
ECOLOGIES OF PRACTICE
WRITINGS ON DANCE 21
SUMMER 2001/02

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Choreographer Russell Dumas has observed that... 'Being an artist in Australia is a lot like being a homosexual in a Roman Catholic seminary – you are tolerated as long as you are not practising.' Dumas' comment bespeaks a deep pessimism about the social effectiveness of art and artists in contemporary Australia.

Artists' capacity to shape and influence or even to participate effectively in the public sphere is severely constrained, Dumas argues. Current systems of patronage and publication accord art an extremely reduced function. Set against this pessimism is the everyday actuality of artists' practice, the making-up and making-do, the do-it-yourself inventiveness of art-making with limited financial resources and minimal economic power. And, despite the intense drive towards commodification and a globalised monoculture, there is evidence of great diversity in the ways in which work is produced.

This issue of *Writings on Dance* includes several papers which were first presented at a conference/performance event, entitled *DIY? Ecologies of Practice*, held in Melbourne in November 2000. The conference was convened by the editors of *Writings on Dance*, Elizabeth Dempster and Sally Gardner, and Philipa Rothfield. A partial documentation and extension of the original *DIY?*, this issue is concerned with broad questions of the ecology of artistic practice; with movement and negotiation between the micro-level – the individual interventions, the strategies and improvisations – and the wider social contexts of practice.

– ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

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TAPPING IS SOMETHING TRYING TO GET IN

RECENT PRACTICE BY **MARGARET TRAIL**

It is an interesting opportunity for me to be invited to speak about the making of art, since my recent art has been all about investigating the ways in which it seems impossible to speak at all, or at least impossible to speak sense.

Therefore, to remain in keeping with the spirit of my art, which seems appropriate on this occasion, my speaking will necessarily be not all that sensible. I hope, however, it will not be completely without interest. In any case it will only go for half an hour.

MARGARET TRAIL PERFORMING 'K-TING!' (2000). PHOTOGRAPH: PETER ROSETZKY

sounds of rain

Tapping is something trying to get in
Tapping is something trying to get in

> This time I remembered I was lying in the oak closet and I heard distinctly the gusty wind and the driving of the snow. I heard also the fir-bough repeat its teasing sound (it touched my lattice ... and rattled its dry cones against the panes) ... it annoyed me so much that I resolved to silence it, if possible; and I thought I rose and endeavoured to unhasp the casement. The hook was soldered into the staple – a circumstance observed by me when awake, but forgotten. 'I must stop it nevertheless!' I muttered, knocking my knuckles through the glass, and stretching an arm out to seize the importunate branch; instead of which my fingers closed on the fingers of a little, ice cold hand! The intense horror of nightmare came over me. I tried to draw back my arm, but the hand clung to it, and an almost melancholy voice sobbed, 'Let me in – let me in!' 'Who are you?' I asked, struggling, meanwhile to disengage myself. 'Catherine Linton' it replied shiveringly. 'I'm come home. I'd lost my way on the moor.' As it spoke I discerned, obscurely a child's face looking through the window. Terror made me cruel; and finding it useless to attempt shaking the creature off, I pulled its wrist on to the broken pane, and rubbed it to and fro till the blood ran down and soaked the bedclothes. Still it wailed, 'Let me in!' and maintained its tenacious grip, almost maddening me with fear. 'How can I?' I said at length. 'Let me go, if you want me to let you in!' The fingers relaxed; I snatched mine through the hole, hurriedly piled the books up in a pyramid against it and stopped my ears to exclude the lamentable prayer. I seemed to keep them closed above a quater of an hour; yet the instant I listened again, there was the doleful cry moaning on! 'Begone!' I shouted; 'I'll never let you in – not if you beg for twenty years.' 'It is twenty years,' mourned the voice – 'twenty years. I've been a waif for twenty years!' Thereat began a feeble scratching outside and the pile of books moved as if thrust forward. I tried to jump up but could not stir a limb, and so yelled aloud in a frenzy of fright. [Bronte, WH: 23–24]

spooky space sound

Here's a problem articulated by Antonin Artaud in a letter written in 1946, which is at times alive for me as well.

> *'There is something destroying my thinking... a something furtive which takes away from me the words which I have found'* [Derrida, 1975: 177]

Unfortunately Artaud did not have Jacques Derrida to propose an explanation for this experience as we have. In his essay 'La Parole Soufflee' – which I first read just because I wanted to read an essay with the word 'soufflee' in the title – Derrida says:

> *Artaud knew that all speech fallen from the body, offering itself to understanding or reception, offering itself as spectacle, immediately becomes stolen speech.* [Derrida, 175]

Sort of an obvious idea really. Speech takes the words which I have found. I speak (offering my words for understanding, reception), you steal, and do with the words all sorts of things.
However, not to put the blame for this theft on you, for – as Derrida explains:

> *As soon as I am heard, as soon as I hear myself, the I who hears itself, hears me, becomes the I who speaks and takes speech from the I who thinks s/he speaks...* [Derrida, 177]

I speak – I steal. Well, Derrida explains, speech steals, language steals those 'words which I have found', in Artaud's phrase. We might say, speech steals, language steals that which I mean to say.

What I mean to say...

> *Somehow it happens that what I mean to say seems always to be submissive rather than active, lacks something in relation to the signifier – the spoken word in this instance.* [Derrida, 177]

So the word, the language gets the legs – and 'what I mean to say' falls away or is stolen and I'm left often with this feeling of: that isn't quite what I meant, or, my god, that is not what I meant at all.

> *'There is something destroying my thinking...something furtive which takes away from me the words which I have found.'*
>
> *Part of what is so disturbing about this phenomenon – why it can feel so devastating, as suggested in Artaud's letter – is that I witness the absorption of that which I mean to say into a set of 'commentaries'. Commentaries comprised of language, which seize upon my offers, (which, in my view, may be art, or words, or any other attempt at meaningful action made by me) and these commentaries appropriate these offers as 'examples' of themselves – examples used to illustrate themselves – commentary. They confer in my offers an essence which, in explaining them, deports them into commentary.* [Derrida, 174]

Thus, all art works discussed become deported commentaries [Derrida, 175], are stolen, lose their legs and become examples in the service of commentaries. An obvious example of this, which happened to me recently, was when a review of a recent performance which I made, explained that performance as being a piece about domestic violence. So, the manifestation of this performance, my offer, thru being explained, became in this context at least, an example of this commentary about domestic violence and it feels to me like something is stolen.

On a grander scale however, it seems that all I mean to say is only fodder which serves some meta-commentary, some overarching commentary which authorises all of these commentaries, which judges these commentaries a sensible system of negotiating reality. [Derrida, 175]

Okay, and now the sound of an invisible dog:

> **sounds of Bessie, panting and snuffling, trotting across a wooden floor**

This dog appeared at the end of a performance I did, largely unexplained. It's still not clear to me really what the invisible dog is doing in this piece. However, its appearance seemed a very great relief to some members of the audience and was/is to myself, also. I am not really sure why this is, but my theory about it is that the invisible dog is offered in the spirit of a resolution. It appears to fulfil and resolve something. It does not seem all that important, in fact it is quite funny, that it is not clear what she resolves and indeed is not clear what an invisible dog might possibly be expected to resolve. This does not seem to matter in a sense, and we nevertheless share a kind of relief and resolution. This is also the sense in which I offer it here, by way of an invisible-dog-style solution to the difficulty of speaking at all, where all speech is stolen-away by commentary.

