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Schoolgirls at Truck Stops: Tracing Place, Things, Bodies and Fictions

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KELLY: Traffic passes on the road.

SAM: One truck after the other.

KELLY: None slow down.

SAM: None turn in.

KELLY: None notice us, walking like ants in the sun.

They both raise their arms up and scream.

SAM: We are alive. We're not sitting in some fucking classroom reading about the world.

KELLY: No/

SAM: We are living.

(Philpott 52)

Picture an empty truck stop at the dusty side of a highway in western Sydney, a picnic table, a magpie, two girls sitting on the table smoking, laughing, talking, trucks pulling in at the other end. Imagine how the affective force of this dramaturgical scene travels beyond the space and time of theatre and script to assemble with other bodies and places. This paper is an exploration of this scenario. It is an experiment with a different way of reading a text – a play titled *Truck Stop* by Lachlan Philpott that opened in June 2012 near where I work in western Sydney, and which is set in St Marys, the suburb next door to the university campus where I teach aspiring secondary English teachers. By the 'text' of *Truck Stop*, I mean both the script published by Currency Press, and the performance of the play [1]. It is important to note at the outset that I am writing not as an expert performance critic or theorist, nor as a theatre practitioner. Rather, I write from the subjective, necessarily partial, provisional and idiosyncratic perspective of one reader/ viewer/ English teacher/ teacher educator/ researcher with a longstanding interest in texts about western Sydney and the places and people of the region who are portrayed in them. My interest in the play arises in part from my desire to bring more texts about western Sydney to the attention of teachers and others in the region (Gannon). But the particular theoretical threads that I pull through the first part of my paper – Bennett, Barad, Deleuze and Guattari, and others – suggest

my interest in exploring ways that affective and material turns in social and cultural theory can be put to work in diverse ways and places. In the final part of the paper I also turn to performance scholarship to more carefully consider dramaturgical aspects of the text.

Truck Stop's focus on school girls who have sex for money opens lines of inquiry that intersect with my research interests in gender and schooling, violence, sexuality, and the materialities of place. I want to loosen the grip of habituated thinking about dangerous sexuality, dangerous spaces, predatory men and young girls at risk in this place and these times. Rather than read the text – or *texts* of playscript and performance – through familiar conventions of narrative, character, plot, discourses of femininity, sexuality or class, I read selected scenes from the text through matter and affect. Not merely as words on a page, nor bodies on a stage, or in an audience, but as a force field, where words, things, bodies, images, feelings, thoughts collide and exceed the spaces and times of their initial encounters. Rather than privileging the human, I begin by looking laterally, aslant, sideways, at the nonhuman elements of the girl-highway-truck stop assemblage, the highway itself, the truck stops and the modes of life that they bring into being in western Sydney. These might be thought of as the “things” of the play, in Bennett’s sense, where objects are actants in scenes that exceed the social and that issue affective provocations, where “human being and thinghood overlap...the us and the it slip-slide into each other” (Bennett 4). In this work of thinking otherwise, through and beyond the text, I aim for an affective method of reading that uses the text as a “node” and aims to map how it “becomes a force that produces bodily encounters with affective impact” (Knudsen and Stage 18). This does not offer a generalisable method that can be replicated or applied to other aesthetic texts in the same way, as “forces” and “encounters” are singular events with unpredictable trajectories. Rather, it offers an example and a provocation for readers to map their own excessive and affective encounters with places, bodies, and texts. For people who habitually work with texts – such as English teachers – it might encourage them to map their own intense affective encounters with texts in different ways, and to open spaces for their students to do so.

