple occasions about the fear and dread she felt at the prospect of living life without you and yet it was you that had to live without her. I'm sorry that you had to do your last years alone.
I know that you loved her very much.

Warmly,
Missy Mooney

MOMENT 12

VITA: I thought the other day, in the night, that you were the only person I have ever really loved. I thought this out rather carefully, and analysed my feelings, and came to that conclusion. I won't say that I haven't been *in love* with other people, but you are the only person that I have ever deeply and painfully loved.

HAROLD: You see our love is something which only two people in the world can understand, the first and dearest of these two people is [Vita]. The second, poor man, is your own Hadji.

VITA: I was thinking, "how queer. I suppose Hadji and I have been about as unfaithful to one another as one well could be from the conventional point of view, even worse if you add in homosexuality, and yet I swear no two people could love one another more than we do after all these years." It *is* queer, isn't it? It does destroy all orthodox ideas of marriage? Yet it is true, so true that I know our love to be like a great oak tree with lots of acorns, or like a tulip-tree with lots of flowers. I do think we have managed things cleverly.

MISSY: A bit cheesy. But maybe a montage of all the different ways they said I love you?

HAROLD: I love you.

VITA: It is true, true, true.

HAROLD: You don't know how I worship you, but I can't show you when you are there and it sounds sentimental, but when you are away from me I yearn for you with every fibre in my body, and with every beat of my heart, and with every pulsation of my brain.

Darling, you are all in all to me, and if you ceased to love me the whole sun of life would be darkened, and all my joy in life would become a mass of leaden despair.

VITA: You are the best and most sacred and the most tender thing in my life.

HAROLD: Because you are firm and splendid

VITA: You will never know how I have loved you

HAROLD: you don't know my devotion to you.

VITA: Harold.

HAROLD: What you do can never be wrong.

VITA: God bless you,

HAROLD: God bless you Vita.

VITA: God bless you, my darling.

HAROLD: I should be happy wherever I was with you.

VITA: I do love you so-

HAROLD: And you are absolutely the only thing that counts in this world. You are the vessel which contains the wine of life.

VITA: – it's like a well, so deep that if you went to the very bottom you would see stars.

HAROLD: It is so completely immaterial in every way.

VITA: Darling, I love you so much – so very, very, very, very much – more than anything -so dearly, so protectively, so respectingly, so much more than anything else, so eternally.

HAROLD: I feel that our love and confidence is absolute. I mean in the technical sense of absolute: it is relative to nothing but itself: it is untouched by circumstances, emotions: it is certainly untouched by age. Darling isn't this a great comfort? "Human beauty fades: but art never" I feel that our love is something as detached from circumstance as the beauty of a work of art. This gives one security in all this

transience. If one of us died, this love would live, although in agony. Our love will only die with both of us.

MOMENT 13

MISSY: And you know, they wrote many, many letters like this. This wasn't just like a special occasion letter this is just how they kind of talked to each other on the weekly and I'm kind of, I'm interested in the life of these letters, you know […] There's something about- although they were never written to be said aloud, there's something about them that I want to hear them out loud.

MEGAN: This was a question I had; do you, do you want accents? Cos they were English.

CONOR: I was thinking about that.

MISSY: I don't think so [...] because I'm kind of leaning more towards that this is -It's almost like this whole thing is happening inside my head.
I'm not trying to show Vita and Harold as if I'm doing a David Attenborough documentary. It's almost like my versionings and imaginations of them.

MEGAN: Yep.

MISSY: Cos that's as close as I can get. I don't even have a video of them-

CONOR: No.

MISSY: [...] So part of me is like maybe go for like a neutralize.

ALL: Yes / yeah.

MISSY**:** Maybe like a slight general British…but like in reality they had real snobby like "Persia" (*pronounced per-see-ah*] like snobby talking like that. I don't wanna do that, cos you know, it'll seem a little bit like taking the piss as well.

CONOR: Yeah.

MISSY**:** But just a neutralization

MEGAN: Ok.

MISSY: And then when we're kind of us, actually take the time to speak -talk how we talk

MEGAN: Ahhh go full Hams[8].
Get those Kiwi vowels back in there.

MISSY: *(in an attempt at a 'blokey' voice)* Get right back in there.

MOMENT 14

HAROLD: I lunched with Nigel and Philippa. We were discussing the ethics of suicide and I said that if you died, I think I should kill myself.

VITA: If he died, I should not care to go on living without him.

HAROLD: These may be the last words I ever type on my beloved tikki-

MISSY: [His typewriter].
Fun fact, Harold typed all of his letters on a typewriter and Vita wrote all of hers.

CONOR: Interesting.

MISSY: Yeah, and he typed his diary as well. So, he would do his diary every day after breakfast he'd type out like one or two pages and then chuck them in like this filing cabinet thing forever.