The piece with the invisible dog is an interesting one for me to mention today, since it very much represented a departure for me from an earlier style of artmaking and the commencement of a new style. I had more or less decided not to make art anymore, or the impulses to make art seemed to have died in me, when I went to Perth for a month to visit my boyfriend. In order to have something to do while he was at work I took with me some tapes I had made which were of conversations between myself and various friends as we walked around art galleries. I had made these tapes as part of my studies in art theory at Monash. I took them to Perth because I really liked something about them, and I took my fourtrack tape recorder and I mucked around with the tapes while Tim was at work, and over four weeks, pretty much inadvertently made rather a lot of art.

The most interesting thing about these pieces (other than the dog), for me, is that the voice of a ghost appears on one of the tapes and it calls the name of the woman I am talking to on the tape.

Ghost's voice: **Julie!**

Ghost's voice: **Julie!**

Ghost's voice: **Julie!**

The best thing about the ghost appearing on this tape and calling Julie's name, is that the drama of this piece, which occurs towards the end, is that characters appear who have been listening to the conversation which I have just played you, and they posit that the people whose voices we are hearing are not there, are rather virtual voices.

So, I feel this ghost is not incidentally calling to Julie but is also particularly well manifested, since it functions now as the authentic virtual voice in a drama about the appearance of virtual voices. Furthermore, the appearance of this ghost-voice sets up my interaction with you today – and I find myself today playing the same role with you which my characters play on the tape. That is, searching for, pointing out and attempting to convince you that there is actually a virtual voice on this tape. This is what happens on the tape:

HI IT'S ME (1998)

Julie: tis very very hypnotic, but no I don't feel as...
Operator 1: yep, sure
Julie: nup, not like the other one...
It's tongue out... but coming out of the breast is this head
Operator 1: two...
Julie: ...with a spiked collar...
Operator 1: two...
Margaret: and the person is bound
Julie: there's a little head at her feet...
Operator 1: oh, they're discussing the... what they're encountering,
basically... yeah
Julie: it's sort of light...
Operator 1: she's saying it's light...
Margaret: and the whole thing presided over by a crow
Operator 1: and that the whole thing's presided over by a crow
Margaret: can't tell whether it's this world or can't tell what's real and what's not...
Operator 1: can't tell..if it's this world or you can't tell what's real or what's not
Julie: There's a dog lying down...
Operator 1: Not really.
Julie: with quite obvious claws and teeth. Don't know if the dog's dead or alive.
It's almost like a dog foetus... but it's not mature
Operator 1: Dog... a dog with quite obvious teeth and, and claws that could be, maybe
a dog's foetus, but it looks a bit fresh for a foetus
Other voice: two minutes...

Margaret: sense that there's a whole nother world, it's that thing of going, is... the mirror seems to be reflecting literally the world but then you've got this...

Operator 1: Oh, she's saying that the mirror seems to be reflecting literally the world but there's also this... um, I guess, a world in the mirror as well.. e-e, ah the, the floating dog foetus, and she's saying, something, ah, a pond feeling...

Julie: what you were saying, you know, about when you're in blackness, and the things that come out of the blackness...

Operator 1: The sense of being in blackness and the things that come out of the blackness...

Operator2: Um, I actually don't think that those people are there...um, I think that in fact... where was it... I think that in fact, it is a virtual entity... of some kind... and, its presence... should be... of some concern... If I could find the bloody... tsk... thing... hang on...
Well you listen... well, I don't know that but I know what I hear... listen...

Julie: and the, and just the window at the back is

Operator 2: Oh, jesus! [odd sound] There!!

Margaret: oh, I dunno it's not, no, you don't get this at McDonalds...

Operator 2: Did you hear that? Listen...hang on.

Julie: and the, and just the window at the back is...
[odd sound]

Operator 2: Can you hear that??

Margaret: oh, I dunno it's not, no, you don't get this at McDonalds...

Operator 2: It's a tape loop!

Julie: and the, and just the window at the back is...
[odd sound]

Operator 2: which means it's not a person...or send someone down

Julie: and the, and just the window at the back is...
[odd sound]

Margaret: oh, I dunno it's not, no, you don't get this at McDonalds...

Back to Derrida for a sec:

spooky space sound

Derrida points out that there is a certain urgency of expression which arises from this lack I mentioned before. That is, this lack in 'what I mean to say', in relation to the signifier, speech, the language which steals it away.

[Derrida 178–179]

A kind of panic can arise in the face of this always failing of what I mean to say. I think we are all familiar with the types of physical gesticulation and types of moans, groans, cries, laughter, screams which can accompany an inability to make myself understood, an inability to find the right word, to remember what I was going to say. These do indeed comprise a kind of speech on the edges of signification fuelled by the panic which can arise around: 'what I mean to say is'.

At this point, this lack-point, this panic place, this urgency – on this hinge between what I mean to say and speech, it is possible to yield to a range of physical, psychic and uttered manifestations which evade, avoid, dispute, signification. Artaud of course famously screamed at this point. It is here where we stutter and stammer and cry and sob, where we grunt and moan and squeal. Here too where we laugh and hum and sing mindless little tunes. Here ghost fingers begin to tap, glass breaks and ghost voices begin to moan and speak our names. It is here too where sex erupts thru speech, tapping its way thru flirting, to talking dirty, to eventually erupt in the strange languages of the sexual act. It is here on this hinge that I am concerned with making art. And it is in communication with these kinds of manifestations that I work or, to use Derrida's word to avoid the separation of work from life, I adventure.

TAPPING IS SOMETHING TRYING TO GET IN

I am very interested in things which tap to gain attention. I asked David Chesworth once why the sound of tapping on a window is scary, in a way in which tapping on wood is not. He suggested, correctly I think, that it is because when you hear someone tapping on the window they have seen you before you have seen them. Especially at night this is scary.

David and I worked with Maude Davey, Margaret Mills and David Pidd to solve some problems in my art, early in 1999. We taped hours and hours of mucking around.

I was especially interested in moments in the improvisations which Maude, Marg and David made when characters or voices not their own, appeared. We didn't work with character so when it appeared, especially in addition to the three actors, not correlated with one of them, it was especially interesting. And I listened to these voices especially closely. Here you can hear one appear, her name is Mary and she's a spirit and she wants to talk to me.

MARY (1999)

Hm (door close)

Inhales

Anything happening?
No
'kay

Sniff

inhale

Have we begun?

Laughter

Um no but (margaret)

[whisper] I am highly offended when you laugh

t t [laughter] right, right

err

Hang on, hang on – it's coming in

The, would the. Would the.

How – would the. How

Nyahneeyahneeneeyahneeyah

[laughter]

would the. ha

[laughter]

right. Right. Right. right

aaaah – ooooh right. yeah

how old were they?

Mary? [private] Mary? Is that you?

Mm – yes, it is –
Yes, it is [this afternoon]

Mm [yes it is] mm

Yes it is mm

Who are you talking?

Who [right] are you talking to?

I want to talk to Margaret [the.]
Margaret's here [the.]

Margaret's

Margaret is here
Margaret's here Margaret's here Margaret's here Margaret's here Margaret's here
Nyahneeyahneeneeyahneeyah

She's listening She's listening in [right]

You can, you can speak to her thru me [right]

I am your vessel – I am your vessel

Take care of the operation

Take care of their flesh

[frighten her, frighten her]

ur, uh ur, uh, ur fuck ohhhhh! Ohhhh!