While Bennett is a political theorist rather than a literary scholar, her “vital materialism” or “thing-power” and her interest in the affective leads her to bring together all sorts of things, including most recently the poetry of Whitman, with affective states. In what might be called an affective reading practice Bennett notes that reading Whitman’s poetry seems to give her “an enhanced capacity to discern multiple, overlapping and knotted strings that tie me and us to so many other bodies large and small” including lilies, traffic, bootsoles and a particular homeless man on a particular corner who is part of her everyday life (Bennett, “Anxiety, Whitman, Sympathy”) [2]. Bennett explores materiality in *Vibrant Matter* as “a rubric” that can “horizontalise” the relations between humans and other things (112). She says, “I am a material configuration, the pigeons in the park are material compositions, the viruses, parasites, and heavy metals in my flesh and in pigeon flesh are materialities, as are neurochemicals, hurricane winds, E. Coli, and the dust on the floor” (*Vibrant Matter* 112). This is the flattened ontology inspired by Deleuze and taken up by many subsequent thinkers in diverse disciplines. When we focus on materiality, our attention is drawn “sideways” and we are obliged to acknowledge the complex entanglements of the human and nonhuman things of the world. This requires what Bennett calls a naïve “willingness to theorise events ...as encounters between ontologically diverse actants” (*Vibrant Matter* xiv). In *Truck Stop* encounters between these diverse actants include those between girls, men, truck stops, money, animals and highways, as well as with a wide range of more ephemeral or fleeting things and sensations. They include those things that interact in the space of the theatre, and spaces beyond the theatre. These always form, in Bennett’s terms, a “contingent tableau” (*Vibrant Matter* 5) where things, people, times of day, particular locations come into configurations that make things happen and that produce affects. These are what I want to trace in the truck stop scenes in Philpott’s play, in order to argue for a subjective and affective reading practice that is simultaneously anchored in the material detail of the text and the world.

I also draw loosely on Karen Barad, who is a quantum physicist and feminist philosopher rather than a literary scholar. Barad opens her book *Meeting the Universe Halfway* with an extended

discussion of a play script, *Copenhagen* (Frayn), to which I will return later in the paper. Barad insists on theorising the “social” and “natural” together as always inevitably entangled, and elaborates what she calls a “diffractive methodology” that reads insights and approaches from different areas of study through each other, interrupting their conventions and habits of thought. Her questions about who and what comes to matter in any sphere of inquiry, and her analytical strategies of “diffraction” and “intra-action” have been recently taken up by numerous educational researchers, as challenges to more conventional notions of “reflexivity” and “interaction” respectively [3]. With “diffraction” as a metaphor drawn from experiments in quantum physics, Barad insists on “reading insights through one another in ways that help illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how these exclusions matter” (30). In this article I have brought this to my reading of the play. The related notion of “intra-action” dislodges the concept of the agentic subject and draws attention to the movement generated in an encounter in which two or more bodies are in a process of becoming different through “the mutual constitution of entangled agencies... in contrast to the usual ‘interaction,’ which assumes that there are separate individual agencies that precede their interaction, the notion of intra-action recognizes that distinct agencies do not precede, but rather emerge through, their intra-action” (33). Barad reworks concepts including “matter, discourse, causality, agency, power, identity, embodiment, objectivity, space and time” in order to dislodge what she calls the “remnant anthropocentrist and representationalist assumptions” of poststructuralism (26).

Yet the sense-making apparatus of literary texts, as they are commonly approached in schools, perhaps especially when they seem to present familiar characters and locations, are often reliant on notions of agency, identity, causality and power as they are realised through tropes of character, plot and setting. In the context of *Truck Stop* if I want to seek a different practice of reading – through Bennett’s thing-power and Barad’s diffraction – it means losing interest in the girls as separate characters, with explanatory backstories, subtexts, biographies and family histories that have been planted through the text by the playwright and instantiated in the performance by actors. This makes me less inclined to think of the highway and the truck stop merely as backdrops for human dramas.

Phenomena, according to Barad, are not discrete “things” – “independent objects with inherent boundaries and properties” but rather are formed of inseparable intra-acting agencies or “ontological entanglements” (333). Separations between subjects and objects, or ascriptions of agency to particular discrete bodies, fall away when attention turns to relations between things, relations that bring things into existence, or that enable phenomena to emerge. If I consider girls having sex for money with men at truck stops as a sort of phenomenon, then, following Barad, rather than look for causal relationships or imbalances of power I might look instead for the elements of intra-activity within the phenomenon. Intra-action moves away from any sense of the subject as a discrete entity, and agency becomes an enactment rather than a quality or capacity that someone or something has per se (Barad 178). Agency cannot be an attribute of anything or anyone, when these are not stable, bounded or pre-existing; rather agency lies in “doing or being” and in the continuous remaking of boundaries between things (Barad 179). Jumping back to the script of the play is a big shift, but keeping in mind Barad’s suggestion that the “primary semantic units are not ‘words’ [or things] but material-discursive practices” (141), this article asks how are words and things enacted, and entangled in the figures of schoolgirls, highways and truck stops?

SAM: It’s lunch at school. I’m sick to death of standing in the sun. Sick to death of how the guys get all the good places to hang out and how we are stuck there like fucking cows in a field and I say let’s get out of here. Just the two of us. So we do.

