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## Review of Operations

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Urban Theatre Projects (UTP) undertook a wide range of activities in 2009 in the research, development and presentation of theatre and performance new works, including:

- *The Fence* a creative development and rehearsal period for 2010 Sydney Festival work, directed by Artistic Director Alicia Talbot;
- *The Football Diaries* a rehearsal and public season of writer/performer Ahilan Ratnamohan's solo work at Hackett House in Bankstown;
- *Stories of Love and Hate* a conference format presentation at Museum of Contemporary Art Sydney, accompanying Fiona Foley's exhibition;
- *Posts in the Paddock* a creative development stage of a new co-produced with My Darling Patricia;
- *State We Are In* a research and development phase of the 2009 Intersection residency by artists Rosie Dennis, Jeff Stein and Paul Gazzola.

In 2009, we presented Ahilan Ratnamohan's solo work *The Football Diaries*, directed by Lee Wilson. *The Football Diaries* is a meditation on art and sport in which an engaging personal story merges with new dance, popular culture and contemporary life in Australia. The work attracted new audiences to UTP during the two-week season in April and later in 2009 the work was invited to the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown in July 2010.

UTP also continued the development of a new Sydney Festival co-commission *The Fence*. *The Fence* is a tale of love, belonging and healing. It is an emotional and tender work that looks at the adult lives of five family and friends who spent their childhoods in orphanages, institutions and foster homes. In 2009 UTP undertook a four-week creative development followed by a six-week rehearsal period on site in Parramatta. This work involved our public dialogue process and UTP worked with thirty-three community consultants with experiences of growing up in care, both Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians. The company formed partnerships with eight advocacy, peak and industry organisations to support the development of *The Fence*.

In 2009, UTP continued the residency program called Intersection. This initiative offers artists wages, venue, artistic and management support in the research and development of new performance works.

*Posts is the Paddock* is a collaboration between My Darling Patricia with Indigenous artists Nadeena Dixon and Rhonda Governor-Dixon. This project was seeded by an Intersection residency in 2008. Through visual and physical performance, the project explores the story of Jimmy Governor. In 2009 the creative team worked on a puppet and set build combined with a research/writing period, followed by a research trip with collaborating artists through regional NSW, following the route of Jimmy Governor. This was followed by a three-week development that culminated in a showing to at Casula Powerhouse. The work will undergo a further creative development period in 2010.

UTP also conducted a research and development that took place at Auburn Central, Auburn Community Development Network and at Urban Theatre Projects. *High Rise*, involved 4 senior western Sydney artists who are affiliated with other key arts organisations across the region including ICE and Casula Powerhouse. *High Rise* is

a new performance and installation project to be developed in partnership with Auburn Community Development Network (ACDN) and located in a public housing estate in Auburn.

In May, UTP's long standing General Manager Simon Wellington left the organisation to take up a new opportunity at the City of Sydney. The UTP Board set about recruiting a new co-CEO and appointed Michelle Kotevski as Executive Producer in July.

UTP became a member of and attended the Informal European Theatre Meeting Network (IETM) in Vilnius, Lithuania in October, extending and consolidating our relationships in the international arena.

## Financial Management

In 2009 UTP's operations resulted in a deficit of \$14,687. This is the first deficit for the company in many years. There are a number of factors that determined this outcome.

- In the shrinking philanthropic environment of the last year, a number of philanthropic grants made by UTP were unsuccessful.
- In May 2009, long term General Manager Simon Wellington left the organization. In order to deliver the program, UTP's remaining part-time team took on full time employment for over three months.
- An Executive Producer was appointed and commenced in July 2009. Given the challenges of staff turn over and major project delivery, it was not prudent for staff to take significant leave, thus the organization accrued this liability.
- The State Property Authority, which owned the Marsden Institute- the site for the rehearsal and performance of *The Fence*, was unable to provide infrastructure such as power and water, which resulted in unforeseen budget impacts on the project.

The company's annual turnover of \$624,421 was higher than 2008 (\$592,548), due to the creative development and rehearsal on site of our major new work *The Fence* (premier January 2010) and investment from the Thyne Reid Foundation in the Artistic Associate role.

Government arts grants increased from \$459,072 in 2008 to \$510,000. As a percentage of overall income arts grants represented 78.9% of total income. This is 1.5% higher than 2008 (77.4%). This is a reflection of the intensive new work development in 2009 (3 new works), and the first year of operating under increased triennial support arrangements from the Australia Council.

UTP's goal is to reduce this percentage over the triennium to an average of 64%. This reflects the uncertainty and instability of the non-arts funding environment, particularly philanthropic sources. UTP is continuing to build its relationships with non arts sources across government and philanthropic sector to achieve this target by the end of the triennium.

A significant income variation on the previous year was in the area of box office/performance fees. UTP had one self-presented season in 2009 of a small-scale work *The Football Diaries*, as opposed to two presentations in 2008. These

were the major Sydney Festival work *The Last Highway* and the self-presentation of *Stories of Love and Hate*.