HAROLD: -These may be the last words I ever type on my beloved tikki. I am not really jumpy, which is strange, rather excited and amused. I wish V. were here, but it would fuss her terribly to telegraph tonight when she is so far away. If I am not well, I shall telegraph to her tomorrow morning. But even if I am a corpse before she arrives, I have nothing to say to her which she doesn't know-

VITA: My own darling Hadji, I was thinking this morning how awful it would be if you died. I do often think about that; but it came over me all a heap when I looked out the bathroom window and saw you in your blue coat and black hat, peering into your scoop.

MISSY: [The "scoop" was a hollow in one of the paving stones in the Cottage Garden at Sissinghurst, and Harold used it as a rain gauge].

[8] An abbreviation/slang term for the Aotearoa New Zealand city 'Hamilton'.

VITA: It is the sort of sudden view of a person that twists one's heart, when they don't know you are observing them – they have an innocent look, almost as a child asleep – one feels one is spying on some secret life one should not know about. Taking advantage as it were, although it is only the most loving advantage that one takes. […] I often think I have never told you how much I love you – and if you died I should reproach myself saying "why did I never tell him? Why did I never tell him enough?

HAROLD: – immortal love, immortal gratitude. These cannot die.

VITA: It is not nice to know that one of us must die before the other.

HAROLD: What should I do in life without you? I would be lost and lonely, like a jam-jar floating in the North Sea.

MOMENT 15

MISSY: In 1929 they debated on BBC radio their ideas about marriage, and this was their conclusion:

HAROLD: You agree that a successful marriage is the greatest of human benefits?

VITA: Yes.

HAROLD: And that it must be based on love and guided by intelligence?

VITA: Yes.

HAROLD: That an essential condition is a common sense of values?

VITA: Yes.

HAROLD: That the only things that will stave off marital nerves are modesty, good humour and, above all, occupation?

VITA: Yes.

HAROLD: And give and take?

VITA: And give and take.

HAROLD: And mutual esteem. I do not believe in the permanence of any love which is based on pity, or the protective or maternal instincts. It must be based on respect.

VITA: Yes, I agree. The caveman plus sweet-little-thing theory is long past. It was a theory insulting to the best qualities of both.

HAROLD: I have often wondered what makes a perfect family. I think it is just our compound of intimacy and aloofness. Each of us has a room of his own. Each of us knows that there is a common-room where we meet on the basis of perfect understanding.

VITA: I always well trained not to manage you. I scarcely dare to arrange the collar of your great coat unless you ask me to. I think that is really the basis of our marriage, apart from deep love for each other, for we have never interfered with each other, and strangely enough, never been jealous of each other. And now in our advancing age, we love each other more deeply than ever, and also more agonizingly, since we see the inevitable end.

HAROLD: This is rather awful, isn't it, being 40.

VITA: How much one dislikes growing older! I know how you hate it. You know how much I hate it.

HAROLD: Good bye to middle youth! I simply hate it. All that I care for is youth and energy and striving. I don't want to have been successful. I want to go on trying. It is no fun being at the top of ones profession – the only fun is getting there. I wasn't made to be old. When God made me he forgot all about the fact that I should have to grow up sooner or later. I have had such a frightfully good time all the 40 years and have done exactly what I liked and done nothing meretricious at all, so God is sure to take notice soon and avenge himself on me.

VITA: But I think the reason we both hate it is a double reason: the superficial reason is the physical reason, that one gets fat and bald and what-have-you, in the American phrase, but the real deep reason for us, you and me, is that we hate the idea of leaving Life, as we must, twenty to thirty years hence, and we both love life and enjoy it.

MISSY: Less than 10 years later, on the 15th of February 1962 Vita wrote in her diary:

VITA: I feel really ill, and try to hide it from [Harold]. The sooner I see the doctor the better.

MISSY: Harold wrote in his Diary:

HAROLD: I think [Vita] is better, but she never lets me know.

MISSY: A week later.

HAROLD: [Vita] tells me I must prepare for a blow. She has had a haemorrhage and went up to London yesterday to consult a gynaecologist, who said she must go into hospital and be examined. I can see that [Vita] thinks it is cancer, and faces it with her usual courage. She is really heroic. […] The shock has a strange effect on me. It seems to sunder my life in two -the past being radiant with sunshine, and the present and future dark as night. Familiar objects (my pipe, my sponge, the book I have been reading) all seem like voices from the past. 'Last time I handled you, all was sunlit.'

MISSY: Five days later.

HAROLD: [Vita] leaves home by the morning train. A car takes her from London Bridge to the Royal Free Hospital in Liverpool Road.

MISSY: The next day.

HAROLD: *Dies irae.*

MISSY: [The day of wrath].

HAROLD: At 1.30 they telephone to say that Vita is-

MISSY: 'still in the theatre'.

HAROLD: -and this fills me with horror. Then at 2.45 the surgeon telephones.

MISSY: 'Lady Nicolson is now back in her bed and having a blood-transfusion. She stood the operation fairly well.'