KELLY: Out the school gates and up the highway. Really hot day but it feels good being out of school. Nobody staring....

SAM/ KELLY: Just the two of us.

SAM: Like it should be.

KELLY: Out of school.

SAM: Walking up the highway.

KELLY: No balls flying past/

SAM: No boys shouting shit at us.

KELLY: Just cars and trucks speeding past.

SAM: A hot shirtless guy in a red car passes beeps his horn and/ we wave at him.

KELLY: We wave at him.

SAM: Some hot guy in a red car.

KELLY: How it feels when he does that, and it doesn't matter if he beeped at you or at me, how I feel is like we are on some adventure while everyone else is stuck in the real world in that fucking hot horrible playground, there we are ...like in some video clip.

Sam and Kelly sing the first three verses of 'Your love is my drug' by Ke\$ha.

SAM: The two of us walking up the road...

SAM: We could be running away you know. Escaping forever...

They both raise their arms up and scream.

(Philpott 51)

The heat of the sun, the cramped spaces of the playground, habituated patterns of use, balls, sounds, songs, the proximity of the highway – the flat ontology of the things of the world – come together to create a trajectory that propels the bodies and desires of girls to the truck stop. In this scene they walk along the edge of the highway, as weeds are projected onto the screen behind the stage, and the amplified sounds of traffic coming closer, slowing down and speeding up, accompany the girls as they walk away from the legitimised spaces of school. This is where I'm implicated in a different way with the text as it resonates beyond the place and time of the stage into the world. It comes with me to other highways that I drive or walk along, to schools and into my research in gender and education.

Drawing on Barad, educational researcher Hillevi Lenz Taguchi argues for analysis that draws the body of the researcher, along with many other things, into the interpretive space. Analysis, then, becomes "a space of transit, a series of open-ended systems in interaction with the material-discursive environment" and it demands that we attend to "transcorporeal engagements with data" (Lenz Taguchi 265). She suggests that we need imagination and what she calls "*bodymind*" in order to "register the flows of smell and the intensities of touch, level, temperature, pressure, tension and force in the interconnections that emerge" in the event of our engagement with data, whether it be interviews, images or other sorts of data (Lenz Taguchi 272). But where is the data in a fictional text? In a theatre script or performance? What bodies demand attention? In the

context of *Truck Stop*, I use the term “data” to refer to the body of the text, the viewer, the performers, the space we inhabit together for a moment and all those other objects and bodies, tangible and intangible, including myself at multiple points in time and space. Further, inspired by the diffractive apparatus of Barad, Lenz Taguchi suggests that we “engage and interfere with data” to take up “thinking as a transcorporeal act” (271).

These “transcorporeal engagements” with girls at truck stops include my body on the highway, near the St Marys exit, where my car breaks down, twice in one month, soon after I see *Truck Stop* at the Q Theatre. Each time I wait for roadside assistance for upwards of an hour. I sit in the back seat, with the door open – one foot on the gravel, breathing diesel fumes, watching weeds festooned in garbage rippling in the breeze. I look for ants, cockroaches, rats, the skeletons of dead dogs and cats, strips of shredded rubber, sheets of steel and plastic like the one that has just fallen from my car and is twisted around the wheels. The car rocks in the slipstream of each speeding semitrailer. I take photos with my phone of trucks coming towards me, their bodies growing larger, their roaring engines louder, then they pass, and fade away. I think of those imagined girls and look for the men behind the dark windscreens but they aren’t there. I picture them inside, on the last legs of their journeys, from the west over the mountains to the city. They are tired, and wired, like I am, waiting for help. Finally, a car pulls up behind me, gravel crunching under tires, NRMA emblazoned on its side. “I won’t get out,” says the man, “It’s too dangerous.” So I stand out there, on the side of the highway, just a kilometer or two from the imagined truck stop of the play and its dangers, and I speak to him through his open window. The second time my car breaks down, the clutch is gone and they send a tow truck right away. I wait, in almost the same spot, under a heavy sky, and a figure appears, a man plodding towards me on the verge of the road, heavysset in an orange plastic reflective vest, steel capped boots, baggy jeans, a baseball cap pulled down, his face obscured, the crunch of gravel getting louder and louder as my body stiffens and freezes. I want to swing the door shut but I don’t move. He comes closer and then, he’s passed, head down, body shrinking away in my rear view mirror.