The most notable expenditure variations from 2008 to 2009 were:

- Salaries and Fees increasing from \$331,374 to \$386,449. This reflects the investment in the new Artistic Associate role, the shift from part time to full time work for part time staff during the absence of General Manager/ Executive Producer and then transition period, and an investment in the wages for the development and rehearsal of *The Fence*.
- Provision for annual leave increased from \$4,554 in 2008 to \$23,480 in 2009. This reflects increased staffing and team costs, and an accumulation of leave due to operational requirements, and an increase of employees from 26 in 2008 to 43 in 2009. In 2010 and 2011 there is a strategy to reduce leave liabilities amongst staff being implemented.

In 2008 UTP achieved DGR status, and this status did increase the organization's access to philanthropic donations for 2009. In 2008 donations represented 1.5% of turnover. In 2009 donations represented increasing the organization's ability donations rose to 3.6% of turnover.

In 2009 UTP discharged of Long Service and Leave liabilities for its outgoing General Manager Simon Wellington.

Accumulated Reserves decreased due to the operating deficit from \$127,476 (21.5%) to \$112,789. The Reserve Asset Ratio for 2009 was 18.06%, reflecting a healthy financial position.

### Directors in 2009

The names of the directors in office at any time during or since the end of the company's financial year are: Jenny Bissett, Tim Carroll, Claudia Chidiac, Devleena Gosh, Bill Harris, Tanja Farman, Lily Shearer, Simon Wellington (resigned 8 May 2009), Alicia Talbot and Michelle Kotevski.

# The Football Diaries

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*Played at close range, confined in a small space and patterned into something approaching dance, Ratnamohan's ball skills are enviable and entertaining...His narration is engaging and his observations on the ugly side of the so-called "beautiful game" are acute.*

Sydney

Morning Herald

## Artistic Team

Director	Lee Wilson
Performer	Ahilan Ratnamohan
Set & Lighting	Mirabelle Wouters
Dramaturg	Alicia Talbot
Sound Artist	James Brown
Sound Artist	Lara Thoms and Frederick Rodrigues
Technical Operations	Joshua Emanuel
Production Manager	Neil Simpson
Creative Development (Stage 1)	Artistic Collaborator Karen Therese
Program Text co-writer	Lux Ratnamohan

## Timeline

Research and Development	18 - 31 August
Stage 2	8 - 19 December
Creative Development	9 - 20 February
Rehearsal	23 March - 17 April
Performance Season	26 April - 2 May

## Venue

Hackett House, Old Town Plaza Bankstown

## Project Description

*The Football Diaries* is a meditation on art and sport in which an engaging personal story merges with new dance, popular culture and contemporary life in Australia. Cross disciplinary in its aesthetic and approach, *The Football Diaries* combines spoken word with dance and video installation to introduce a new voice to contemporary theatre. Ahilan Ratnamohan, a young Sri-Lankan/Australian footballer, makes a direct and complex address to his audience, taking them into a world where dreams and aspirations clash with jarring realities.

Ahilan's narrative, drawn from his own journal writings, combined with his virtuoso soccer skills, gives the audience an insight into an athletes' experience of space, time and emotion. This is a truly original theatre experience, operating at the level of immediate enjoyment and wonder, with layers of social commentary and philosophy creating a strong and lasting impression. Throughout the development and rehearsal Ahilan Ratnamohan, worked closely with director/devisor Lee Wilson to devise, rehearse and perform this 50-minute solo theatre work.

*Impressive physically, brilliant script, engaging performance.*

Respondent, *The Football Diaries*; Audience Survey, April 2009

This project was selected for development as part of UTP's inaugural Intersection residency program. The work underwent creative development in 2008 and

premiered in 2009 at UTP's rehearsal studio in Hackett House, Old Town Plaza, Bankstown.

*Ahil Ratnamohan flings himself into the yellow space to show off his athleticism and skills with the ball. It makes for a dramatic close range spectacle...*  
The Sydney Morning Herald

Staged in an intimate venue, with lighting and design by Mirabelle Wouters the set consists of three yellow walls and a white floor. Abstract lines on the floor hint at field-markings. The audience sits on bleacher-type seating. Stage properties are minimal - Three soccer balls, a bottle of water/sports drink and a change of football jersey hanging off a hook. The audience feels the crackle of the large, stadium gaslight. Its glow from the floor at the front of the stage saturates the 'field' often throwing multiples of Ahilan's shadow onto the walls throughout the performance.

The performance text moves between biographical narrative, the science of football and Ahilan's own recollection of recent historical football events. A subtle, intriguing link between these three textual components begins to emerge. Inter-cut with this is movement phrases, an original blend of athletic virtuosity and football skill that create a new form of dance.

*Enveloped by sound and video, the experience is one of being on the field, ready for a pass, and part of this unique and moving journey.*  
Bankstown-Canterbury Torch

Ahilan's physical and spoken performance is punctuated by video installations from Lara Thoms and Fred Rodrigues. These consist of slow motion archival footage of football hero Johan Cruyff's grace and virtuosity, reiterating Ahilan's search for beauty. Additional new video combines textures and iconic patterns to contrast and augment the archival footage. The video works in synchronicity with audio pieces created by sound artist James Brown – at times echoing football crowds and stadium sounds - to evoke tender nostalgia or athletic exhilaration.