HAROLD: 'Did you do the major operation?'

MISSY: 'Yes.'

HAROLD: 'Did you find cancer?'

MISSY: 'Yes.'

HAROLD: I feel like fainting, but drink some sherry.

MOMENT 16

VITA: My own Darling Hadji, this is not a nice patch for us to be going through, but I think the only way to take it is to realise that as one gets older these bothers do come upon one. I am not going to indulge in self-pity, and I am not going to be more of a bore and a worry to anybody, but more especially to you, my sweet, who are not a person who ought to be worried. So I hope that within a few days I shall be home, and all gay and happy again.

MISSY: A month later on the 6th of April.

HAROLD: [Vita] leaves the hospital at 10 and has a lovely drive in the Daimler ambulance down home […] She is not tired.

VITA: The doctor has just rung up. He has heard from the specialist that I *am* anaemic. This is a great relief, because it is what-/

MISSY: [The next few words are illegible]

VITA: I must get up now. I am feeling much better, but I can't control my writing. Can you read it?

HAROLD: [Vita] is really much better. In fact, the specialist who visited her this morning says that if she continues as well as this, no further treatment may be needed. I am immensely relieved.

MISSY: On the 2nd of May Vita wrote:

VITA: My own darling Hadji, I am going to get up and go into the garden: it is quite warm. I am glad that you have got away from all those boring nurses and atmosphere of sickroom: poor Hadji, you are so uncomplaining. My handwriting is better, don't you think? I shall try and get as far as your life's work today/

MISSY: [The Spring garden].

VITA: -and can take one of the nice light garden chairs along with me. Also I shall put on some clothes which may make me feel a little more human. What I find one grudges is the appalling waste of time and not seeing to things one wants to see to.

HAROLD: Oh my sweet, how I long for the day when you get well again. I don't like the idea of that vast dog keeping you awake.

VITA: Glen-

MISSY: [The Labrador].

VITA: -slept in my room and was quite quiet until 6am, when he got up on my bed and became inconveniently affectionate – huge rough paws whacking me.

HAROLD: He means so well, but he can't reduce his size nor does he understand how ill invalids can feel. I shall be down by tea tomorrow and shall remain all the week.

VITA: It may still be all right,

HAROLD: I think she is getting better.

VITA: but I doubt it.

MOMENT 17

MISSY: On the 2nd June 1962, Harold wrote in his diary:

HAROLD: It is a lovely morning. I get up early and walk round this garden. V.[Vita] is asleep, and I do not disturb her. Glen dances on the lawn with his brother, Brandy. I breakfast with [Nigel], and then I force myself to do my review of the composite book *Companion to Homer.* I finish it about 12.30, and start reading the newspaper. Ursula is with Vita. At about 1.[0]5 she observes that Vita is breathing heavily, and then suddenly is silent.

VITA: She dies without fear or self-reproach at 1.15.

HAROLD: I pick some of her favourite flowers and lay them on the bed.

MOMENT 18

MISSY: He wrote three weeks later:

HAROLD: 'Oh Vita, I have wept buckets for you.'

MISSY: And he did, [Nigel Nicolson writes] quietly at the dinner-table, clamourously when he thought himself out of earshot in the garden. [Nigel] was awed by his desolation […] [Harold] never recovered from Vita's death.

HAROLD: More snow during the night. Horribly cold. Horribly unhappy. I think drink is the only end for me. But Vita would not have liked that cowardly escape. I must just go doggedly on.

MISSY: His gaiety gradually subsided into gentle good humour, his intellectual vitality to vague contemplation.

HAROLD: It is surprisingly fine and sunny and I spend the day reading Greek on the lawn. I much enjoy going back and reading my old things. I am getting older every hour and feel rotten.

MISSY: He had two strokes in quick succession, which further dulled his mind.

HAROLD: It is curious that my consciousness seems perfectly alert, only I cannot express it and limp over a conversation.

MISSY: He gave up writing, then reading, and became very silent in his last two years. […] Sometimes [Nigel] would ask him about the past, but his responses became fewer. He had no wish to live longer. The end was sudden and merciful.

HAROLD: He died at Sissinghurst on 1 May 1968, of a heart attack, as he was undressing for bed.

MOMENT 19

An audio recording of Vita Sackville-West's voice introducing her long narrative poem: The Land, *plays.*
When it finishes, the actors move centre stage and recite the following excerpts from The Land:

MISSY: Book-learning they have known.
They meet together, talk, and grow most wise,
But they have lost, in losing solitude,
Something, -an inward grace, the seeing eyes
The power of being alone with earth and skies

HAROLD: Now are the noiseless stars made visible
That hidden by the day pursued their track,
And this one planet that we know too well
Mantles in black.

VITA: An all the harmonies were joined and whole,
Silence was music, music silence made,
Till each was both or either, and the soul
Was not afraid.