Figure 1 Images of trucks photographed by the author.

A diffractive analysis, according to Lenz Taguchi, provokes interferences, requires us to “engage

in an event of reading and *becoming-with...*the data, rather than reading it from a distance and as separate or apart from it" (272). We must become "minoritarian" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 276–77) with our data, rather than relying on "majoritarian" approaches that instantiate hierarchies and draw upon conventional practices that fix meaning into static and familiar forms. This requires eschewing familiar "norms, subject positions, habits of mind and practice" (Lenz Taguchi 267) in order to seek positive difference "as an effect of connections and relations within and between different bodies, affecting and being affected by each other" in a constant state of becoming (Lenz Taguchi 269). In relation to *Truck Stop* (including how we might work with it pedagogically), this might entail following flows of affect or emotion that move through text and readers/viewers, producing multiple readings from many points of view, extending the text to explore different moments, possibilities, movements of bodies, words and things.

Returning to my own embodied affective and material entanglements with *Truck Stop*, I want to attend to becomings that exceed the diegetic space of the play on a stage or on the page, into the unpredictable spaces beyond these. This means trying to map the microparticular movements of human and nonhuman others, actual and imaginary, which include gravel, garbage, broken cars, bodies contained by, or extending out of windows and doors, words like "dangerous" hanging in the air, the looming trucks under the oppressive low clouds in my photos, strangers. But my engagement with the data of *Truck Stop*, with these figures of girls who long for other ways to be in the world beyond school and this place, is also shot through with traces of other times and abject places and of sex and girls, including myself, and what might be called risky behaviour by others but might just feel to girls like "We are alive. We are living." This might be a small step towards Lenz Taguchi's strategy of "becoming-with" the data, reading aslant, around, looking for a way to read alongside and in alignment with the girls. So back I turn to the text, to *Truck Stop*, to the crunching gravel and the smell of bitumen on a hot afternoon, to the agency of the highway to impact on bodies and I wonder to what extent the highway produces these girls who have sex with men, just by its proximity to the school, and the possibilities and affordances that arise in the connections and relations between them.

SAM: Kelly's in the truck. I sit at the picnic table waiting.

Flies seethe everywhere, questions seethe in my head.

I think of backpacker killers and rapists on TV, thinking too much and seething sounds all around me, listen to my iPod.

A brown car drives in, some woman with a dog.

Dog runs towards me, I pat it and then it does a shit near my bag.

Your dog's done a shit.

Want to leave.

Fifty flies squat on my bag. Highway buzzes. Wish you weren't in the truck. Wish you'd come back.

Long pause. Flies and highway noise.

The truck door opens.

The truck door shuts.

Truck engine starts. Rumbles away.

KELLY *walks towards* SAM. *She looks calm. She reaches into her pocket and pulls a \$50 note, holds it up, it waves in the breeze.*

(Philpott 57)

Barad opens *Meeting the Universe Halfway* with a discussion of Michael Frayn's play *Copenhagen* but the aesthetics of the text, its affective impact, its theatrical and dramaturgical devices, are not of particular interest to her. Rather the play – an imagined meeting between physicists Niels Bohr and Werner Heisenberg – is mainly used as a counterpoint to her own account of the radical impact of quantum theory on “science, politics, ethics and epistemology” (Barad 5). She argues that the premise of the play – that moral judgments are tied to individual intentionality – is a misunderstanding of Bohr's theories, which instead would imply that “intentionality might be better understood as attributable to a complex network of human and non-human agents” (Barad 23). After almost twenty pages of discussion of the historical, theoretical and ethical accuracy of the play, Barad finally takes up an affective register, saying that it provokes “a whirlwind of moral questions and uncertainties that surround, inhabit and haunt the characters and the audience” (17). The play, Barad writes, leaves us “frozen at a moment of time before Armageddon,” it “denies us access to our own souls,” it leaves us “wandering aimlessly through a barren landscape with no markers, no compass, only an empty feeling” (17). Overall, however, her interest is in correcting the scientific and ethical missteps of the play, not in its artfulness as a literary text or its affective intensity. What takes her to this play might be analogous to what takes me to *Truck Stop*, as well as to ideas that I want to contest within it. There is the matter of affect and how it moves texts and bodies in the live space of theatre. The feeling the play's audience had as a body made up of other bodies bumping into each other as we moved from the claustrophobic space of the small theatre into the foyer, stunned, flattened, deflated – and how images, fragments and feelings keep moving and intersecting with other moments, places, spaces and things.

