

**Sydney University**

**Linden Wilkinson and Michael Anderson**

**Artistry and academia: adventures on the other side of orthodoxy**

Abstract:

This script combines stage and television story-telling styles to investigate how we tell and how we receive ‘the truth’ in different mediums. The script juxtaposes interior monologues, duologues and performance workshop scenarios to convey the plot, which centres on the role of performance as a data-gathering tool for a fictional research project. Unlike in research, character positionality is intended to provoke questions of credibility to illuminate the risks generated worlds of memory and its re-enactment are blurred. The first draft of the script was designed to stimulate discussion on the ethical challenges inherent in performed research within a cash-strapped research environment. The additional content included in this draft reflects both the interest in the issues the script raised and the interest in ‘Maxine’ particularly. To accentuate the thematic concern of dramatic truth, all the stories in this draft, as opposed to the script’s over-arching scenario, are from documentary sources in the public domain or from interviews with others working in different capacities with post-traumatic stress disorder. It is our intention to question the dynamic relationship between authenticity, engagement and story content. Therefore the script deliberately strays from naturalism to test the relationship between believability and mode of story delivery.

Biographical note:

Dr Linden Wilkinson recently attained her doctoral degree from the Faculty of Education and Social Work, Sydney University. Her area of academic interest includes cross-cultural performance and the creation of verbatim theatre. She is also a published playwright, an actor and has worked in series television as a writer, script editor and story editor.

Dr Michael Anderson is Professor in the Faculty of Education and Social Work at Sydney University. His research and teaching concentrates on the role of creativity, the arts (particularly drama) and play have on learning. His recent publications explore how aesthetic education and research is changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Keywords:

Creative writing – Performance as research – Mixed methods – Orthodoxy

## **Artistry and academia: adventures on the other side of orthodoxy**

### *The Characters*

MAXINE – 20s, a police officer

SUZIE – 20s, a Researcher

TREVOR – 40s, a psychologist

TED – 40s, an academic

WAYNE – 20s, a police officer

JAKE – 20s, a police officer

### *Setting*

The stage is bare but for a desk, a computer screen and a chair down-stage right. Upstage is a solid wall from one side of the stage to the other. This becomes a screen. In the centre of the screen/wall there is a functional door. This allows the characters to enter and exit the filmed sequences.

**AN INNER-CITY SUBURB, NOW.**

FADE IN:

1. INT. TREVOR'S OFFICE – DAY

(A performed sequence)

MAXINE and TREVOR enter from different sides of the stage. MAXINE wheels on a chair. She sits centre-stage. TREVOR sits at the desk.

*The house lights fade down. A special fades up on MAXINE.*

*Rumbling of guns; sounds of the First World War, remote.*

*MAXINE looks to the screen behind her. An image of the Western Front emerges. It features mangled bodies and a large shell hole.*

MAXINE

The first night of the first battle in France, the AIF lost over 5,000 men. These were all battle-ready boys. They were the reinforced Fifth Division; some had survived Gallipoli. Mates. Knew each other the way only dysentery and desire can bond. Know what I mean? Courage, mateship, sacrifice. Had all that. And experience. But not the right experience. Not the right experience, as it turns out. Not the right experience for France. No-one had told them when you're running for your life across a churned-up field of mud, you dive head first into a shell hole. Because that's where the guns are trained. On the shell holes. So if you dive, you get a wound in the foot. Mate! You get a bloody Blighty! But if you jump feet first, you're history. See? Not the right experience .... nothing prepares you for your first night in France. All the first nights. Some road. Headlights. A car wrapped around a tree. Or some kid on fire in a gutter. My great-great-great-uncle, Lyle, was killed at Fromelles. Everybody's favourite. A clown. He used to wear dresses. To shock his mother.

TREVOR

You're not Lyle, Maxine. You're not a soldier.

TREVOR and MAXINE exchange a glance.

TREVOR

You wear a uniform but you're not a soldier.