MOMENT 20

MISSY: I think maybe I'm answering the question that [I asked at the beginning], you know, is this a documentary play? Is it a love story? What is it? Maybe it's about death? I dunno.

MEGAN**:** And how do you, how can you almost quantify a person's life. When I read this and, you know, even just thinking about like the letters, it's like you quantify a person's life into a volume. That's what remains.

MISSY: Yeah. 100%. 100% And I think…
I was either listening to a podcast or reading something the other day and they said, it's like a saying, you know the saying goes that you die twice. The first time when your heart stops and the second time when someone says your name for the last time.
And I think I do believe that a little bit, the power of that. And that, you know, that's kind of all… that's what you've got. That's all you can give them.

MOMENT 21

MISSY: Dear Vita and Harold,

I hope you don't mind that we are airing your words.
They are beautiful and enchanting and sad at times, but I think people will enjoy hearing them.

I should probably acknowledge, that the reality is, that I don't know you at all.
And that I have a tendency towards melancholy and desperately want to believe in love.
So, I admit that I look back at your lives through rose-tinted spectacles.
But I've remained true to your words in this play.
I've also decided the truth of them.
I don't know if that makes sense.

But I've tried to be careful. Respectful.
I like to think that you would marvel at the fact that in a small country floating in the Pacific Ocean, miles away from the geography of your life and decades after your death, that people are thinking of you.

Warmly,
Missy Mooney

APPENDIX B - PLANS FOR THE FIRST THREE WORKSHOPS/REHEARSALS

SESSION 1 - (2 hours)

- Rehearsals to take place in the theatre studio (TL. 2.33) or another suitable venue (i.e. I.4.09)
- I will ask the actors to sign and return the consent form and code of conduct (via email) in advance of this first session.
- This will be our (the actors and myself) first time meeting together. Part of this will be a recorded group discussion.

Activity	Description	Rationale/Goal
Introduction	In this introduction, I will briefly outline my research interests and intentions (kind of like a mini-PhD confirmation). I will also briefly define/describe documentary theatre, as not all the actors have experience with the form.	This will explain the project and the role of the creative practice within my research in more detail, re-iterating and elaborating on the content included in the information sheet and consent form that they have already received.
Outline Creative Practice Process	A quick recap of the code of conduct, expectations, and the intended trajectory of the rehearsal/construction process. Identify key dates and deadlines such as performance dates etc. and articulate their role/involvement in the process. Give the actors the opportunity to ask any questions about the process.	Explaining logistics and outlining the process is practically helpful. Stating what is expected of both me and the actors is the first step in cultivating an inclusive environment from which a shared explorative dramaturgical process can emerge.
Chronology/ Timeline	I have made a chronology/timeline of key historical dates and events in Harold and Vita's lives which I aim to go through like a seminar or 'quick history lesson'. This will be recorded (with the actors' permission).	This activity aims to give the actors some background on Vita and Harold, identify the 'given circumstances' or 'facts' of their lives and give some biographical and chronological context to their letters. I will reference some of their documentary materials including pictures, letters, and newspaper articles.

Questions/ Discussion	I will encourage the actors to ask any questions and make any comments as they arise during my 'presentation'. However, post-presentation there will be time dedicated to questions, comments, and discussion. This will be recorded (with the actors' permission).	Reflection is a core component of both this research's overall methodology and the creative practice's dramaturgical process. Giving the actors the opportunity to question, comment, and discuss the information they have encountered so far marks the beginning of the reflective process. It also helps them to begin to develop their own personal understanding of Vita and Harold and the documentary material
Homework	I will ask each actor to identify a letter or section of a letter that they are drawn to from the 'master doc' of Harold and Vita's documentary material that I have compiled. I will do this too.	The intention of this 'homework' is that we will share our selection at the next session.

Missy to do post-rehearsal:

- Transcribe any pertinent or potentially useful sections of our recorded group discussion etc.

  (Based on previous experience, I anticipate that my transcription rate is roughly 1 hour of audio in 3 hours).
- Identify a letter to share at the next rehearsal.

SESSION 2 - (2 hours)

Activity	Description	Rationale/Goal
Share Selected Letters	We will each share our selected letter (session 1 homework) and explain/discuss why we chose it. This will be recorded (with the actors' permission).	This exercise is relatively undemanding and enables the actors to begin to familiarise themselves with the documentary material. It could also be the first step in the process of narrowing down which material will be used in the script. It similarly contributes to my desired reflexive dramaturgy, as by considering why we are drawn to certain bits of documentary material over others we are potentially identifying any latent biases and inclinations that could influence the structure/ narrative of the work.
Letter Editing Exercise	I will prepare three versions of two letters, one written by Harold and one by Vita, to be read aloud by the actors. The first will be the letters as they were originally written/published. The second version will be edited slightly, with a few sentences removed etc. The final version will be more obviously edited, with the content of the two letters interwoven into a dialogue. This exercise will be recorded (with the actors' permission).	This exercise seeks to be an exploration of the power of editing, illustrating how editing might impact context which can then alter/shape both the narrative and the dramaturgy. It also aims to evidence the constructivist nature of truth and authenticity in documentary theatre. In the sense that all the documentary material used for this exercise is from the archive, nothing has been fabricated, and no words have been added. Yet, the re-framing of the material can vastly alter its potential meaning. The context of the words can carry just as much meaning, if not more, than the actual words themselves.
Questions/ Discussion	Opportunity for questions, comments, reflections, and discussions on the two activities. This will be recorded (with the actors' permission).	This enables group reflection on the 'ethics of editing' in documentary theatre and the potential ethical considerations around overtly editing/condensing documentary material to construct an engaging dramaturgy.