Sexuality and place are crucial in *Truck Stop*, and here the work of education scholar Jessica Ringrose (*Postfeminist Education*) is helpful in my thinking. She uses the analytical strategy of schizoanalysis, from Deleuze and Guattari, in her work on girls and the sexual politics of schooling. Schizoanalysis is positioned in opposition to psychoanalysis and its Oedipal myth, which shuts down and channels desire “through the great molar powers of family, career, and conjugality” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand Plateaus* 233). Elsewhere Deleuze and Guattari explain molar and molecular as two analytical directions, where the molar direction is towards “large numbers and mass phenomena,” while the (schizoanalytic) molecular direction “penetrates into singularities, their interactions and connections at a distance or between different orders...flows and partial objects...infinitesimal lines of escape” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 280). Ringrose draws on their work to trace how the “molar norms” of heterosexuality and the family trap libido by negating, repressing and commodifying female desire, aggression and anger, and suggests that we look for those little “bursts of energy in the machine” that provoke new and unpredictable flows and becomings (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 338, in Ringrose 78). She follows “lines of flight” from rigid normative strata such as class and gender and disrupts the binary of “the virginal innocent vs the oversexualised slutty girl” that psychologises and pathologises girls (Ringrose 78). These are the storylines underpinning the characters of Sam and Kelly in *Truck Stop*, along with, for Kelly, the Oedipal desire for the absent father. In her work on girlhood, Ringrose rejects these sorts of individual pathologies and stresses the inherently contradictory conditions and irreconcilable schizoid demands of femininity for young women (Ringrose 80). The overcoded territories of school and western Sydney are what Deleuze and Guattari might call “striated spaces” (*Thousand Plateaus* 474), highly structured and permitting only limited movements and relations, in contrast to “smooth spaces” where movement is less regulated and controlled, where lines of flight to the new become momentarily

possible.

In *Truck Stop*, striated spaces are regulated by all sorts of human and nonhuman things including teachers, peers, school rules, fences, gates, roads, school bells, uniforms, timetables, and trains. They include the NSW Crimes Act 1900 (Section 66C) "Division 10, Offences in the nature of rape, offences relating to other acts of sexual assault etc" that name the age of consent as 16, sexual health clinics, and bacterium such as chlamydia. They also include the lyrics of their favourite song "the rush is worth the price I pay" and the string of other commodities that are on the move with them through the truck stop, listed in the back of a school notebook as the cargo of the trucks that they enter to have sex with the drivers – "Blueberries/ Lambs/ Milk/ Beer/ Sand/ Shampoo/ Petrol, baked beans. Hamburger patties/ calves" (Philpott 58). What seem like lines of flight toward something that seems like freedom from the oppressive schoolyard, the smooth space of possibility of the truck stop, is simultaneously a space of capture, and of what Deleuze and Guattari call "reterritorialisation" back into the striated spaces of order and regulation. They caution that "staying stratified – organized, signified, subjected – is not the worst that can happen, the worst that can happen is if you throw the strata into demented or suicidal collapse, which brings them back on us heavier than ever" (*Thousand Plateaus* 161).

Every momentary escape from the rigid strata of school and home carries with it the molar order where female sexuality, particularly – as Ringrose says – of working class women and girls, gains currency in the heterosexual order through practices of commodification. The girls in *Truck Stop* are complicit in their commodification in the sexual economy of the truck stop, and it feels to them at the same time like freedom and choice. As Deleuze and Guattari point out "No one can say where the line of flight will pass: Will it let itself get bogged down and fall back...Or will it succumb to another danger...a line of abolition, annihilation, self-destruction? ... The risks are ever present" (*Thousand Plateaus* 250). For the characters in the play, experimenting with lines of flight away from the strictures of schooling, the truck stop might seem like a smooth space in a Deleuzian sense, where movement is less regulated and controlled, where new possibilities extend beyond the repetition of the known.

What does it mean for a text written for performance "to work"? Aesthetic texts are pedagogical. They change how we feel, and what we know, they modulate subjectivities, they have political power and consequences, they are "affective entities" and "culturally active agents" (Hickey-Moody 91). Artistic methods, including those of theatre – scripting, workshopping, directing, performing – "craft compounds of sensations" which are "experienced differently by each body in an audience" (Hickey-Moody 90). The "affect of art," says Hickey-Moody, is "a whole greater than the sum of its parts, a sensory milieu that encompasses, but extends beyond, the products of human labour" – playwright, actors, audience (90). Affects are mobilised in a space of bodies moving and speaking on a stage, locked in a room with other bodies, huge projected images and amplified sounds, pools of dark and light, intensities and affects oscillating, vibrating in that space and time across and between bodies and beyond them, and beyond that time and place.