MAXINE

What I'm saying is: That little kid in the gutter was wearing a dress – what was left of one.

TREVOR

I say to people: what we're looking at is examining a spider's web; what you jiggle over here tends to move over there. So you have to walk around the spider's web again and again and again to work out the pattern...how things are connected, to get a sense of it all, without the blame. Oh yes, but ...No, no, no, no, but it happened. Let's look at what happened. Again.

MAXINE

She reached up, screaming her lungs out; she wanted to be picked up but her fingers her fingers had been burnt off to stubs, skin just falling off her. Skin just hanging off her; I couldn't pick her up. And the fucking ambulance had been sent to Springwood in Queensland! Fuck that! We were in the fucking Blue Mountains!

TREVOR

And where are you now, Maxine?

MAXINE

In a balloon, Doc.

The Fromelles projection fades into a coloured tourist image of the Blue Mountains – sandstone escarpments and timbered slopes. And drifting across the sky are hydrogen balloons, with striped canopies and baskets suspended beneath.

MAXINE

In a balloon. Drifting high above. Getting it all into perspective.

TREVOR

Six hundred metres into the air, okay?

Maxine stands. She wheels the chair off-stage and returns.

TREVOR

You don't have to go in there.

Maxine hesitates.

MAXINE

If I'm not a cop, what am I? May as well put a bag over my head.

Stage lights fade. MAXINE exits through the door in the screen. The door is where the camera is positioned.

Screen now projects SUZIE'S workshop/improvisation class.

TREVOR exits.

*CUT TO:*

## 2. INT. SUZIE'S WORKSHOP – DAY

(A filmed sequence)

MAXINE enters the class and sits in the semi-circle of chairs. Workshop participants are draped comfortably around the semi-circle. The camera is fixed on the two chairs out the front of the GROUP. Two participants, WAYNE and MAXINE, amble towards the chairs.

SUZIE operates the camera, so she is not visible to us.

SUZIE (V/O)

“Where am I?” Take one. Remember: connect.

WAYNE watches MAXINE; MAXINE watches SUZIE (i.e. the camera).

SUZIE (V/O)

Imagination is the building block, creativity the reward.

Finally...

WAYNE

You – ah – you come here often?

MAXINE acts like she's a barista – down with the arm and makes bubbling milk sounds.

The GROUP laughs.

WAYNE

Fuck, Dickhead! I'll have a latte!

SUZIE walks into frame from behind the camera.

SUZIE

Thanks, Maxine, our resident clown. Valuable contribution.  
Let's...let's keep going...ah ....Jake?

JAKE steps out from the audience. MAXINE reluctantly surrenders her place. JAKE takes it.

SUZIE speaks to camera. MAXINE is behind her.

SUZIE

Day 3, Opt in/Opt out research study. The “where am I?” exercise,  
take 2.

SUZIE exits frame, leaving a troubled MAXINE in frame.

Snap to black.

Stage lights fade up.

CUT TO:

### 3. INT. TED'S OFFICE – DAY

(A performed sequence with filmed inserts)

TED sits at the desk.

SUZIE enters

SUZIE

Ted?

TED

Suzie.

SUZIE

Is this about my PhD – ?

TED

Your research is – It seems – ah – that the Police F – Service – is becoming – ah – a little sensitive to possible media scrutiny -

SUZIE

Really?

SHE pulls a USB from her bag. The USB is very precious to her.

TED

– and considering what the Defence Force has – (had to put up with).

During the following SUZIE gives the USB to TED. TED inserts it into the screen. SUZIE takes the remote.

SUZIE

Ted, the narratives I'm getting are incredible. Just incredible. The culture is abhorrent. No wonder my research participants are planning to leave. No wonder. The amount of bullying – harassment – scratch the surface and these people are traumatized.

SUZIE points the remote to the large screen. The projected image is now smaller, contained. She fast-forwards. We see the continuation of the improvisation with WAYNE and JAKE from Scene 2. No sound. JAKE tells a painful story.

TED watches.