Welcome
[To come or to die?]
Ur, ur ,ur, ur, ur
My name is steven

To die or to come?
Eh – ah

Die

Eh – ah eh

Die

Eh – ah eh

Die

I think the preponderance of window breaking spectacle in action films is driven by a number of impulses, not least of which is that glass is a very special material which really only appears as an object when it shatters. This is a very peculiar characteristic for an object to have – but glass as window, glass as mirror are sort of invisible objects, their purpose is to be transparent or perfectly reflective. Thus, when they shatter their materiality becomes apparent in a way for the first time. It's shocking – there's a huge bang and this object appears for the first time. Furthermore these objects are dangerous when shattered, they have teeth. Amazing. Exciting.

I am very interested in objects which appear when they break and furthermore appear with, or in the form of teeth. Amazing. I think language is a lot like this. It is only when it breaks that we see something of the object and we see something of its teeth.

K-TING! (2000)

PART ONE

So, err, anyway

Um, so yeah – and um

Oh. So, then what happens, then

And – fft – um, um tt – ahh. Anyway, I've, err...think, (tinkle) you did, I did think you were, I was gonna, ftt, I guess – a..
(tinkle)
Oh, tt, ft, mmm, f, to me its like, feels like, you know it's like, I, I ,I op – er, er umm. Some kind of, um, nnnhhhh, I, its like that they're, like um, ah they're thin and blah-blah tss (tinkle)

I mean god it makes me sound like I'm

And um, (tinkle)

Aaaah, and (tinkle – smash-swish)

Let's think. aaaah. mmm.

I don't know, thats ah...oh, I dunno. Oh you kind of go, oh, must be – ha ha ha, oh god, well

Um, ts, ah (tinkle)

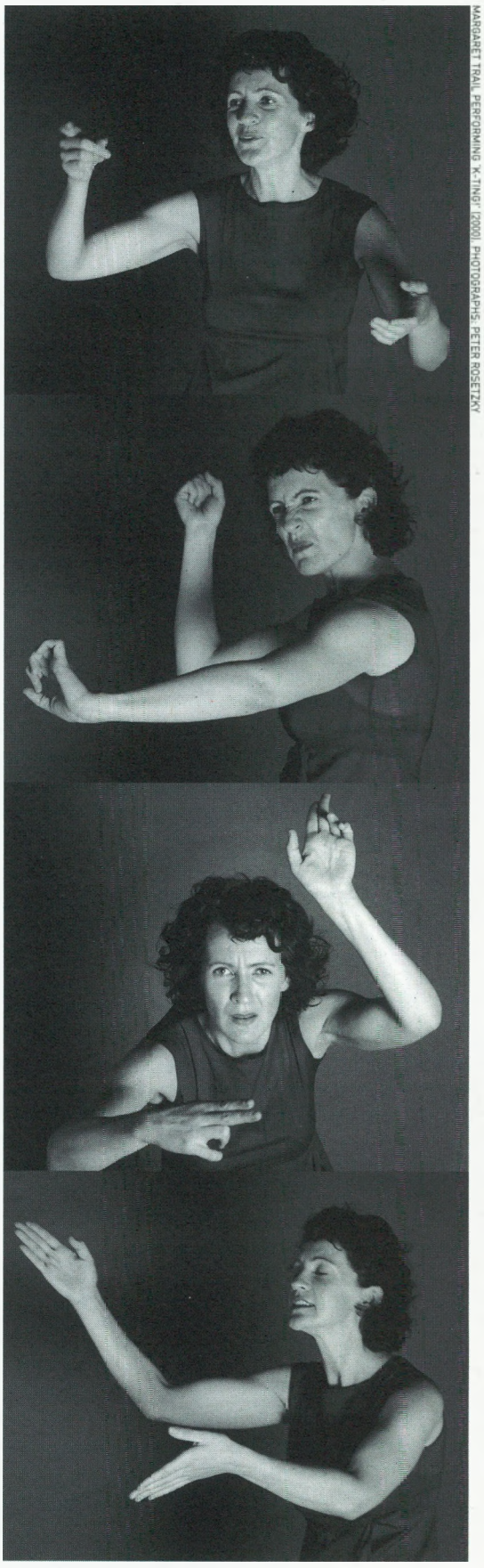
PART FOUR

Um, tee, and um, er um, tss, ah smwish-ash
You kind of go, oh must be, haha

Just err – can see, you know, whatever, smwish what – ch – Uh! – Cause, thea loud and, um..
smwish
Normous, hahaha, that kind of – Arrgh! Urrgh! – That sort of thing. Um smwish-ash

Mm and tha's how, and fuss, t-um, but ah, I dunno, it has to – but, you know, we were smwish-ash
– tk, Ur!

Um, muy, gotabitof, oh. And it's but it's not, smash it's not grr, biological growth, this thing that roo, um, grro. It's not the, the li, eth who, smash who, some, some in the ah go. The you just um, just mmah. And so you, then you have to, have to grow and then you've got the, you just um smash just, ahh and so you, then you have that,that delicious



MARGARET TRAIL PERFORMING 'K-TING!' (2000). PHOTOGRAPHS: PETER ROSETZKY

PART FIVE

scrunching fade up and continue

Smashes, glass coffee table – bashes! How...

T- bkkkk! Kchhhhh! T – Hhhhhhh! Smashing. Pah. Arrgh! Urrgh! Arrrrrrgh! Bang! Bang! Bang! Like. Ko! Uh! Grr-rr. Uh! You know...Ur, Ooh, Paeng. Bkk! Ah! Uh! Ng! Ur! Ah! Ugh.

Smashes. Smashing. Smash. Crashing and shattering. Mashes! Smashing the. Smash. Smash and Crash. Cra. It's not the...Smash and Phhwo

Kwoom. Phhhwooor. Phwoor. kooor. The Kwoo and the Kwoom. Kkkkkkk. Tsts – Kkkkkkk, the Kkkkk and the Kwwooom. Li

S Smash. The

Smash

Smash. Smash

Smash

Smash

Fuck (end scrunching)

Silver. Of light. Water

Water Light

Amazing lightwater – beautiful.

And now, finally, as my students would say: 'That's the end.'

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DAVID WILLIAMS

Peter, since 1977 you have edited and produced 5 series of *Theatre Papers* [1977–85] and then 5 collections of *Arts Archives* [1993–2001], and it's an extraordinary body of work: traces of processes, dispositions and trajectories in the making of theatre, dance and a wide array of contextual practices. I think of them as a kind of plural and thoroughly useful map of diverse making cultures and thinkings-through-performance. Today I wanted to ask you about you in all of this, how you've kept going in such a productive, patient and self-effacing way, what your engines and goals are. First of all, can you remember how you started, what your triggers were?

PETER HULTON

I can remember very clearly two moments when I started. With the *Arts Archives* and the audio-visual side of it, it was just by chance seeing the single gesture that a student of Laban's made; it had been filmed at Dartington, and was in the archive there. When I saw this gesture, I thought if only one could understand the thinking and perceptual orientation that had arrived at the point where somebody, in this case a student, could engage in a movement or a gesture. Behind this one single gesture one can hear thoughts, ideas, perceptions and orientations, and I was so intrigued to hear more.

With the *Theatre Papers*, I had one of the original editions of *Towards a Poor Theatre*, the volume published in Sweden by Eugenio Barba. I was at university, and I remember one Sunday evening, sometimes I used to go and treat myself to a fry-up at the Shelbourne Grill Hotel in Dublin; I was by myself and I took the book in. And the first thing I looked at were the photographs of face masks, and I just didn't understand a thing; I wasn't studying theatre, I had no training in that area. I was absolutely intrigued, and started reading a little of what this man was saying in the book. And I thought, goodness, here's the same person not only putting words down on paper but also somehow enabling these men and women to produce extraordinary facial images. ...