Homework	Based on The Tectonic Theatre Project's 'Moment work' technique, I will ask each actor (and myself) to make a 'Moment' from their chosen letter and consider one way it could be presented/performed at the next session.	Director Moisés Kaufman, playwright Doug Wright, and actor Jefferson Mays did a similar activity when workshopping *I Am My Own Wife* at the 2000 Sundance Theatre Lab in Utah (Wright, 2004, p. 74). This aims to facilitate the actors' connection with Harold and Vita's documentary material in an engaging way while also functioning as a stepping stone in our dramaturgical exploration of the theatrical potential of the documentary material.

References

Wright, D. (2004). Portrait of an Enigma. *American Theatre*, *21*(1), 65–79.

Missy to do post-rehearsal:

- Transcribe relevant sections of recorded group discussion.
- Prepare my 'moment' for the next session.

SESSION 3 – (2 hours)

Activity	Description	Rationale/Goal
Share 'Moments'	Each actor (and I) will present the moment they have devised. They can incorporate other actors and any other elements available to them in the room if needed/desired.	This will be our first time attempting to 'perform' any of Harold and Vita's material. It may potentially yield 'content' or ideas that can be used and further developed in the piece. It will also further the actors a sense of agency and familiarity with the material.
Discussion and Reflection on Moments	After each person has presented their Moment, as a group we will reflect and discuss the results.	In this discussion, we can identify/comment on what 'worked' and what didn't, and how these moments might be further developed and improved.
Link the Moments	Working collaboratively, we will venture to link our four separate Moments into a performable dramaturgical/narrative structure. We may try multiple different sequences and slightly tweak the moments into different 'cohesive' options.	This activity serves as an exploration of how narrative can be created. Because the presentation of the material influences how it will be received, this exercise could be a useful way to consider what kind of play this could be. E.g. Is it a love story, a history lesson, idea-based, event-based etc? Additionally, being able to link different fragments of documentary material together into an effective and intelligible narrative will be essential to the work's comprehensibility/clarity. From this activity, we may identify some of the potential challenges we might face connecting/'storying' the material.

Missy to do post-rehearsal:

- Identify other 'moments' to work on next rehearsal.
- Think about how some of the recorded group discussion material could be incorporated with the historical documentary material.

APPENDIX C - FINAL REFLECTIVE RECORDED GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. From your perspective, as an actor and collaborator in the construction of *What Remains*, do you feel that posthumous documentary theatre makers (& actors etc.) have and should consider an ethical obligation/responsibility towards their deceased subjects?
   - How might these differ from documentary theatre practices with living subjects?
   - How do they impact/influence the dramaturgical construction of the work?

2. Did an awareness of ethical considerations influence your process and performance as an actor?
   - Was it helpful/useful, good/bad. Challenging etc. as an actor to be aware of potential ethical considerations when working with documentary material?

3. Has your approach to your work in this process been different to other non-verbatim theatre projects you have been involved in? If yes, how so?

4. Do you have any insights or advice from your involvement in this process that may be useful to other actors/theatre makers who may be acting in or embarking on a posthumous documentary theatre project?

5. Any other comments or reflections?

APPENDIX D - ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL LETTER

Te Wānanga o Ngā Kete | Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences

The University of Waikato
Private Bag 3105
Hamilton 3240
New Zealand

Te Piringa – Faculty of Law
Dr Nathan John Cooper
Tel: +64 7 838 4463
Email: nathan.cooper@waikato.ac.nz
www.waikato.ac.nz

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Missy Mooney

Laura Haughey
Declan Patrick

School of Arts

24 June 2021

Dear Missy

Re: FS2021-31: Posthumous Documentary Theatre: Re-presenting Historical Documentary Material Onstage (working title, this is subject to change)

Thank you for submitting your revised application to the ALPSS Human Research Ethics Committee. We have reviewed the final electronic version of your application and the Committee is now pleased to offer formal approval for your research activities as detailed therein.

Please contact the Committee should issues arise during your data collection, or should you wish to add further research activities or make changes to your project as it unfolds. We wish you all the best with your research. Thank you for engaging with the process of ethical review.