*The company's confidence in me was re-assuring. The freedom that was given to me, and the trust placed in me, to then spend time on my own personal development was very refreshing. More so was the emphasis that was placed on the outcomes of this development...in the actual creative process, the performance has been very challenging, however in a good way. All of the senior artists I worked with tested me, but supported me very well. Conceptually the piece is like solving a jigsaw puzzle - which, again, thanks to so many confronting questions from peers - I feel I am slowly solving.*

Ahilian Ratnamohan

### ***The Football Diaries* Expendable Chapters**

The program for the work included a number of pieces of short writing by Ahilan and his brother Lux. The idea was sparked around by a book of short pieces by French journalist Paul Fournel based around the highly intimate experience of cycling, *The Need for The Bike*. The program featured some of Ahil's writing and a number of pieces written by Lux that were based on discussions with Ahil.

The writing highlighted idiosyncratic events, moments and images in Ahil's pursuit of the beautiful game.

*Had it not been for UTP ...I probably wouldn't be performing. Since India@Oz.sangam in 2003, I've been nurtured by UTP as a performer, creating performances for Short n Sharp 3 & 4 in 2004 and 2005 respectively as well as being a part of the UTP Ensemble. In 2007, despite my being in Europe pursuing football, Alicia asked me to audition for The Last Highway, which she allowed me to do via internet video. Though I didn't get the part, Alicia ended up asking me to perform a cameo role in the Sydney Festival show, which was a great experience, just being involved with such a professional cast. UTP are currently auspicing an Australia Council Theatre Board grant, which I have received to research and develop a future work The Phorena.*

Ahilian Ratnamohan

## Audience & Box Office

In its premiere season at Hackett House in Bankstown *The Football Diaries* was performed 11 times from 22 April- 2 May 2008. Total attendance for the public season was 404, at 86% capacity, comprising 65% paid attendance and a box office of \$4,645.

The audience survey's response rate was of 41%. An overwhelming majority (**97%**) of the respondents or loved (**74%**) or liked (**23%**) the show. Unlike past UTP audience surveys, there were slightly more male (**55%**) respondents than female (**45%**). This can probably be explained by the subject matter (football).

Most (**74%**) of the respondents were also between 18 and 44 years of age. Almost two thirds were born Australia. The rest were born mostly in non-English speaking countries (**25%**).

The majority (**56%**) of the audience members' were new to UTP performances. A great majority (**80%**) of respondents had been to a live performance in the last 12 months with almost half (**48%**) of the respondents having been to 5 or more. A fifth (**20%**) were new audience members.

Most respondents (65%) enjoyed the form of the show especially Ahil's graceful and expert football skills. Over a third of respondents (38%) also enjoyed the way in which the skills and message about racism were intertwined. More specific comments included:

- The emotional content took me on a journey to the wild European professional soccer league and the trials and tribulations that I would never have appreciated otherwise
- made footy look like art. And for someone who dislikes soccer that's amazing
- another way of seeing a live event that isn't theatre but creates a similar fee(ling)
- Introduced a beautiful aesthetic to an audience which may not have been previously aware of this aspect of the game
- The ability to relate to everyone and share something even though many would have no idea about football



- The combination of theatre and sport and finding one in the other
- It was history told in an exciting new way and it was an amazing story, one I'd never heard
- It was incredibly honest. Loved the dissection of race - not something you see often on Aus stages - not inner city anyway. Portrayed Football in a beautiful way. I've never appreciated its athleticism and rhythm before
- Link between low art football and high art ballet
- A work of power and grace

## Posts In the Paddock

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Produced by Urban Theatre Projects with visual performance company My Darling Patricia, *Posts in the Paddock* is a new interdisciplinary performance by My Darling Patricia. Harnessing My Darling Patricia's poetically savage visual imagery and delicate performance making, *Posts in the Paddock* is a collaboration with indigenous artists and non-indigenous artists, with a direct family connection to the story of Jimmy Governor. Through the oral histories of two families, the work investigates broader questions around shared grief and shame and contemporary dialogues of reconciliation. The initial research and development for this work took place in September 2008, supported by UTP's Intersection Residency.

The creative development activities for *Posts in the Paddock* consisted of three blocks of time, taking place in May and June 2009. First was a puppet and set build combined with a research/writing period, followed by a research trip with collaborating artists and then a three-week development with the cast that culminated in a showing to a small audience at Casula Powerhouse.