TED

Sometimes, and it's recognized, the current system doesn't help at all.

SUZIE

Do you know – there's this one story ... I swore I wouldn't use it but....

SUZIE finds the frame. She slows the image to normal. The camera comes in and out of tight close-ups on JAKE, weeping, on WAYNE, on the group – all listening with intense engagement. Even MAXINE is transfixed.

JAKE

I just stood there watching.....

INTERCUT WITH:

SUZIE

He's been part of a group. They all got pissed, picked on a new recruit. Got him pie-faced.

JAKE

He was on the ground. Guys on top of him. Then one guy – a Sergeant -

SUZIE

Now he's describes how some fucking big-shot shat ...

JAKE

They held his mouth open.

SUZIE

- defecated – in his mouth.

JAKE

And I didn't do –

SUZIE

Can you believe that?

JAKE

- anything. Because I knew if I did, I'd be next. Or –

SUZIE

Fuck these guys.

JAKE

That's what I thought....that would be me. And I didn't do –

SUZIE

And that bastard of a sergeant is probably some major dude now. Still in the Force...Service. Pulling strings. Mouthing off about cultural change.

On screen JAKE breaks down. WAYNE pats JAKE on the back. The rest of the GROUP breaks into slow applause.

SUZIE

Now, is that theatre or is that theatre? At its bloody best.

SUZIE pauses the image.

TED

What we know, Suzie, is that just like in the Defence Force, there's an attempt to change the culture.

SUZIE

But who's in charge? Huh? Now the bloody perpetrators are their superiors! By-stander guilt. They're riddled with it. Look.

SUZIE clicks the remote to play.

On screen we see TREVOR stand, look at the tears, the applause. TREVOR is disturbed. He exits frame.

Meanwhile SUZIE distracts TED with:

SUZIE

By-stander guilt. How does that impact on judgement? On self-respect over time? On commitment to the Police Service over time? I'm on to something, aren't I?

SUZIE turns the screen off.

SUZIE

I can't wait to publish. You know....I wouldn't be doing this, Ted, if I didn't believe in all the good that's coming out of it.

Lights down. TED exits.

CUT TO:

4. INT.SUZIE'S OFFICE – DAY

(A performed sequence with typed text)

SUZIE gathers her ideas.

As she speaks the screen behind her becomes a laptop screen; the words are typed in as she speaks them; the circle model appears, as she articulates its components.

SUZIE

From the Indigenous perspective, the Indigenous world view, reference um t.b.a. we are a circle. There are segments: the physical, the spiritual, the emotional, the – physical, spiritual, emotional – the intellectual. Four segments. But I suggest in the modern world, in the Western way of being – these segments are fragmented. So you get – intellectual, physical, spiritual and emotional – as separate circles. You get the fragmented self, find reference. But what connects all these circles – what brings them together – is creativity. Creativity is the flow – it’s how our dreams are realized. The pathway from our imagination to our newly realized selves. And the group – the group reinforces this transition – just as the group can prevent it.

Yeah.

SUZIE exits through the door.

CUT TO:

5. INT. SUZIE’S WORKSHOP – DAY

(A filmed sequence)

The workshop screen fades up. TREVOR is visible as an observer.

C.U. MAXINE, she’s waiting to begin the “Where am I?” exercise with JAKE.

SUZIE (V/O)

Day 5, Opt in/Opt out research study. The “where am I?” exercise, take 1.

Pause. JAKE watches MAXINE.

JAKE

Hear that?

SUZIE (V/O)

Maxine, you’re supposed to start this impro. It’s your call.

Pause.

JAKE

What do you reckon it is? That sound.

Pause.

JAKE

I reckon it's an ibis.

C.U. MAXINE – we hear the sound of her heart beat.

MAXINE

It's not an ambulance, that's for sure.