A THING BEING DONE

AN INTERVIEW WITH **PETER HULTON**
BY **DAVID WILLIAMS** AND **RIC ALLSOPP**
EXETER ENGLAND MAY 2001

PETER HULTON

... So I suppose in both instances it was the density of intelligence, in the widest sense of that word, that was within these phenomena. And I was interested to find out if there were ways of meeting this intelligence in some way or other. It seemed to me that most of the publications I've come across over the years in their various formats did little to help me in this respect. In *Theatre Papers*, it was always a question of giving the voice to the practitioner, to hear the ideas, thoughts, insights, experiences that had informed their work. As simple as that.

DAVID WILLIAMS

That's been a consistent principle throughout, that you make a space available for the voices of others...

PETER HULTON

Yes, it's about them being allowed to be intelligent about their practices, in their own manner, in their own language, their own pace of thought, their own set of references and nouns and verbs and images. And likewise in *Arts Archives*, that sense of voice, not only occurring within the practices but also giving space for them to articulate what they do. I once worked with Joan Skinner, spent time with her doing the work. There we were at the Greenwich Dance Agency with all these distinguished dancers of one sort or another who had come to work with this famous lady. And there she was, at one point in this extended period of work, saying 'And now we will do spongey dance'. If I had invited such a gathering of people to do a spongey dance, it would have fallen on dead ground. But precisely because she had worked with this group over a number of days, because she breathed the way she breathed, and because of all that phenomenally complex set of circumstances that make Joan Skinner who she is, she was able to say this and everyone was enabled to do a spongey dance! [See *Arts Archives*, 3rd archive, 1996–97, no. 2: 'An Introduction to Skinner Releasing Technique'].

I've always been interested in how people speak of what they do: their language, but also the rhythms of speech and its spacings. With *Arts Archives*, the video enables a registering of the silences, the gaps, the travellings that go on in someone's mind before they produce a word or sentence. I've almost come to the conclusion that there are no such things as methodologies, there are only teachers. At the end of the road, what is occurring are these fine, subtle meetings of people through spaces and times and breathings where nothing is being said at all; these elements are every bit as eloquent and interactive as anything else. And that kind of material evidence of practice can't possibly begin to be annotated, recorded, documented in published print form. I've always been astonished that more people don't seem to wish to attend to that kind of thickness of interchange that is going on; for a great deal of informational and perceptual richness is occurring in these interchanges.

DAVID WILLIAMS

One thing that strikes me about *Arts Archives* is that they are extraordinarily information-rich resources in terms of dispositions towards pedagogy as dynamic process and communicative exchange. Qualities of watching and listening, which reside in the kinds of gaps you've referred to. *Arts Archives* and *Theatre Papers* seem to have a multiple pedagogic function, both in terms of thick descriptions or registers of teachers-in-process as it were, and as secondary research resources for students, researchers, teachers, practitioners to be used in different ways. Is one of your core concerns with the practices of teachers teaching?

PETER HULTON

I know they seem like that, and of course many of the situations I observe involve a teacher, workshop leader or artist inviting people into aspects of their work that they feel are central and can be shared with somebody else. I am very often there at those points, and of course I'm intrigued by the manner in which they do that. But actually I don't have in my head such a clear notion of what these materials are. And in a way the pedagogic aspects are only part of being on a journey, if you like. If I wished to touch something at the heart of the project I'm engaged in, I don't think I would describe it in that way.

Let me tell you what I hunt. I risk getting into strange territory here, but let me try. What I love to see more than anything else is people at work in operation with imagery. I don't have any fancy notions of what imagery is, it's very open; I define it simply as possibilities rendered present. In a workshop, it's like going fishing; you wait, and of course often you don't catch anything. Sometimes you catch little ones, not that they are unimportant at all. Sometimes you're there when a bigger one is being caught, not by me I have to say. I'm a witness, or through what I'm doing a participant in the fishing activity. Sometimes it is so evident that a person or a group of people, through many different means, techniques, orientations towards what they are doing, and within many different contexts, are arriving at or touching a point where they are in operation with imagery and imagery is in operation with them. I don't define that in terms of any particular theatrical or performance form; I've been witness to it in the widest possible array of forms. Although of course the forms themselves contribute to these moments, and the ways in which they are generated.

I have to admit I don't go to theatre any more, unless it's free. It sounds terrible, I know, but the reason why I don't go is because the disposition and formal arrangements of what theatre has so often become in our society simply don't allow for the accessing of these particular operations or indeed for the witnessing of them. For me, the place where I can witness them, or be party to them, is often found within pedagogical situations, within the processes. It's almost as if these processes, when they are really happening, are crying out for different contextual places within which they can happen. Our culture in the West is beginning to find alternative sites where these phenomena might appear, but only rarely do you find them in theatre.

So what is it I find within these processes? I really don't want to give the impression of being an essentialist in this area, because what I am witnessing is as much a part of me and my performative engagement with whatever it is as it is part of the particular context of the particular person or people. It's a very contextualised and complex moment, and very often the highly mediatised form through which I'm watching it further blurs it. But I do think that during these moments – I call them moments, but they can have some duration in time – and into these moments come all of the philosophical, aesthetic, artistic and intelligent activity that I wish to have there with it. I feel that when someone is really operating with imagery and imagery is operating with them in the sense I described, in these moments the potential for the conjunction of real intelligence and practice is most apparent: most explicit and implicit, if you like. Somehow the activity and the space within it allows for that, allows it to take place. So I find it immensely rich from that point of view.

There are other reasons I find these times so formidable. When they occur, I get an inkling of what for me is an emerging issue. At these moments I actually perceive an activity that allows forth a human person in relationship to imagery, imagery here as I've described: possibility rendered present. When I see this really at work, these moments shift or develop the performative moment away from what could be considered to be a very anthropocentric set of circumstances and concerns, towards something which allows in this fantastic evidence of a person in relationship to 'world': it could be the world of imagery, it could be the world of world, it could be a world. I see people negotiating, dialoguing, listening, being in a kind of ecological, streaming balance between the things that enable this moment to have the power that I think it has. And in such

moments I feel that performance is beginning to reclaim something of the kind of power I think it does have, and probably always has had somewhere. In the real sense of the root word *dromenon*, the drama, which is 'a thing being done'. The moments can be very fleeting or an entire performance, and it really doesn't matter what kind of imagery it is: matrixed, non-matrixed, fragmented, or whatever. A thing is being done, and it's being done with me as part of the performance, as well as with the performer, as well as with the imagery, the 'thing'. A thing is being done which has all of the concrete existential evidence of the person, the tree, the cat, or whatever.

And then I think of the enormous intelligence, subtlety, fluidity at play, what Deleuze talks about in terms of the 'plane of consistency', immanent 'continuums of intensity'. These moments, which I call 'anthropomundic', occur as close to that plane of consistency as any I ever see. And I'm astonished at the human person's abilities and facilities in bringing to this moment all that they do bring. I'm reminded how rich that is in comparison to the streamings and intelligences and bases for decision-making that we might make in society to produce our educational system, for example, or our political systems, or our relational senses between each other. And at these moments when the things I'm on the hunt for emerge, I'm consistently amazed at how they remind us of the possible streamings.

DAVID WILLIAMS

So these 'anthropomundic' moments are supra-subjective events: a flaring into appearance of the person, of the imagery, and of their dynamic and unfolding interrelatedness.

PETER HULTON

Yes. I only use this word to myself; it's a shorthand way to hit my head on the thing, to keep reminding myself. To say think of that, even if you don't know what it means. By stepping on to that stone in the middle of the pond, somehow you see things from slightly different angles. Shorthand words like 'anthropomundic' are just little provocations, ways of stepping sideways and making sure I can stand there for a little while and have a look at something, think about something. And I find it rather pleasurable and productive.