### Artistic Team

#### Puppet and Set Build

My Darling Patricia

Clare Britton, Halcyon Macleod

Puppet Maker

Bryony Anderson

#### NSW Research Tour

My Darling Patricia

Clare Britton, Halcyon Macleod &  
Katrina Gill

Cultural Advisor

Lily Shearer

Collaborating Artists

Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor &  
Nadeena Dixon

Video & Photography

Michelle Blakeney

Family consultant

Katy Britton

#### Creative Development

My Darling Patricia

Clare Britton, Halcyon Macleod &  
Katrina Gill

Cultural Advisor

Lily Shearer

Collaborating Artists

Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor &  
Nadeena Dixon

Video & Photography

Michelle Blakeney

Performers/Puppeteers

Sam Routledge and LeRoy Parsons

Sound designer

Declan Kelly

Image Consultant

Tess Allas

Artistic Consultants

Alicia Talbot & Iina Kastoumis

### Venue

Puppet and Set Build

Wauchope NSW

Research Tour

Dubbo, Wellington, *Merriwa*

Creative Development

UTP Rehearsal Studio, Hackett House &  
Casula Powerhouse

## Timeline

4 - 22 May	Build and image design
25 - 29 May	NSW Research Tour
1 - 19 May	Creative Development

## Project Activities

### Build & Image Design

For the build, My Darling Patricia (MDP) artists, Clare Britton and Halcyon Mcleod, spent three weeks in Wauchope working with puppet maker Bryony Anderson. In this time they: created prototypes of the two puppets to be used in the performance, Crow and Dingo, sourced timber from the property and used it to build part of the main set element, the fence, and built a series of shadow puppets with their screen and setting. Concurrently, Halcyon continued her research and writing of texts and for the performance.

### NSW Regional Trip

In the months preceding the build, Clare worked in consultation with Cultural advisor Lily Shearer and collaborating artist Aunty Rhonda Dixon-Grovenor to plan a five-day itinerary for a research trip through Central Western NSW. Lily and Aunty Rhonda provided advice on protocol and contacts to approach along the route. A team of artists was assembled including three members of My Darling Patricia, documentary maker and photographer, Michelle Blakeney, Lily Shearer, Aunty Rhonda and Katy Britton - Clare's mother and family member of the O'Brien's in the Governor story.

The main goal of the trip was to meet people and visit places connected to the story of Jimmy Governor in order to learn more about the story from a range of perspectives. It was also planned with the aims of recording audio and visual material for use in the performance and creating opportunities for conversations and reflection amongst the creative team. This was a continuation of the method of exploring and creating material through informal conversation and exchange established in the early stages of the project. The schedule was deliberately flexible to allow for detours and discoveries along the way.

The group travelled to Wellington where they met with Jimmy Governor's niece and recorded an interview with her. They also spoke to a local community leader and some of his students and chatted informally about the project and the story and visited sites around the town, capturing footage of the landscape through which Jimmy Governor had traveled. The next stop was Dubbo where there were several significant connections to the story and people they hoped to meet including a visit to the Dubbo Gaol. The final stop was Merriwa and the property where the O'Brien murders took place still owned by Clare and Katy's family. Clare's relatives hosted the group and Lily and Aunty Rhonda conducted a smoking ceremony where the Posts in the Paddock stand.

*A creative challenge during the CD was figuring out how to work with real experiences and documentary style material and weave this into the imaginative world of the performance. This was new territory for MDP. As we traveled through Central NSW speaking to people, went deeper into family oral histories and published accounts, the divergent streams of the story fanned out. It became clear that it was not our task to seek a common thread but rather to represent the divergences and the personal, fragmented*

*nature of history and family. We gathered photos, recordings and experiences and wondered how to use them.*

*One of these real experiences was a smoking ceremony that took place during the research trip at The Posts, the ruins of the O'Brien house. This event felt significant both in the development of the work and for the participants and the video documentation was beautiful. We looked for a way to work with this material but it's re-telling felt awkward and misplaced until we built a scene where Aunty Rhonda described what happened in a personal, evocative style which both described the event and its significance and was also a lyrical piece of storytelling.*

My Darling Patricia

### Creative Development

Following the research trip, My Darling Patricia commenced a three-week residency spending the first week at UTP's rehearsal studio in Bankstown and two weeks at Casula Powerhouse. Additional members of the creative team, performer/puppeteers Sam Routledge and LeRoy Parsons, and sound designer Declan Kelly joined the process at this stage. For the three weeks, the team of artists worked with the puppets, set, text and recordings to generate performance material and continue to explore the story and its contemporary reverberations.

During the residency Declan recorded five songs with Aunty Rhonda and her daughter Nadeena Dixon at Redfern Community Centre. Research and discussion continued alongside the work on the rehearsal floor. Clare and Halcyon also consulted regularly with Tess Allas on cultural and artistic issues from an indigenous perspective and worked with Alicia Talbot on the structural and dramaturgical directions of the work. At the culmination of the three weeks, a small audience of family members and friends connected to the project were invited, along with possible presenters and funding body representatives, to share a morning tea, hear about the project and watch a performance of some of the elements created so far.

### Impact of the project

This creative development project allowed MDP to deepen and evaluate their investigation of their subject matter, build a creative team and get to a point where a significant amount of material is in place and *Posts in the Paddock* can now continue into final stages of development and presentation.