JAKE

No, it's not –

MAXINE

If it was an ambulance, it'd be getting louder. I see her round now and then. That little girl. Unfortunately she had fourth degree burns to the top of her head, so she had no hair. She's fairly badly scarred; fingers pretty much gone and she'll probably spend the rest of her life getting different types of surgery, as she grows bigger. The skin obviously won't grow with it. Expand and keep going. It's obviously a day I'd like to forget.

The heartbeat stops.

Pause. EVERYONE waits.

SUZIE enters edge of frame.

SUZIE

Maxine.....there's something I'd like you to try –

MAXINE

(Furious) You – fucking – stupid, stuck-up – bitch!

MAXINE pushes her chair back and exits.

JAKE looks at SUZIE.

SUZIE remains motionless.

TREVOR stands.

Sound of heartbeat.

Screen fades to black.

Heartbeat stops.

Stage lights up.

CUT TO:

6. INT. TREVOR'S OFFICE – DAY

(A performed sequence)

TREVOR enters UR.

SUZIE enters through the centre-stage door.

TREVOR

Helplessness sets up fight and flight and it can make people so anxious that they become neurotic. They have to marshal all of their day to day functions in a way to keep themselves safe. So for example they deal with their helplessness by confirming their sense of space again and again and again. So they're alike a person under siege. You know, you deepen the moat and you pull up the drawbridge and keep all the bastards out. But the fact that I'm in the castle keep on my own – I'm going to wear that and no-one's going to get me. But the problem is, of course, after a while, if you can't have relationships and you're emotionally on your own, people aren't going to wait around forever, so they're obviously going to want to undo that.

SUZIE

Lower the drawbridge.

TREVOR

Lower the drawbridge.

SUZIE

Through the imagination. Imagine, experience, perform, create.

TREVOR

That's a lot of lowering.

SUZIE

But you've seen my work. You've seen it happen.

TREVOR

I've seen euphoria, yes. It's very entertaining.

SUZIE

So is creativity. Entertaining, inspiring. People becoming free to realize a new reality.

TREVOR

But what is it that we are seeing? Our eyes aren't neutral.

SUZIE

No. They're informed.

TREVOR

By what? Experience? Or ambition? What are we culturally, professionally impelled to recognize?

SUZIE

Are you saying I'm making it up?

TREVOR

I'm just questioning whether you're making it last.

SUZIE

And I question whether you want to see me fail. You don't like my getting results. You're disempowered by the group thing.

TREVOR

No. Not at -

SUZIE

Why did you send Maxine to me?

TREVOR

Maxine? She wanted to come.

SUZIE

To do your bidding, bust up the group, discredit me. Because my approach threatens you – paid by the hour year after year.

TREVOR

Suzie, Maxine is a reality we share. Some proud young men and women carry more than their share of the highly dysfunctional elements of our society. Welcome to the world of the walking wounded. The seriously unwell. Welcome.

TREVOR exits.

SUZIE remains.

CUT TO:

7. INT. TED'S OFFICE – DAY

(A performed sequence)

TED enters.

TED

There's been a complaint. From your group.

SUZIE

Who?

TED

I can't say.

SUZIE

Loyalty to some loser rather than to me. Thanks heaps, Ted.

TED

Apparently the narratives are getting out of hand.

SUZIE

What, "truthful"?

TED

Look, I'm not present.

SUZIE

That's right. Ted, I'm not forcing them to do anything. They're loving it. They feel heard. Validated.

TED

Just take a step back here. You're working with a group of people, who are planning to leave the Police Force...ah, Service.

SUZIE

Yeah. And they're not going quietly. It's fantastic.

TED

The point is, Susie – the point is: they haven't left yet. They're undecided. You've chosen to examine a group of people, who say one thing but are still doing another.

SUZIE

“Have you ever considered leaving the Police F- Service?” That's all the survey asked. It's their stories, their emotions that have pushed the research.

TED

But it seems you're **not** taking account of indecision – and where that indecision can take them. The conflict that indecision sets up. You're not providing layers of safety.

SUZIE

It's okay. I'll blob the faces. Joke, Ted.

TED

Susie, look, I'm telling you, as your Supervisor, you have to stop.