I've just been teaching a course about the avant-garde at Bristol University as a sort of academic locum, and it's been really interesting to revisit some of this work. You begin to develop shorthand views of what happened, what these people were after, how it evolved, the recurrent concerns and motifs. In the end you abstract yourself off to a series of wholly indefensible generalisations, but which are very useful reminders to me about some of what went on and where things are at the moment. Ignoring for a moment who or what the 'avant-garde' was or is, and accepting that I'm operating at a kind of hysterical shorthand level, let me convey my sense of the five gifts of the avant-garde. One of them, for better or for worse, and Deleuze describes it far better than I can, is the question of becoming; this shoots through and on, underpins everything. Another is a problematic rather than a gift, and it's the question of narrative, non-narrative and spaces in-between in all their manifestations. A third gift, which is entirely indefensible although it makes some sense to me, is the notion of the thing itself; if I say that piece of shorthand to myself, I can rest happily on it for a while and gather sustenance from it. A fourth gift would be the body and issues of embodiment. And the fifth is the anthropomundic.

Ric, you remember years ago we talked at Dartington about an ecology of theatre? Well, I'm still hunting that one down, and have a slowly growing sense of how one might understand or practice this question of ecology; and the anthropomundic is really a question of ecology and ecologies of practice. For hundreds of years, so much of our art making in the West has been what I would call anthropocentric. Since the last century, the 'avant garde', drawing upon all sorts of influences and cultures, has reintroduced something of what I'm calling the anthropomundic, which is an image ecology between *anthropos* and *mundus*. *Mundus* not just being things – trees, flowers, animals, people, material objects – but also images, in their diverse manifestations. Between those two terms there are enormously dynamic streamings. Ostensibly *Arts Archives* is about very anthropocentric work, it could be seen in that way as simply watching people; but in the moments I'm looking for, it moves way beyond any question of anthropocentricity and you get a sense that you're entering the realm of the anthropomundic.

Years ago, when I first went to Dartington, I had never been trained in theatre or anything related, and I really didn't know why I'd been appointed to train these teachers or actors or dancers. I had no idea what to do. I spent a long time in the studio just moving chairs and bits of furniture around, or drawing the curtains,

doing simple task-based activities because I had an absolute horror of anybody role-playing. I really didn't understand or like anything to do with acting. After many years, I've come to the realisation that this anthropomundic quality is not determined by the kind of imagery that people are working with, it can happen in a moment or an entire play of Chekhov as well as with Yvonne Rainer doing a task-based activity. It just isn't predicated on those kinds of image distinctions at all. That's interesting to me, for it has meant that even within the highly anthropocentric nature of most Western theatre since the Renaissance there are occurrences of this other relationship and process, vestiges if you like. The thing being done has returned in the twenty-first century, and the avant-garde is partly responsible for reminding us of that, and reopening the possibilities.

If what I'm talking about has any relevance at all, then what kinds of sensations, perceptions, trainings, modes of preparation does one need to engage with in order to come by this anthropomundic relationship? And for me these are profoundly interesting questions. For example, in my work as a teacher over the years, I've become aware that there is a very simple faculty that people have great difficulty working with, myself included: and that is, how does one listen to the implications of material? Of course it involves the dialogue with oneself, but somehow it's more than that. How do you allow the implications of material you're working with to reveal or disclose themselves in an alignment with you? Because we impact upon our environment, our world, our images so much, we have an enormous difficulty in allowing this to occur in and to us. Do you know the word syzygy? It means a conjunction or alignment, as in planetary alignment. When you see people working with materials, they make repeated compositions of one sort or another, and more often than not they are laying too much on the materials, or laying too much on their own bodies. There is a reverse procedure which throws up something akin to syzygy, where you come into alignment with the material. Through and along the alignment come all the streamings. If you're not in alignment with your image, whatever that image is, whether inside or outside or both, then you won't hear it speak to you.

RIC ALLSOP

If I look at the list of *Arts Archives*, one way I can see it is in terms of your eye moving from 1993 to the most recent one you've made. There is a consistency of your eye looking at this work. That process of placing yourself in alignment with the material you're working on is like a mirroring; you're doing it, but you're also trying to find out what it is, what that relationship is inside the material you're looking at. I wondered whether you'd come to any thoughts about this? What have you gleaned about that in terms of how you're beginning to look? How does the experience now direct you to look at particular pieces?

PETER HULTON

Well, two things to say about that. One is that my way of looking within *Arts Archives* is mediated entirely by the technology I use ...

RIC ALLSOP

It's not entirely: it's heavily mediated, of course, but you still have lots of choices ...

PETER HULTON

I do, but to be frank the more I work it, the more I realise how mediated it is. Which is fine, and I have to work with the grain of that. At the moment I'm working on a CD Rom with a French dancer, Dominique Dupuy. Let me describe the experience of beginning to make that. I'm there in a workshop situation, which is one I'm quite familiar with. He has a radio mic on him, I have earphones so I can pick up what he's saying. The camera is framed of course, and utterly predetermined in terms of what it's framing, how close or far, the speed of approach, how it's moving, and so on. My eye perceives through technology, as does my ear. And you can only get it once, it's very hard to edit this kind of material and try to overdub afterwards. I try to be in the flow of what's happening, to listen closely to the degree that I can to some extent prefigure where it will go; and this is my second point. As he's speaking, I'm already thinking about what it is that the lens must already be moving towards watching. I find it exhausting, but when it works, in a sense I'm filtering, and as he speaks I'm already moving towards his foot, say. If I'm connected to it sufficiently, aligned with it, I prefigure the logic of where to go next visually. That's when it's really working. As I described earlier, the moment of Joan Skinner's instructions, the spacings of her words, and the thickness of information in the gaps, you can't overdub any of this; or if you do, it turns into something completely different, and you have to recognise that.

I have become increasingly interested in using this CD technology. The workshop videos I make are much more delimited than what a CD can give you. The physical phenomena of the computer screen, what you can do with it and how it engages people, are very different. And it allows you greater analytical space to watch something, return to it, flick forward or back, come off at different angles from it; it's more rhizomatic than arborescent, to borrow Deleuze's terms. In a very simple way, it allows you to manipulate material and to journey through it individually in a rather different way from video where one has to guide the viewer to some greater degree. So with this CD technology, slowly I would like to move away from those situations like workshops, which is where I've been with my camera for the past eight years or so. I would like to take another set of angles on this material, to place my eye in relation to it in a slightly different way using CDs and, if I had enough money, DVD and mpeg2 compression. CDs offer a site of reflection or meditation for the person viewing somebody's work; or at least one would like to believe they do. I would love to be able to encounter work with people in a much more personal and specific way. I once made a video of Julyen Hamilton working in the space [*Arts Archives* 2nd Series, 1994–95, no. 5: 'Dance Improvisation'] in which Julyen dances and talks about dancing at the same time; and I was always intrigued by that possibility even though it was just video. I suppose I want to work with people just to celebrate the ways that they are in the world that inform their making, what they see, what they think, their perceptions and how these surface in their work.

All you can do with this stuff really is treat it as a gift back to life, put it back out there. One of the nice things about what I've been doing is that I've enjoyed the strategy of the medium I've used. I enjoy the fact that there's a catalogue, so people can choose what they want if they want it. I like the strategy of a video or a CD, rather than say a book or journal. Not that books or journals aren't useful, but *Arts Archives* and *Theatre Papers* are an entirely different strategy. They get into nooks and crannies with the distaste that they deserve. [Laughter]

DAVID WILLIAMS

They have very different kinds of circuits and flows of dispersal, and somehow they enable different connectivities. I remember a few years ago in Western Australia, there was a small new dance and contact gang who treated some of the *Theatre Papers* a bit like samizdat. They passed around these papers, and photocopies of them, and the materials seemed to take on a little quiet role of provocative anti-toxins, or toxins, I'm not sure; they entered the bloodstream.