MDP were challenged and developed their skills in working with cross cultural process, learning about protocol and collaborating with artists whose usual working practice is very different from their own. They also developed their skills as interviewers and researchers. The experience of working with UTP and drawing on the organisation and especially artistic director, Alicia Talbot, experience in working on devised, cross cultural projects imparted new skills and understanding to MDP.

*Another collision point was a meeting between personal contemporary stories, arising out of improvisations and discussions, and the themes of the Jimmy Governor story. It seemed important that we avoid portraying the inherent racism and deep discrimination in the Governor story as a relic of the past and that we engage with the contemporary realities of the experience of indigenous Australians. There were heartfelt offers of stories from individuals and the readings we'd been doing (eg Bruce Elder's 'Blood on the Wattle' and*

*Chloe Hooper's 'The Tall Man'), resonated through the discussions. In an attempt to grapple with these links between the past and present we built a scene for the showing that ultimately felt flawed and naïve, burdened by the research and the desire to voice issues arising from the group. In retrospect, it seems that we need to trust MDP's existing performance language to engage with these ideas.*

The research trip brought together a disparate group of people and created a unique opportunity for exchange and dialogue between team members and between the team and the communities they visited, opening up new ways of seeing the material and contextualizing/questioning the goals of the project. The trip also generated interest in the project in regional areas from potential audiences who know and have connection to the story.

Throughout the process there was a sense of enjoyment, satisfaction and growth on a personal level from the artists involved who spoke passionately about doing 'something real' and describing their experience of the project as 'practical reconciliation'.

Many of the challenges came in the form of managing relationships and planning and MDP dealing with the demands of a way of working that was new to the company. For the first time they were working with material that was based on something 'real' that had emotional ramifications, discovering the challenges of working cross-culturally and involving artists who don't usually work in the area of performance. In addition, the co-production relationship with UTP was a new situation for MDP and the establishment of this new relationship generated some miscommunications and confusion. A positive outcome of this was the planning of a meeting and discussion session in August, to map out a more effective relationship and the path for the project to move into presentation.

*During the CD, we worked with layering artistic practices and media, including puppetry, improvised performance, verbatim storytelling, video, and photo documentary and audio recordings. One of the most exciting areas of development was with the Dingo puppet. The puppet itself is beautiful and we discovered a series of images that spoke to the broad themes of the work: the dingo straining at it's leash, against the perimeter or hanging from the fence like a carcass. The rich metaphoric world that we found with the puppet and the material built around it, was outside the confines of time - historic or contemporary - and allowed us to use our 'MDP mode' of image building in a new context.*

My Darling Patricia

The residency was a productive period of generating material and flowed on well from the preceding build and trip. The team generally worked extremely well together and MDP were pleased by what was achieved during the period and the outcomes presented at the showing on the final day. Most of the challenges came in the form of scheduling and managing a team that weren't all used to working as performers.

*Another rewarding area of exploration was shadow puppetry which we found to be well suited to portraying complex and slippery stories arising from history and family. The dinkiness of the form clearly says that the whole story is not in the telling. It's one dimensional and full of holes. As the audience is*

*drawn into the simple narrative of the shadow puppet play, what is not being shown hangs above and around the telling.*

My Darling Patricia

## The Fence

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*The Fence* is a new performance work that looks at the entanglement of family relationships and long-time friendships. Centred on the home and marriage of Mel and Joy, we witness the story of five middle-aged Australians – four of whom grew up in care as part of the stolen generations and the ‘Forgotten Australians’. During the course of a night this complex set of relationships begin to unravel and re-form as we glimpse how each has navigated different paths as a result of their upbringing.

In 2009, UTP undertook two substantial stages of development leading to the premiere of the new work for Sydney Festival 2010.

### Artistic Team

Director / Original Concept	Alicia Talbot
Performers / Devisors	Helen Dallas, Richard Green, Kelton Pell, Skye Quill and Vicki van Hout.
Set Design	Alison Page
Story Consultant	Wayne Blair
Lighting Design	Neil Simpson
Sound Design	Liberty Kerr
Community Liaison	Irina Kastoumis
Costuming &	Katia Molino
Assistant Stage Manager	
Production Manager	Chris Axelsen
Stage Manager	Frank Mainoo
Development Co-Devisor	Queenie van de Zandt
Development Story Consultants	Wayne Blair, Irina Kastoumis, Maude Davey
Consultants	Garry Ansell, Lily Arthur, Shane Carter, Kevin Grills, Jessica Hartley, Mark Hartley, Mark Hayes, Mary Hooker, Robert House, Diane Mancuso, Wesley Marne, Kerry McKenzie, Peter, Stan Towel, Pamella Vernon, Valerie Wenberg, Paul Whitton.
Advisors and Contributors	Bonney Djuric, Eris Harrison, Teddy Hart, Vic Morrow, Sai Oo, Joanna Penglase, Deborah Pollard, Ryan Sadlier, Lily Shearer, Leonie Sheedy, Leanne Tobin, Aunty Edna Watson, Uncle Alan Watson, Lee Wilson, Fiona Winning,
Project Partners	The Alliance for Forgotten Australians, Link Up NSW Aboriginal Corporation, Mount Druitt Men’s Shed, Origins Inc, Parragirls, The Stolen Generation Alliance (SGA), South West Sydney Stolen Generations Support Group.
Walking Map	Bonney Djuric and Leanne Tobin.
Supporting Partners	Sydney Festival, Arts NSW, Australia Council, Parramatta City Council, Bankstown City

Council, Thyne Reid Foundation, State Property Authority.