SUZIE

Why?! Because of one complaint! Who was it? Trevor?

TED

Can't say.

SUZIE

Maxine. It was Maxine, wasn't it.

TED

No.

SUZIE

Bloody Maxine. Who did she get to contact you?

TED

The person involved came to me direct.

SUZIE

Doesn't that prove - (she has it in for me?)

TED

The point is we can deal with it now; we can't deal with it if it all blows up. You know, a lot of reputations are at stake. This is not just about your thesis.

SUZIE

Well, if it does blow up, doesn't it need to?

TED

Suzie! There's an ethics nightmare about to erupt. This is how crises begin...a murmur, a ripple becomes a contagion and no-one goes near the university for years. That's what happens. These are proud young men and women, who carry more than their share of the highly dysfunctional elements of our society.

SUZIE

I'll tell you what's beginning here. I'll tell you what's beginning. You've got a project up with the Police, haven't you? Something safe for the proud young men and women?

TED

No.

SUZIE

Really?

TED

It's not confirmed.

SUZIE

It's not confirmed.

TED

It's a submission.

SUZIE

But they're keen.

TED

Interested.

SUZIE

And it's not about people, who want to leave, is it.

TED

No.

SUZIE

It's about - ? It's about –

TED

In-coming recruitment procedures. Addressing the culture at the coal-face.

SUZIE

And where did that idea come from?

TED

Staff retention is a big issue. I mean ...It's what we've had to face in Education for years. We've got a lot to offer in this area. A lot of experience.

SUZIE

Oh, really? Not a lot of experience in dealing with after-hours incidents of excess alcohol and defecation.

TED

You'd be surprised.

SUZIE

And you've used my work.

TED

Absolutely not!

SUZIE

What's the budget?

TED

It's a submission.

SUZIE

So it's big. The budget.

TED

It's – it would be good for the University. At this difficult time. Very good.

SUZIE

Oh, right. The University.

TED

Plus we're delivering the expertise, the investigative skills.

SUZIE

Why aren't I on it? Your research team.

TED

Look, the proposal is only short-listed. There isn't a team.

SUZIE

Yet.

TED

You've got your PhD to do. Go and play with people, who have already left.

SUZIE

I'll stop doing what I'm doing. That's what you want, isn't it?

TED

Yes.

SUZIE

If I gave you my research – that would be of benefit, wouldn't it? The footage is – well, you've seen it. Deep insight into how the culture actually works to ah – subjugate, intimidate, humiliate, defeat. So it's a win-win. Win for you, Win for me.

TED

Your participants think what they've given you is exclusive to your study.

SUZIE

We could work around that.

TED

How's that?

SUZIE

We could persuade them to join yours – I mean, ours. We could say they have a new opportunity to address their concerns...

TED

To share their concerns....

SUZIE

To demonstrate their concerns....

TED

'Demonstrate'? Way too confrontational. The Police Service is trying to do the right thing....

SUZIE

Share their concerns then....

Stage lights fade down.

TED exits.

SUZIE exits through the door.

CUT TO:

8. INT. SUZIE'S WORKSHOP – DAY

(A filmed sequence)

SUZIE'S shoulder is in frame.

The GROUP sits in a semi-circle facing us/ the camera.

MAXINE sits apart.

SUZIE

I know, I was disappointed, too, that we couldn't pursue this study. But! The fact that they have asked me to stop and instead instigated new recruitment procedures absolutely proves that they have known about the bullying culture all along.

The GROUP begins to put on stocking masks, turning their faces into blobs.

MAXINE doesn't move.

SUZIE

They want to resolve and harmonise the recruitment process. They want to resolve transparency issues and reconcile cultural misunderstandings. In short, they want to bring a culture of universal fulfilment into the workplace.

SUZIE exits frame. She goes behind the camera; the camera now focuses on specific faces, now that they are unrecognizable.