Initially *Truck Stop* may not seem to be disruptive, or new, except in its claims to interrupt middle class ignorance about the abject spaces and people at the fringe of the suburbs. It could be argued that it reproduces western Sydney in its usual habituated and abject tracks. The play might seem to lock girls into dominant and normative "molar formations" (Ringrose) of gender, sexuality, family, class, education and aspiration.

The marketing and reception of *Truck Stop* repeatedly emphasise the way the text draws upon the truth of young people's lives. The back cover blurb says, it shines "headlights on sex, gender, raunch culture, morality and growing up" – as though all that needed to happen was to turn the headlights on as though the truth is just out there waiting to be illuminated. Its reception suggests a sort of morality of revelation: "Adolescents who see it (and they should) might find it confronting... It is not often they see themselves represented with such clarity, honesty and respect" (Supple). The play's claims to veracity start with the suggestion that it was inspired by an

actual event in a NSW public high school. In the introduction to the *Truck Stop* playscript by Playwriting Australia's Chris Mead, the playwright is positioned as an ex-high school teacher with a "gift for the distillation of real voices" and the "transmission of marginalised voices" and indeed his interest is described as "giving voice to those on the margins of the Australian city" (Mead vi). By "distillation" Mead suggests an intensification of the "real" – an increase in authenticity or verisimilitude achieved through art. The introduction says that "the characters describe their own worlds with their own words" and that Philpott "has listened very carefully to the polyphony around him" (Mead vii). The play is seen to create "a forum for their voices to emerge in all their contradictory impulses, rage and joy" (Mead vi). Students and teachers from local high schools are also credited for input at various stages of script development, as the playwright worked for "over 10 months interviewing teachers teenagers and counselors" in western Sydney (Whitton). Through these sorts of representations of the work of the playwright, the aesthetic and creative labour seems underplayed, as though the playwright is a conduit for truths that circulate beyond him, as the text embodies the risky lives and dangerous desires of western Sydney girls. The text of the play seems to resonate with usual forms of research "data" about young people's lives that are gathered in educational research – acquired through observation and interviews – though the mode of representation varies and the aesthetic and artful practices of writing and performing amplify the affective points and intensities that have emerged through ten months of interviewing and script development.

However *Truck Stop* is more complicated than its capacity to represent the worlds of young people in the west. Nor are the ripples of the text into other scenes of my life merely an idiosyncratic effect. Research in performance studies provides some clues into how the aesthetic text does its work. Theatre scholar Laura Cull argues that most theatre – despite the singularity of the moment of performance in time and space, and despite the circulation of affect – continues to privilege "performance as representation... anchored by its imitation of an identity: 'the world', 'the play', 'the self'" (1). Reading performance through philosophy enables new understandings of the "ephemeral, material work of performance" so that meaning is not dependent on "an interpreting, anthropocentric subject standing outside" the work (Cull 21). Cull argues that meaning emerges through "affect and becoming," in other words through a "transformation of the audience that takes place on the level of the body" (Cull 21).

Of Philpott's work specifically, Allyson Campbell, who has collaborated with him and directed his work, argues that his politics do not lie in the "dramatic dialogues of realism" but rather in a dramaturgy that works "affectively rather than immediately cognitively" (198). Although Campbell is discussing his earlier play *Bison*, many of her comments seem to apply as well to *Truck Stop* [4]. She stresses "affective and experiential impact" and argues that Philpott's affective dramaturgy is "committed to producing its own playworld rather than sitting in a referential (and implicitly inferior) position to the 'world outside'" (198). Quoting from the script – as I have had to do in this paper – is always problematic "because one only has the horizontal or linear experiences of reading" whereas the theatre text draws on a "dramaturgy of repetition, juxtaposition, acceleration, simultaneity, and...accumulation: layer upon layer of text, voice, music, sound effect, gesture, dance, all adding up to a series of affective climaxes" (Campbell 201). Some sense of these layers can be glimpsed in the excerpts that have been included in this paper, for example, Sam's speech earlier cited, beginning: "Kelly's in the truck. I sit at the picnic table waiting..." draws attention to all the specificities of the place – schoolbag, dog shit, flies, heat, the fears she articulates mixing up television bogeymen with the specificity of this girl in this particular place. Time seems to slow down and stretch out – a brown car comes and goes, she pats a dog and speaks to a woman, the slowing of time is marked by sounds of flies and highway and a long and empty pause. Then the staccato of "The truck door opens/ The truck door shuts/ Truck engine starts," and suddenly Kelly is right there, waving a \$50 dollar note in the air. In *Truck Stop*, as in *Bison*, there is a "complex, non-linear dramaturgy" that relies on "the orchestration of voice and wordplay" and "scenes" that "appear and disappear in an instant with just a change of light, or a particular placement on stage, or a gesture to indicate that suddenly we