## Timeline

Creative Development	22 June – 17 July 2009
Rehearsal	2 November – 11 December 2009
Re-rehearsal	4 – 12 January 2010
Premiere Season	14 – 30 January 2010

## Venue

Creative Development	Parramatta Swimming Pool
Rehearsals & Season	Old Kings School, 3 Marist Place, Parramatta

## Project Description

*The Fence* is a tale of love, belonging and healing. It is an emotional and tender work that looks at the adult lives of five family and friends who spent their childhoods in orphanages, institutions and foster homes. *The Fence* focuses on the present and how a small group of friends and family members have searched to make sense of their need for home and belonging.

The house belongs to Mel and Joy, who have been married for 20 or more years. They have a fiery partnership, and it is watching their relationship in action that carries the audience throughout the piece. Their home is a haven for long-time friends and the night starts out like any other – TV, dinner on the couch and a couple of drinks. The unexpected return of Mel's sister after a 10-year absence, unearths the past and an ordinary night turns upside down.

Set in a purpose-built suburban-Sydney home, on the grounds of a former institution, with the audience seated in the 'backyard', the protagonists engage the audience in an honest, poetic and poignant portrait of contemporary life.

Director Alicia Talbot's signature style has a filmic quality enhanced by the evocative setting and rich soundscape. Described as 'fictionalised reality', action and images unfold gradually and simultaneously with raw impact.

In light of recent political apologies to Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians suffering the "care" of the State in past decades, *The Fence* offers a fierce political commentary, with sensitivity and beauty.

In developing *The Fence*, the creative team spent 12 weeks working with Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who had grown up in orphanages, foster homes and other forms of State care. These individuals are part of the Stolen Generations and Forgotten Australians. Industry professionals also took part including health professionals, peak organisations, advocates, activists, cultural thinkers and academics. Urban Theatre Projects describes the process as public dialogue and positions the collaborators as experts within the process. Lead by Alicia, the artistic team engage in regular open dialogue to develop the script and images throughout the piece.



## Inspiration for the Work

*The Fence* is an idea that had been turning around Alicia's head since she was working on an Adelaide Festival commission in 2002. The company were based in a housing estate, about 20 minutes from the centre of Adelaide and one of the security guards, who was renowned at the housing estate for his tough tactics, spoke of his experience as a child. He related the story of how he went into a home when he was about four years old and walked out again, when he was 16 years of age. All he remembered seeing through those years was the fence. Alicia was also struck by the physical hunger of the kids during that project and, among other things, it began to evoke difficult artistic questions she wanted to investigate around how we raise and care for our children.

## Public Dialogue

*You took the time to seek us out, to authenticate stuff. To make it real. That's a major thing – It validates us and gives us recognition. That's unique for us.*  
*The Fence* –Community Consultant interviews September 2009

*The Fence* community consultation process focused on Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians who had been brought up in care settings, such as orphanages, foster homes and child welfare institutions as part of either the Stolen Generations or the Forgotten Australians.

*The Fence* employed a unique process and devising method that Alicia Talbot has developed through previous works, where community consultants are positioned as experts within the devising process. This consultative process involves community consultants and industry professionals attending rehearsals on a weekly basis, and responding to material and scenes generated through extensive discussions and long-running improvisations. The sessions were not recorded electronically - notes were taken by lina Kastoumis and distributed as comprehensive transcripts for cast, crew and the consultants. The consultants' critical and dramaturgical feedback greatly impacts on the believability of the work and brokers a relationship between opinions and observations of real, lived experience and artistic enquiry.

## Excerpt from *The Fence* consultation November 2009

*LA: There's less aggression than last time. You've toned down that aggression.*

*AT: That's what we been working on – trying to make the brother sister thing believable.*

*PW: That's a lot better. They didn't seem to be standing so long – they got into it. A lot better than it was. What would you call it?*

*AT: More believable? Yes?*

*Many consultants nod or vocally agree, "Yes".*

*AT: What would make it (the 'sister' scene) better?*

*WM: Isn't this just the introduction? It doesn't need more. It's just starting up.*

*VW: Well, before it was hurtful. Now, well he hasn't seen his sister for a long time. It brings more happiness. More joy.*

*KG: They are closer together.*

Consultants are not asked to disclose their personal stories to then be characterised on stage by actors, but rather invited to share their opinions and observations about

the world as they see it. The consultants are paid a fee for their contribution. While this sounds like a small gesture, for individuals and communities who often have the experience of being ignored, stereotyped or vilified, the ability to participate in a process where their words and opinions have the power to change the direction of a scene, or seed the idea for a new scene, is a very powerful experience.