PETER HULTON

It's interesting in terms of circulation, because their effect is not immediate, it seems to me. They also have a knack of reappearing after about ten years, they begin to appear in people's bibliographies. They come back into another area of circulation, if you like.

RIC ALLSOP

How was it to rework Mary Fulkerson's *Theatre Paper* as a CD Rom? [*Arts Archives*, 4th series, 1998–99: 'Release: Language of the Axis']. You first worked on it with Mary in 1978, and it must have been a very different strategy for CD.

PETER HULTON

Well, that was my first CD effort, and it was very crude. It was a different strategy, of course. But it hasn't been taken up at all. When *Language of the Axis* first came out in print, it went out to a community of people, and was circulated widely, and I knew that was happening. *Arts Archives* don't go to communities of people because I don't think they exist in the same way as they did then. They go to individuals, the cultural situation is much more atomised now, and they also go to communities of people working in higher education, in training and institutional research contexts. And in a very tiny way I suspect that these kinds of materials have contributed to the recognition that practice can be a legitimate subject for research, that its bodies of knowledge are indeed worthy of scrutiny. That was certainly part of an underlying subversive strategy from the very beginning, to distribute these materials in such a way that they might play their part in extending academic notions of research. At the same time, over and above the actual content of a video or paper, perhaps it helps enhance the reputations of the artists concerned, it helps get them work, and they are able to use these materials as tools in applications for funding, and so on.

I think you have to use a 'Bavarian-type cunning', as Brecht would say, in pursuing these kinds of projects. I fully support any material strategy which can help declare the practice. If there is a biosphere of practices or images, let's call it a 'practicosphere', then it's under threat from so many different things within our society. Not least of which might be the revenge of the intellect upon experience that plagues so many of our university courses. Resistances and suspicions about other kinds of knowledges which cannot be conveyed in discursive ways remain entrenched. The gesture made by the Laban student I mentioned earlier on was in its own right a fragment of knowledge. And I believe there's a huge bank of knowledge in what I'm witnessing.

DAVID WILLIAMS

One of the things I like about *Arts Archives* is a proposition included in the brochure. It reads: 'It is the policy of *Arts Archives* to include as much material as is practical in order that the viewer or reader may edit according to interest'. As well as being an encouragement to engage with these materials in the ways one finds useful, this seems to be a recognition of their unfinished quality, rather than claiming that this is, for example, the 'definitive' video about kalarippayattu, the Alexander technique, breath and the voice, or whatever. The archives offer an array of materials that are to be re-used, re-fashioned, re-edited. Am I right in thinking there's a seed here for your recent interest in the possibilities afforded by CDs, in terms of a greater agency for the watcher or reader, and relatively a greater fluidity on the level of the materials themselves?

PETER HULTON

Yes, I think you're right. Maybe I wrote that to suggest that if you're bored, you've got a fast-forward function on your VCR. But I'd hate for the videos to be seen as packaging a practice with any claim to exclusive mastery or closure at all. When I make copies of the videos to send out, I just rewind them to a point mid-stream and go in there to check if they are working properly. So I have an enormous memory bank of little snippets from each of the videos, and that can be as informative as editing the whole video. I would like them to be tools for people's work.

You know, when I hear from people out of the blue and I send materials out around the world, I feel that these things are somehow going to settle into some fertile ground. I always feel the seed is going to spiral down and rest there and be taken further into something else. Perhaps what I least enjoy is bulk orders from university libraries; I've just sent a large number of videos from all of the archives to a university, and I know that they risk just sitting on the shelves collecting dust. And I don't have quite the same experience. But what does sustain me there is that someone by chance, by happenstance, might just take one off the shelf, put it in the VCR for fun, and might see something that touches them, gives them impetus. Even if someone rejects it, that defines a little bit of their own impetus to move forward or elsewhere.

DAVID WILLIAMS

There is also a historiographic edge to what you've been doing for over twenty years now; these are oral and visual histories of often quite marginalised practices. I remember having a conversation with Mick Gordon, the director of The Gate in London. He asked why I wrote about 'famous' people, rather than the 'true heroes' of performance making, and then proceeded to list the kinds of people you've worked with on *Arts Archives* or *Theatre Papers*: the semi-secret and often barely visible engines and triggers for all sorts of practices, which hover on the brink of disappearance in our product-oriented culture. Do you conceive of this as one of the functions of these materials? As a sort of loose, serendipitous, and very partial mapping of processes and practices, all of them invitations to pause and look again, that inform so much of what hardens into forms and comes at us in high visibility institutional contexts. For versions of them are often coopted and used in these sponge-like commodity contexts.

PETER HULTON

Well, I don't think I've ever conceived of this project in terms of the relationship to an energising substrata such as you've just described. On the other hand, I have conceived of these materials as part of a dynamic oral culture of connections, exchanges, knowledges. There used to be a debate about how to document oral cultures without immobilising or destroying them. But of course they are strong enough to go on in their own ways, they are resilient and evolve. Sometimes you meet someone like Andrei Serban – on one level a celebrated director with an international reputation, on another someone who works with stick

exercises in the training of performers. [See *Arts Archives*, 4th Series, 1998–99, no. 4: 'The use of sticks in performance training']. And the stick exercises themselves belong to the kind of area you're referring to, bedrocks of particular knowledges that are shared and travel in an 'invisible' way, they don't belong to Andrei. Their movements and connections operate rather like oral cultures. And all sorts of specific exercises circulate in this way, they are handed on and transformed according to needs and contexts; they are not owned by anyone. Over the years I've observed thousands of different practices. Do I use them in my own work? I might use one or two that I know about, not intellectually or by observing them, but by bringing them into my own practices in a substantial way, having the touch to understand and develop them. These are not recipes for people to follow. Sometimes you see a knowledge at work, you hear an echo, and something is possible. That's what I mean by my suggestion that there are no such things as methodologies, there are only practitioners.

RIC ALLSOPP

This relates to what you said earlier on about alignment, and it reminds me of something else you once said which has stayed with me. You talked about the ability to 'hang around things'. An ability to circle around something until it reveals what it is. It's a quality of listening.

PETER HULTON

Yes. When you make your *Fire Table* performances, Ric, you have thought about them of course, but in a sense the pieces declare themselves to you; it's two-way traffic. It's a dialogue, a balance within our psyches and physicalities. I see it in Dominique Dupuy's way of being in his body, for example: it's not simply a question of letting outside in, and it's never only inside out. The anthropomundic is the dialogue and exchange of two-way traffic. I would almost call it a touch; touching something on the outside means being touched by it, and this is another way of perceiving alignment. Part of the etymological root for the word 'touch' relates to something that ignites: touchstone, touchwood. Touch that fires. The congruence and conjunction of inside and outside, which I find touching, moving. I can recall the anthropomundic just by feeling the air on my cheek...

I very much like Deleuze's description of the plane of consistency. He says that if you're off it, you're either early or late, which is related to speed. And then he talks about 'affinities'; you're either there with it, or you're not. And that's a little what I see, that underneath the organisational composition one senses connections with this plane, people working or beginning to work in touch with it. And they do.