Kind regards

Nathan Cooper, Chair

Division of Arts, Law, Psychology & Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee

APPENDIX E - ACTOR INFORMATION SHEET AND CONSENT FORM

ACTOR INFORMATION SHEET

I, Missy Mooney, am a postgraduate student at the University of Waikato studying towards a PhD in Theatre Studies. My thesis is focused on the construction of posthumous documentary theatre. This can be understood as the process of creating a play from pre-existing documentary materials such as letters, diaries, personal writings etc after the death of the document's originator(s). In conjunction with a written thesis this research intends to incorporate a creative practice in the form of an original posthumous documentary theatre play. I aim to create the play, with permission from the copyright holders, primarily from the published letters and personal writings of Vita Sackville-West and her husband Harold Nicolson.

WHAT WILL YOU BE DOING?

By participating as an actor in this project you are consenting to take part in the rehearsal process and performance of an original piece of documentary theatre.

This will require:

- **Commitment to attending all rehearsals/workshops you are called for.**

You will be committing to a rehearsal period of approximately 4 months with regular rehearsals 1-2 times a week for 2-3 hours at a time. However, the exact rehearsal dates and times can be negotiated to best suit the cast. Missy will be the primary 'creator' of the script, but the piece will be developed through creative collaborative workshopping with the actors in rehearsal. It is expected that you will respond willingly to directions and learn/memorise your lines outside of rehearsals.

- **Participation in Recorded Group Discussions.**

During the rehearsal process Missy intends to facilitate group discussions with the actors. These discussions will be audio recorded so they can be accurately transcribed (by Missy). These recordings and transcripts will serve as a record of the rehearsal process. Missy also intends to incorporate sections of the group discussion transcripts verbatim (word for word) in the play script and/or in the written thesis. You will receive copies of the transcripts to review and will be asked to indicate if there is anything said that you do not wish to appear in the play script and/or the written thesis. Only sections of the transcripts will be

considered for use in the play script, not the whole discussion. Missy will be the only person with access to these recorded discussions.

You will be in control of your level of participation in these discussions. Please do not feel pressured to answer any questions or contribute if you do not feel comfortable. You can withdraw from any discussion at any time. It is not usual for support persons to be present at private rehearsals however, if required, this can be arranged.

- **Performance/presentation of the play.**

There will be a non-commercial performance of the piece for an invited audience. The date and venue for this performance are yet to be confirmed, but it is likely that it will take place at the University of Waikato.

- **Post-performance interviews and group discussions**

After the performance, Missy will conduct a final recorded group discussion and reflective individual interviews. These individual interviews will involve you (as an actor) preparing a brief written response via email to a short list of questions about your experience working on the play. The exact questions will be decided after the creative process is complete. The questions will invite reflective thought on the rehearsal process, its challenges, and any insight/realisations you may wish to share. You again will be asked if there are any parts of your response(s) that you don't want referenced in Missy's written thesis.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

The outcomes of this research will be an original/new piece of documentary theatre and a written thesis. These will ultimately be published online in the University of Waikato research depository (University of Waikato Research Commons). This research may also be used for other research outputs such as presentations or other written publications. You will be informed of all research outputs.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Participants will be asked to indicate how they wish to be acknowledged for their contribution to this project. If you do not wish to be identified by name in either the published script or the written thesis you can request anonymity and a pseudonym will be used in place of your real name.

- You may be happy to be named in the written thesis but would prefer to be anonymous in the playscript.

- You may want to be acknowledged by name for your contribution to the script but don't want your name to be linked to your specific responses. In this instance you will be acknowledged by name in the preface to the play and a pseudonym will be used in the play script.
- Alternatively, you may wish to only be referred to by your first name.

You will be asked to indicate how you wish to be identified on the consent form and you may change your decision at any point before the submission of the thesis.

STORAGE OF INFORMATION

It is University of Waikato policy that data is held for at least five years. Missy intends to store the research data indefinitely. The recorded group discussions, transcripts etc will be stored on a password-protected computer. Missy will be the only person with access. The final performance/presentation of the play will be recorded for assessment purposes.

YOUR RIGHTS

- You will be sent the transcripts of the group discussions to review and will be asked to indicate any material you wish **NOT** to be included in the play script or written thesis.
- You can withdraw all of your recorded discussion material, or sections of it, no later than 2 weeks before the scheduled performance.
- In consenting to participate as an actor in this research it is expected that you are committing to the whole process from rehearsal to performance. However, in the context of this research, you are not obliged to stay the course. Therefore, you have up until 2 months before the performance date to withdraw from the research. To withdraw you must inform the researcher via email.
- You will not receive payment/compensation of any kind for your participation in this research.