*I was fascinated from day one. Beyond just enjoying it – I was enthralled by the process! I have never been on that side of the process. I've been an audience member – but no, never been backstage, behind the scenes.*

*The Fence* –Community Consultant interviews September 2009

On a broader community level, this process engenders community ownership through the way the work is developed, its subject, its choices of art forms and through word of mouth. For members of communities who are not often used to seeing their world presented or referred to on stage, there is a strong identification with the subject material and this provokes discussions, and a sense of pride about the community itself. Community consultants are drawn from a diversity of expertise bound by location and circumstance.

Community Liaison Consultant Lina Kastoumis facilitated this process. Lina has a strong understanding of the complexity of relationships and issues within the communities being engaged. In addition to community consultants, Lina liaised with public health professionals and cultural thinkers on a regular basis. Through this process relationships with individuals, community and service organisations in the area were developed and maintained.

Beginning in 2007 UTP developed relationships with a number of key advocacy organisations, in particular Link Up NSW and CLAN (Care Leavers Australia Network). As the project start date grew closer we also continued working relationships with previous community partners including The Men's Shed, Emerton. These organisations provided introductions to a number of individuals who then became involved in the project as consultants. As *The Fence* gathered steam UTP developed individual relationships with care-leavers who in turn brokered relationships with representative organizations such as; Origins HARP, Forgotten Australians Alliance, South West Sydney Stolen Generations Support Group, Parragirls and the Stolen Generations Alliance.

## Community Consultation Consultant statistics

### Stage 1 - Creative Development

- There were 4 primary consultation days –16 June, 17 June, 30 June and 9 July 2009.
- A total of 33 paid consultants participated in the Stage 1 consultation process; of these consultants 90% were repeat attendees.
- A total of 5 industry service workers and/or executive office bearers of partner organisations observed the consultation process.  
The workers came from the services; Link-Up NSW, Care Leavers Australia Network (CLAN), Stolen Generations Alliance (SGA), Alliance of Forgotten Australians (AFA), Origins - Healing and Recovery Program (HARP).

- A total of 57% identified as Indigenous Australian.  
The consultants represented a number of language groups and nations including Bungalung, Yawallaarran, Darug, Gamilaroi (or Kamilaroi), Bidgambul. Some members of the Stolen Generations have not been able to trace their language group or nation.
- A total of 45% consultants identified as Stolen Generations.
- A total of 42% identified as Anglo-Saxon/Celtic Australian and identified as Forgotten Australians.
- A total of 70% consultants lived in western Sydney.
- A total of 18% consultants were aged between or over 55 - 70 years.
- A total of 27% consultants were aged between 45 – 55 years.
- A total of 48% consultants were aged between 35- 45 years.
- A total of 3% consultants were aged 20 - 30 years.
- A total of 62 people attended the creative development showing on Friday 17 July 2009.

## Stage 2 – Rehearsal

- There were 3 primary consultation days – on the 12 November, 25 November and 8 December
- A total of 27 paid consultants participated in the Stage 2 consultation process; of these 95% were repeat attendees.
- A total of 8 industry service workers and/or executive office bearers of partner organisations observed the consultation process. The workers came from the services;  
Link-Up NSW, Stolen Generations Alliance (SGA), Alliance of Forgotten Australians (AFA), Origins - Healing and Recovery Program (HARP), Families Australia.
- A total of 59% identified as Indigenous Australian.  
The consultants represented a number of language groups and nations including Bungalung, Yawallaarran, Darug, Bungalung, Gamilaroi (or Kamilaroi), Bidgambul. Some members of the Stolen Generations have not been able to trace their language group or nation.
- A total of 48% consultants identified as Stolen Generations.
- A total of 41% identified as Anglo-Saxon/Celtic Australian and
- A total of 78% consultants lived in western Sydney.
- A total of 56% consultants were aged between or over 55 - 70 years.
- A total of 22% consultants were aged between 45 – 55 years.
- A total of 22% consultants were aged between 35- 45 years.
- 75 people came to the December showing.
- 65% of the consultants attended performances more than once throughout *The Fence* season at Paramatta.

## Stories of Love and Hate

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*A funny, fun, insightful and important work that won't lose you for a second ...  
200 per cent free of judgement – and full to the brim of joy"*

FBI RADIO  
(FBI-voted top theatre show of 2008)

*Stories of Love & Hate* explores great loves, broken hearts and the fragile bonds that hold our society together. At times funny, bizarre and confronting, cultures and ideologies collide in this intimate and innately Australian exploration of love and loss. Drawing on an infamous local incident, which attracted worldwide attention, *Stories of Love & Hate* considers the idea of hate as a consequence of feeling the things we love are under threat. The result is a collection of interlinking personal stories told with affection, integrity and humour.