For information about *Arts Archives*
contact Peter Hulton at 6A Devonshire Place
Exeter EX4 6JA, Devon, England

"I'll throw us ahead 28 years"

CONTACT IMPROVISATION TODAY

BY **NANCY STARK SMITH**

Nancy Stark Smith has been centrally involved in Contact Improvisation since its inception in 1972. She is a renowned and sought after teacher, a consummate performer and articulate advocate of the form. She is also a founding and continuing co-editor of the international journal of dance and improvisation, *Contact Quarterly*.

The talk reproduced here was first presented at the DIY? Ecologies of Practice conference event held in Melbourne in November 2000.

Nancy was in Australia at the time working with the Melbourne based improvisation group State of Flux, and teaching a number of public workshops (*Deepening the Form*) .

We invited Nancy to speak about the history and lineage of Contact Improvisation — how the practice, the form and the settings in which it arises have evolved, changed or indeed, remained the same over its twenty-eight years. She began with a brief historical overview of the development of Contact Improvisation...

One important fact is that Contact Improvisation was created by one person. His name is Steve Paxton. He's an American dancer and artist and it was a dance investigation by him; it was a point in a path that he was on in the 1960s and into the '70s. He was a modern dancer, he had trained as a gymnast, also as an athlete, and had been practising yoga and other forms of martial arts. He was part of the Judson Church Dance Theater revolution in the mid '60s in the States that was opening up the boundaries of what was considered 'dance', what could be performed, what was dance making, what was dance material. But rather than spend time trying to second guess what Steve was trying to do then, I'll try to run through a little bit of CI's history from its inception and talk about some of the changes that have happened over time. And of course, it's just from my point of view. There are a lot of ways to tell any story, so this would be mine.

The piece that's often considered to be the seminal work for Contact Improvisation, is a work that Steve Paxton made, called *Magnesium*. It was a piece for a group of men and one of the things that he was exploring was the extremes of orientation and disorientation. He had a practice of standing still which involves observing the sensations in the body involved in balancing, standing sometimes for a really long time, like 40 minutes, noticing a lot of small sensations in your muscles and the activity in your senses directing your attention to these, and actually starting to feel almost disoriented in your small orientations and balancing. Meanwhile at the other end of the spectrum he was teaching a kind of flinging oneself about in space and rolling and falling and coming up and spilling. I was a student at Oberlin College at the time when he came as a guest artist as a part of a residency by The Grand Union, a dance improvisation group he was involved in with Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Barbara Dilley, Douglas Dunn, Nancy Lewis and David Gordon. All were innovating their own methods and their own ways of working and collectively making performance.

Each artist had their own strand during that month of residency at Oberlin and the work with the men was part of Steve's. The men had a giant, old canvas wrestling mat – so old that when anyone landed on it, the dust would fly out. He taught a lot of different kinds of rolls and falls. The piece started with standing still and then the men began to fall off centre and started to spill and follow their momentum through the space ... falling, coming up, making little collisions with one another, and sort of leaping into each other's arms, catching, sliding, falling ... a continuous moving. They were sort of drunk and staggering and sliding, they were energised movement men in your face. I think it was maybe a 10 or 15 minute piece – it was continuous – and then they ended with standing still again.

The audience watched from the running track above the gym for the most part. I was very moved. I also came from a gymnast, athlete, dancing background and this activity was very beautiful to me, very exciting, So I mentioned to Steve that if he ever did this work with women I would be interested to know about it. Meanwhile he's continuing the development of his work and about six months later he called to invite me to come to do a performance project in the John Weber Gallery in New York. It's interesting, the context in which the work arose. I think that context had a lot to do with what happened. Maybe this dance form could have been started by a Phys Ed teacher somewhere, or a wrestler or I don't know what. But the fact that it did come from an artist from the dance field at that time and was presented as art work is significant. The first time Simone Forti saw Contact she said 'Mmm, it's kind of like an art sport'. And we used that term for a long time. It really satisfied the need to call it something but not have to wrestle with people's ideas at that point of what dance was. Is it dance? Isn't it dance? So that was one way through.

So, in June of 1972 Steve gathered a small group of people, men and women, students he had met in his travels as a guest artist and some of his colleagues in New York to work with some of the ideas in *Magnesium* but in a different way. Instead of a group, it was focussed on duet improvisation. So we had a few practices that we did – standing still, the 'small dance', lots of rolling ... forward, back, aikido rolls etc., getting us to spill and process momentum safely in space. We ran and threw ourselves in the air at each other and learned to catch and work with the momentum of that. And we might also have had one other sort of contact, maybe head to head, balancing communication head to head. And then long periods of duet contact improvisations, lots of watching. Long dances. That was all there was in terms of formal methodology of the practice.

CI TODAY

I'll throw us ahead 28 years to say that at this point there are hundreds of people all over the world teaching Contact Improvisation. They all have their own methods. Some that they inherited from the people they studied with who might have inherited it from their teachers and adapted things. There is no set pedagogy and it's a mixture of tradition and innovation which has its own pluses and minuses, but it's interesting for people studying Contact now to realise that all of the skills and exercises and techniques that they are being presented with by their teachers, and that they're wanting to master in order to practice Contact Improvisation, are in fact somewhat arbitrary and unnecessary. The various exercises, principles and practices that people isolate to teach in classes help to guide one's physical training and perceptual training in certain directions and that's important, but there are many possible ways to go, and it's important to practice the improvisation itself to find what you need to do to maintain it.

Because I think in terms of practice as a teacher, as a performer and also just a practitioner of this work, the individual is responsible. The individual is responsible for setting the attention of what they're after, and doing it and teaching it. Do you want to improve people's physical skills, their improvisation awareness, their compositional sense, their social, human development. There are many levels of practice in the physical activity and the teacher helps orient the practitioner/students – whatever you might want to call them – to a certain way of practicing. So there might be hundreds of Contact Improvisation classes around the world and they're all slightly different from one another because the teacher has different interests and strengths and history and direction and that's how they form the class. Because we don't have a particular pedagogy or certification teachers sometimes worry and wonder 'Am I doing it right, and am I actually passing this on?' The fact that it's a duet form means that you have to do it with somebody else. This is not something you do alone. So there has to be some level of agreement about what the activity is to do it.

My test has always been in terms of the practice itself ... and I often liken it to learning a language, a dance language. If you speak English you can have dialogue with anyone else who speaks English. It might be rudimentary but you share some vocabulary, you learn things, you use what you've got. But if it breaks down and you're not able to communicate or happily give and take then there's been a breakdown in the language. So, the practice of the work apart from classes is the test. So I would say to the teacher, if someone who has studied Contact with you can go to a Contact jam and dance with someone who studied with someone else and they can have communication and practice, then perhaps it's a successful transmission of the language. The premise is from there you pick up vocabulary, you invent new things, you go on from there, you're off and running.

SO GOING BACK THEN, TO THE HISTORY

(This dance form is more holographic than it is linear; things travel in time but it grows exponentially in a lot of different directions, so I don't mind being a little holographic in this talk today.) The first performances of Contact grew out of the practice on the mat, standing still etcetera, and then going on to duet improvisation. We were spending a lot of time watching each other, learning from watching and then getting up and having a forty minute dance, whatever. It was a total immersion all day. We rehearsed for a week and then performed five hours a day in the gallery. The context was one in which it was an art activity where people could walk through and look at it, they could pause, they could come every day and sit there for five hours. That was the context and sometimes I'm amused to think that this could have been just a piece of Steve Paxton's in 1972, period. People are inventing forms and coming up with ways of focussing their dance activity all the time; presenting it and then moving onto the next idea. So, it's interesting to think that Contact became a movement form; I don't think that was the intention, it was an experiment.