THIS INFORMATION SHEET

Please keep this information sheet. If you have any questions about this research, please contact **Missy**: mcem1@students.waikato.ac.nz

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email alpss-ethics@waikato.ac.nz , postal address, Division of Arts, Law, Psychology and Social Sciences, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wananga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
DIVISION of ARTS, LAW, PSYCHOLOGY & SOCIAL SCIENCES

ACTOR CONSENT FORM

[A completed copy of this form should be retained by both the researcher and the participant]

Name of participant: _____

I have received a copy of the Actor Information Sheet describing the research project. Any questions that I have, relating to the research, have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can ask further questions about the research at any time during my participation.

During the group discussions & individual interview, I understand that I do not have to answer questions unless I am happy to talk about the topic. I can stop the discussion/interview at any time.

When I sign this consent form, I will retain ownership of my discussion/interview responses, but I give consent for the researcher to use the responses for the purposes of the research outlined in the Actor Information Sheet.

Please complete the following checklist. Tick [✓] the appropriate box for each point.	**YES**	**NO**
I consent to my participation in group discussions to be recorded.		
I am happy to be **identified** by my real name in **ALL** presentations of the research findings (the play script, thesis and other potential research outputs)		
I wish for my identity to remain **confidential** in **ALL** presentations of the research findings (the play script, thesis and other potential research outputs), and request the use of a pseudonym.		
I wish to have different levels of anonymity for the **DIFFERENT** presentations of the research findings (the play script, thesis and other potential research outputs).		

Participant :	_____	Researcher :	_____
Signature :	_____	Signature :	_____
Date :	_____	Date :	_____
Contact Details :	_____	Contact Details :	_____
	_____		_____
	_____		_____

APPENDIX F - FLYER FOR *WHAT REMAINS*

"I'm interested in the life of these letters, you know? Although they were never written to be said aloud, there's something about them that I want to hear them out loud."

Constructed over 50 years after their deaths from the letters they left behind, ***What Remains*** stages the enduring love and letters of Vita Sackville-West & Harold Nicolson.

This original piece of posthumous documentary theatre explores the re-presentation of historical documentary material onstage, and how the creative encounter of 'fact' (the documentary material) and fiction (its theatrical expression) is a unique theatrical process with distinct ethical challenges.

Constructed & directed by **Missy Mooney** as a practical creative component of her PhD research: **Posthumous Documentary Theatre: Representing Historical Documentary Material Onstage.**

Featuring actors: **Lily Empson, Megan Goldsman & Conor Maxwell**

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

APPENDIX G – PROGRAMME FOR *WHAT REMAINS*

Constructed by Missy Mooney

CAST

Lily Empson:	Missy, Violet
Megan Goldsman:	Vita, Megan & Lily
Conor Maxwell:	Harold, Conor

THANKS TO:

Alec Forbes:	Lighting Design & Operation
Oliver Stewart:	Videography
Ben Whitehouse:	Still Photography
My PhD Supervisory Panel:	Declan Patrick, Laura Haughey & Karen Barbour
Mum, Dad & Hannah	

What should I do in life without you? I would be lost and lonely, like a jam-jar floating in the North Sea.
- Harold Nicolson

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

ABOUT THE PLAY

What Remains: The Love and Letters of Vita Sackville-West & Harold Nicolson is a piece of 'posthumous documentary theatre.' This is an original term that I use to refer to the process of creating a play from pre-existing documentary materials such as letters, diaries, personal writings etc. after the death of the document's originator(s). Every word spoken in this play comes, word for word, from documentary sources including published volumes of Harold and Vita's letters, diaries, and personal writings, and the transcripts of recorded group discussions between myself and the actors that took place during the rehearsal process in 2022.

Created as a practical creative component of my PhD, *What Remains* is both an original creative work and a practical investigative research tool. It simultaneously serves as a representation of my research and the research itself. I am interested in how posthumous documentary theatre may differ to documentary theatre practices with living subjects and the symbiotic relationship (and potential tension) between notions of ethics and dramaturgy when creating posthumous documentary theatre. The process of mediating Vita and Harold's historical material from their original letter form into a contemporary theatre context, experimenting with fragmentation, juxtaposition, montage, direct address, physical dramaturgy and other dramaturgical strategies, has enabled me to practically explore this tension.

Constructing *What Remains* has been a fascinating, challenging, and productive research experience. The rehearsal room has been a place of thinking, questioning, doubt, and discovery, but also laughter and joy. I find so much beauty in Harold and Vita's words. I hope you find it too.

- Missy Mooney 7th September 2022

APPENDIX H - INTRODUCTION TO THE PERFORMANCE OF *WHAT REMAINS*

Nau mai, haere mai, tena koutou katoa. Hello, welcome. I'm Missy Mooney and firstly, I want to thank you all so very much for coming along tonight to support me, and the actors: Megan Goldsman, Lily Empson, and Conor Maxwell. As most of you are aware, the play you're about to experience, *What Remains: The Love and Letters of Vita Sackville-West & Harold Nicolson,* is the practical creative component of my PhD research.