SUZIE

And I just want to encourage you all to consider joining this new "Culture at the Coalface" research initiative. It validates all the work we have already done together. And I want to congratulate you all for your courage, your determination and your resilience. Oh – and your acting! Fabulous work. Well done – all of you. I've learnt so much just watching you become so empowered. Maxine - ? Put the stocking on.

Fade to black.

CUT TO:

9. INT. TED'S OFFICE – DAY

(A performed sequence)

TED enters and sits at his desk.

SUZIE enters TED'S office through the centre door

SUZIE

Cheer up.

TED

She's dead.

SUZIE

Who are we – ? Not Maxine....?

Pause....

TED

Maxine.

SUZIE

You're kidding me.

TED

Found her this morning. Just put the phone down. Hanged herself.

SUZIE

Where?

TED

Didn't ask.

SUZIE

Oh My God.

TED

Sometime last night, they think. Early this morning.

SUZIE

Was there a note?

TED

Saying - ?

SUZIE

Why she did it.

TED

From what you've told me, anyone in your seminar room would know why she did it.

SUZIE

I only said she was an obstructionist in a practical workshop flow sense. I never said she was suicidal.

Pause.

SUZIE

The point is: she was an outsider. Everyone else in my workshops went from strength to strength. Heaps of them said they'd be going into the new research project. Heaps.

TED

It only takes one outsider, Suzie. No-one will come near us for years.

SUZIE

No, no. She was way off the grid.

TED

Says you.

SUZIE

I've got her on film.

TED

No. No way.

SUZIE

Think about how significant her story is. Her pain. On her face. Out there for everyone to see. Crying out in the dark.

TED

You're suggesting serious exploitation!

SUZIE

A case study.

TED

No!

SUZIE

Who knows she asked you to reprimand me or whatever?

TED

I know. You know.

SUZIE

You said she came to you direct.

TED

Yes.

SUZIE

No-one else?

TED

I – I don't know.

SUZIE

She came to see you?

TED

She left a note in my pigeon hole.

SUZIE

You replied?

TED

No.

SUZIE

Have you still got it? Maxine's note?

TED

Yes.

TED has the note.

SUZIE

Get rid of it.

TED hesitates.

SUZIE

I'll do it. I'll get rid of it.

SUZIE reaches out her hand.

TED

We're destroying evidence.

SUZIE

No, we're just making it worse for Trevor. She was his responsibility.

TED doesn't move.

SUZIE

This is "An Australian Story". Ted, it's for the greater good. C'mon, Ted. Dive in. Boots and all. What's the worst that can happen?

Freeze.

Sound of machine gun fire.

END OF SCRIPT

## **Research statement**

### ***Research background***

This script springs from two experiences in the research field, when even adhering to the five guiding principles with in risk management template as articulated by Mienczakowski and Moore (2008: 456) the performed research ran the risk of being derailed by audience members. The first experience involved a relative of a deceased person, whose manner of death was talked about by the participants; the second experience involved a participant, who did not approve of the way a shared story was performed. Even with safeguards performed research is vulnerable. So this script imagines what might happen if ambition over-rides principles of practice and the only guideline is publication.

### ***Research contribution***

The aim of this script is promote discussion in academic circles in regard to the relationship between ethics, arts practice, protection and performance. In the two research projects mentioned above, ethics approval concerned data collection from individuals and individuals were protected. But performance continues to transform collective data, massing individuals' narratives and blurring the lines of individual story ownership (Madison 2005). Perhaps practitioners of performed research need to enter the field with more than ethics approval; perhaps they need a memorandum of understanding with participants clarifying that what they are contributing to is a collective story that belongs to the group but owned by the researcher.

### ***Research significance***

This script with its combination of stage and televised modes of story delivery experiments with character creation and authenticity. Ultimately using words, silence and body positioning, the aim is to use both performance mediums as vehicles for the expression of vulnerability and indecision in environments that demand confidence and consensus. It is hoped that the juxtaposition of these modes of story-telling create a greater understanding of the characters' dilemmas but a more objective appreciation of the worlds they are operating within.

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