*In repeating these stories of love and hate with such sensitivity and artistry, the performance provides us with an opportunity to re-hear our fellow citizens and to rehearse new modes of local, cultural, and national belonging.*

REALTIME #89

In 2009, a lecture style format of the work was commissioned by Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney to mark the anniversary of the 2005 Cronulla riots and was shown in response to visual artist Fiona Foley's work *Nulla 4 Eva*.

Director Roslyn Oades and three of the original cast members gave a presentation on the making of the work interspersed with 30 minutes of live performance from the show.

*... (a) resolutely truthful and non-actorly work, with a beautifully accurate rendering of the cadences, timing and slippages of real speech as opposed to the well-crafted phoniness of actors reciting lines*

The Sydney Morning Herald

## State We Are In

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In 2009 the artistic team of Rosie Dennis, Paul Gazzola and Jeff Stein completed the first stage of research & development on their 2009 Intersection residency project *State We Are In*. A transportable site-specific project that explores the shifting ground between private and public space and the question of intimacy within public exposure.

### Artistic Team

Collaborators Rosie Dennis, Paul Gazzola and Jeff Stein

### Timeline

Development phase 11 August - 23 September

### Venue

Development Hackett House & Old Town Plaza, Bankstown

## Project Description

*We are intrigued to how readily individuals relinquish personal information about themselves in such a voluntary manner and seek to parallel and mimic how such open acts of 'self exposure' within virtual domains would be regarded in the urban frame. Would people be as willing to divulge personal information in real time and space?*

*Rosie, Paul & Jeff*

Within the growing popularity of online communities such as *Facebook*, *YouTube*, *MySpace*, *Blogger* and *Wordpress*, the ability to exchange personal information, share stories, clips, relationship status, histories and future actions, transcends the traditional neighbourhood meet and greets, the workplace cooler discussions and schoolyard gossip. Community now has a global reach and the way one maintains a sense of visibility, within this expanded community inturn has taken on new manifestations.

During the development phase the artists undertook a number of practical investigations which centred around the following areas of enquiry;

- to investigate alternate ways that such 'self confessions' can be made public
- to compare the rules and permissions of virtual spaces with physical public space
- to expose the borders and conflicts that arise between public and private

*State We Are In* looked at transforming public space into a fluid zone of creation and connection. The artistic team of Rosie Dennis, Paul Gazzola and Jeff Stein set up 'shop' in the Old Town Plaza in Bankstown. Producing the public realm as a mobile site of discourse, activation and innovation. Their office was mobile, they walked the streets talking to anyone and carrying a handmade sign *make an instant you tube clip here*.

More information about the project and a number of initial you tubes videos can be accessed at the State We Are In blogspot <http://statewearein.blogspot.com/>

# High Rise

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## Artistic Team

Director/Composition	lina Kastoumis
Film-maker	Fadia Abboud
Sound designer	Khaled Sabsabi
Sound/Verbatim	Roslyn Oades
Guest Performance Artist	Paul Gazzola

Consultants Omeima Sukkarieh (ACDN) Layla Naji (ACDN)  
Hong Ong – Auburn Police Multicultural Liaison Officer  
Two local business owners and two residents.

Timeline 24 & 26 September

Venues Auburn Central Complex, ACDN & UTP.

Partners Auburn Community Development Network (ACDN).

## Research Consortium

*The noise of the world is made out of silences*

Theodore Zeldin, *Intimate History of Humanity*

*In November of last year, two Chinese sex-workers were found murdered in a room they sub-let in a high-rise housing complex apartment that housed 5 other people. There are 479 apartments in this complex. This is a 'vertical neighborhood', but is it a community? No one has come forward with information to assist the murder investigation, not even anonymously. Police are exasperated, as are local social welfare workers and community members.*

lina Kastoumis – *High Rise* research proposal, June 2009

*High Rise* research consortium aimed to find new collaborative artistic methods to capture the syncopation, dissonance and undeniable moments of shared public emotional states that literally 'come with the territory' of this high-density urban dwelling in times of calm and crisis.

*High Rise* was not a crime-solving investigation, nor was it a study of sex-work. What intrigued at the initial research stage were the conflicting states of either social connection or disconnection and the mechanics of either silence or communication in a densely populated urban site.

This preliminary research consortium brought together a diverse range of artistic practitioners, cultural and social thinkers as well as individuals and residents who live and/or work in the complex. This site-specific field study and interdisciplinary consultation;

- Explored the site and closely consulted with Auburn ACDN workers and residents to obtain a sense of social and spatial schema.
- Gathered each artists thoughts, impressions in response to the site.
- Discussed artistic approaches, forms, images and ideas inspired by the social site
- Gauged the scope and interest for further collaborative development amongst the group together with funding opportunities.
- Discussed the options of one collaborative work or an interdisciplinary componential response to the site.

Since the research stage, lina Kastoumis has consulted with ACDN and the artists to formalise the future working model for the project. It is envisaged that the eventual work will be a set of audio/visual pieces that cover video interviews and digital stories together with voice and sound pieces. All these components will be designed and undertaken to create a plural 'story' and played in and around the public space that is Auburn Central, as one body of work.

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