What Remains is an original piece of posthumous documentary theatre constructed entirely from documentary material, majority of which are the letters and diaries of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson. I'd like to thank Curtis Brown Publishing UK, specifically Norah and Jodi, who granted me permission to use Harold and Vita's published material to make this play as part of my research.

I created *What Remains* because I'm specifically interested in the dramaturgical and ethical considerations of constructing posthumous documentary theatre and how they might differ to documentary practices with living subjects.

Generally speaking, due to its use of 'real world'/'non-fiction material', documentary theatre actively engages with and seeks to represent the lives of others on stage. Many theatre makers, actors and directors agree that this warrants a level of ethical consideration, as the creative and theatrical representation of real people's lives, words, and stories runs the risk of genuine harm. Often, the documentary theatre maker's predominant ethical concern is the potential for harm to occur via the misrepresentation or exploitation of the people whose words and experiences have been used to inform the play's content. Usually, to address these concerns theatre makers will communicate and consult with their documentary subjects. They might send them the transcripts of any interviews conducted and ask them to review and indicate anything they don't want to be included in the script. They may even invite them to rehearsals so they can see how they are going to be fully represented in the theatrical event.

When creating posthumous documentary theatre none of these are viable options. Harold and Vita died over 50 years ago, I can't ask them how they feel about the way I've represented them in this play, therefore the more 'typical' ethical processes that I've used when working on past documentary theatre projects have had to be re-evaluated.

The actors and I have spent a lot of time considering how the ethical obligations we might feel towards the dead might differ from those we feel towards the living. Can the dead be harmed, do they have a right to privacy, and to what extent should a kind of 'historic truth' be expected from a work of art? How might using the imagination in the construction of posthumous documentary theatre be "an assault on historical accuracy?" (Martin, 2013, p. 11). These are but some of the many questions that arose during the creation of this work and I don't have an objective answer to any of them. However, what I can say is that this has been an exciting and unique theatrical process with distinct ethical and dramaturgical challenges.

The construction of the script for *What Remains*; the editing and structuring of the material into a performable narrative was the initial dramaturgical task, the next was its physical realisation in the space with the actors, and frequently these two components worked symbiotically. I would bring bits of script into rehearsal. We'd read it, talk about it, and try it out in the space, and this would then influence the next draft. And here we are 5 months and 8 drafts later.

And it is thanks to Conor, Lily, and Megan that we are here. They've been so willing, generous, thoughtful, dedicated, patient and supportive. This process has not been as simple as just showing up to rehearsal and learning your lines. They've been involved in the development of the work since before there was anything to develop. They've sat through zoom PowerPoint presentations detailing the chronology of key events of Vita and Harold's lives, been asked to learn intricate sections of verbatim speech, and then unlearn them when I decide to cut them a week later. They've adapted to online rehearsals as we've navigated various periods of COVID-19 isolation and so much more. Working with them has

been a dream come true and, as Harold remarks, “immortal love, immortal gratitude. These cannot die.”

Included in the play is a section of verbatim testimony recorded during a rehearsal in which I question ‘what kind of play this could be.’ Ultimately, *What Remains* is many different things: a research activity, a documentary play, a love story, a work of art, even a bit of a history lesson. But it is also a kind of act of theatrical remembrance and commemoration. It is the acknowledgement of past lives via present ones. So, while we sit in the dark together, let’s spare a quick thought for the dead, for Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson, and for our own friends and whānau who are no longer here with us. Let’s say their names out loud so they are of the present once more, If only for tonight.

APPENDIX I - AUDIO MONTAGE TRANSCRIPT

The Sound of typing.

MISSY: Right so

MISSY: Um/

MISSY: Sweet, so I'm actually guna / start

MISSY: This letter was written you know over a hundred years ago

MISSY: -and this is a letter that Harold wrote to Vita-

MISSY: Harold and Vita/

MISSY: Letters of Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson

MISSY: Their letters/ and their biographies

MISSY: and now more than 50 years after their deaths I'm reading it to you.

LILY: Just quickly before we move on-

MISSY: Oooah / of course

LILY, CONOR & MEGAN: *Laughter*

LILY: So this- I was actually guna pick this letter.

MISSY: Right/ okay doke

MISSY: Cool. So-

MEGAN: Just thinking about like the letters-

MISSY: I wanted to start with a letter because that's kind of where I started-

MEGAN: -that's what remains.

MISSY: -There's something about them that I want to hear them out loud.

CONOR: Alright.

MISSY: Every single word here-

CONOR: Am I good to go?

MISSY: -is from the letters. / I haven't added anything in, nothing is made up

MISSY: Yeah.

MISSY: Hopefully as well that you can see from the material that there is po-potential/ to make a, like a feasible piece of theatre from it and it's not just

MISSY: You know, is this a documentary play? Is it a love story? Who knows.

CONOR: Oh, for sure

MEGAN: Oh my god. / I was just thinking how are you going to actually narrow it down?

MISSY & CONOR: Mmm yeah

MISSY: I dunno.

The sound of typing fades out.