are somewhere new” (Campbell 206). While both plays incorporate naturalistic dialogue in real time, this is also “intercut” with voices that narrate “internal desires” and set “imaginary scenes” and that stretch out time (Campbell 207). There are layers of voices that overlap to complete each others’ sentences, or that form a chorus as in the final excerpt at the end of this paper: “Ask him.../ Then what.../ Ask him.../ Then what...” (Philipot 57).

In this paper, rather than settling for the truth of the text or familiar modes of reading a text through character and narrative I’ve tried to keep meaning on the move, by working through matter and affect, paying attention to how things, people and places are mobilised within and beyond the text. This means moving outside some of the conventions of literary analysis and borrowing strategies from elsewhere – diffractive analysis, transcorporeal engagements, entanglements of all sorts of bodies and things (including humans and including texts). I have then turned to some of the specific scholarship in performance studies about affect as a dramaturgical strategy and how the aesthetics of language in performance contribute to the affective momentum of the text. All of this work attends to the specificities of things in the world. While – in terms of my understanding of gender and place – this experiment in affective reading may not have moved me beyond the images of urban wastelands and desolation that initially affected me, it has begun to shift my thinking about how complex these images are and perhaps even my own complicity in their perpetuation. Mead identifies the dramatic questions of the play as “What would we do? What should we do?” (viii) and these resonate with questions that emerge in my research about gender and education. Finally, in terms of text analysis, although I do not offer a generalisable method for approaching texts, I do hope to encourage affective reading practices that invite mappings of particular encounters with performance and other texts in different ways and directions.

[At the picnic table at the truck stop.]

SAM: ...I dare you too. Double dare/

KELLY: What’ll I say?

SAM: Ask him where he’s going.

KELLY: Then what?

SAM: Ask him if he’s tired.

KELLY: Then what?

SAM: ...If you like him...ask him if you can make his journey better...

KELLY: Make his journey better?...

KELLY: ... Gravel and dirt under my feet sweat under my arms. What am I doing? He’s looking at me now. I want to look back, check if Sam’s watching but I can’t. I just keep going.

SAM: Sun beats down, flies everywhere and Kelly stands in front of the truck driver.

KELLY: I am close to him now. Smell his sweat. Smell his cigarette. I stop in front of him. Look up and see my face reflected in his sunglasses. Say it/

SAM: Say it.

Where are you going?

Are you tired?

Don't just stand there.

SAM/KELLY: Is there something I can do to make your journey....

(Philpott 57)

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Endnotes

1. *Truck Stop*, by Lachlan Philpott, was first produced by the Q Theatre, Penrith, in May, 2012, directed by Katrina Douglas, with Set and Costume Designer Michael Hankin, Video Designer Sean Bacon, Sound Designer Peter Kennard, and Lighting Designer Chris Page. Dramaturgy was by Francesca Smith. Eryn Jean Norvill plays *Sam*, Jessica Tovey played *Kelly*, Kristy Best played *Aisha*, all remaining characters were played by Elena Carapetis.
2. Transcribed from a recorded lecture by Jane Bennett "Anxiety, Whitman, Sympathy" Oct 2, 2014, 17.18–17.32 mins.
3. See, for example, the 2013 special themed issue "Material Feminisms: New Directions for Education" (Vol 25, Issue 6) *Gender in Education*.
4. For further published work on Philpott, see Campbell, Alyson. "Translating 'Gaytown': The Collision of Global and Local in Bringing Australian Queer Play *Bison* to Belfast." *Australasian Drama Studies* 59 (2011): 141–55 and Campbell's critical introduction to the publication of Philpott's plays *Bison* and *Colder* (Brisbane: PlayLab, 2010).

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