Now we could have a whole lot of discussion about why or how that happened, why it became a movement form and didn't just stay a 'piece' Steve made in 1972. One reason is that it was very attractive and pleasurable and interesting to do and people wanted to continue. The second thing is you need a partner to do it, so you must engage other people in the activity to continue. So, it's not just an act of generosity, it's a necessity to share the practice in order to continue your own dancing. So, people from that original group went back out to wherever they lived, whatever their context was – whether they were teaching dance or they were at some college or wherever they were. And if they wanted to keep doing Contact, they had to get someone else started somehow. That desire shares it, that moves it through time and space. They got kind of hooked and they wanted to show someone else and it went on from there. But added to that was Steve Paxton's permission to do that. He didn't say 'no, you can't practice that unless you do it with me, and you have to do it in this way'. He was curious about what it was and he was open with it. He also didn't institutionalise that openness; he just didn't police it.

A few years down the track he had collected people to practice with, to share, to show the work with. Largely the performances were a showing of what we were doing, a showing of the activity. It wasn't dressed up particularly. In fact one early tour we did was called 'You come, we'll show you what we do'. That was the title and that was the spirit of it too. Just to witness the phenomenon was the point. But from watching performances and from little workshops, people started practicing on their own and we started hearing of a lot of injuries. I'm not sure how familiar you are with the form, but it's based on the communication between two moving (and still) bodies, based on physical forces of gravity and balance and momentum and how physical bodies can move in space remaining in communication with one another through touch. And also working in space in a spherical way so that you're not always head up, feet down; you might be upside down or sideways. You can follow the movement through three dimensional space, any part of your body is potentially the point of contact with your partner. So you get a lot of permutations of this double-body phenomenon ... of support and being supported, and moving and being moved; your reflexes move your partner and it goes on from there.

There was some danger involved because you're upside down and you're falling and you're working with a slight degree of disorientation a lot of the time, plus you're called upon to support or somehow deal with your partner's oncoming mass/weight. We started hearing of people getting seriously injured but we didn't know them. We thought mmm real injuries happening. We had lots of bruises in the beginning, but nothing serious. So we wondered what we were doing that was keeping it safe and what we should do about that in terms of the populations who were beginning to practice. We went through some interesting thoughts about it. One was that the 'small dance', the standing meditation of noticing the tiny balancing activities inside standing that Steve offered us and the other small sensitising activities we were doing were preparing us for the more dangerous, reckless stuff, as was some of the bigger rolling practices. People on the outside saw a lot of jumping and lifting and falling and wild stuff, but underneath it was a very deeply sensitising activity to the forces of gravity and your own support and your initiation and touch and using peripheral vision and a retuning of the senses. All that, I feel kept us safe. People would see the activity and they would extract from it the bigger movements and they would get hurt.

So, we thought we must certify, that we have to copyright, we must protect the people and the reputation of the work. And so we investigated copyrighting Contact Improvisation and setting it up so that two of the five of us (or some number) had to agree that a particular person was qualified to teach. We even wrote up the papers and a couple of people signed it and ... we just saw our lives passing. And we thought who wants to be the police of this work and what is the next step once you do that? First you have to track it, then you certify and people pay and then you teach the way it was and should be – it just wasn't that interesting. Plus if people had to be certified to use the term CI, people who were attracted to the activity would still do it but call it something else and the work would lose its coherency and currency as a developing form.

But we were concerned about safety, so the idea was to draw into centre and move from there. Rather than defend, to engage and so bring people into the work, if they want to know. Rather than test them, engage them and they will understand. People are intelligent, they're good, they don't want to hurt anybody. You know, trust that intelligence and just bring more information to it, and not overly decide what the absolute important things are, but keep them important to you and then maybe someone else will understand why they're important to them or they'll recognise which things are important and thus begins the diversity and the central idea of the work, I think.

At that point of not certifying and copyrighting, we started what is now *Contact Quarterly* magazine. So, instead of hierarchy and certification we started communication. 'Tell us what you're doing, read what other people are doing, what the ideas are and practice. Physically put it on the mat, put it on the floor. Think about it, and put it on the floor.' For me that balance of consciousness and physical practice is very important. You can talk about it too much and you perhaps could practice without a clear sense of intention and focus, and that might limit your practice as well. But a lot can be learned from watching and dancing with people; that's one of the main forms of transmission of the work. What you learn from dancing up against someone else's body who has been practicing, their sequencing, their timing, their listening, their way. Talk about holographic! I don't know exactly what we're learning from each other but it's a lot, and you choose what's relevant to you and you just let the rest go.

So, there's has been an enormous amount of exchange going on and development; practice is essential, application gets wider and wider. People realise, oh, what happens if I bring this to my 'X-work' that I do – whatever that might be – dance training, working with senior citizens in some kind of a home or kids or choreography. I mean this is a generator of all kinds of different sorts of partnering exchanges and sensibilities. People see this and, say oh my God, look at all these new ideas! How am I going to use this in my next piece? They do what they can with it. Sometimes they get involved in Contact and extract something from that or they just pick up something from seeing it. You don't control that; it's useable in that way as anything you see is. Some people use it just as a way of staying healthy in their body, they simply like to practice. It's got social functions as well. It's interactive, you're with people in a certain kind of activity. It also develops the senses and reflexes and that is quite enlivening. It's a mindfulness practice as well.

FORMS OF PRACTICE

In terms of forms of practice there is the Jam session. I think it's a kind of interesting and somewhat unique development within the art dance field, as a way of dancing and as a way of practicing dancing. It's not a class, it's not a rehearsal, it's not a performance. It's not a club, its intention isn't a singing and drinking and smoking and socialising kind of thing. I think it comes close to the idea of the martial arts dojo where people at different levels of practice are able to interact with another through a form. Also the Jam session is where people come with their stuff and play with one another. Jams range from like an hour of practice, to three hours on a Sunday afternoon that someone organises, to a weekend, to a 'let's go to the Hot Springs and live in cabins and dance all day Jam' for a week.

So, this all underlies the development of Contact ... how people practice and how they improvise the formats and setups around their intent and how they hold to them and how those develop. Now there are more than fifty, maybe a hundred different Jams going on around the world – some short, some long, some city-based, some country, that the organisers organise collectively or singularly. The organisers set the parameters and that sets the pace. They say, none of this, only this, no talking in the studio, music or no music etc. People are using it and developing the Contact jam in a lot of different ways. The implications are enormous and they feed back into the work.

Maybe I'll close with one thing that keeps coming back, something that Mary Fulkerson wrote in an issue of the *Quarterly* around the 25th anniversary of Contact. The title of the piece, which was really provocative to me, was "Taking the glove without the hand".

I really don't know precisely what she meant by it, but the image provoked in me a sense of the danger in formalising things, in having the techniques or the way it has manifest take the place of the original idea and intent; or over-formalizing the original idea and intent and thinking it is sacrosanct and you can't mess with it. I see the danger in that because these are different times. Contact is an encapsulation of many aspects of Steve's thinking and America and the 1960s and art and a lot of things. And it's a beautiful encapsulation and it seems to function extraordinarily well for a lot of different people in a lot of different ways over time as well, which is amazing. That young people are still attracted to do this, whether it's just to get their chops because now choreographers are really wanting them to do this sort of thing in their dances so dancers need it as part of their training, or whether it changes their mind in a certain way as well, which it does.

I think things that are essentially true transcend time and so perhaps do some manifestations like dance styles. Many don't last much past their originators; some do. But touch is a very powerful medium, it's healing, it's stimulating, it's a lot of things, it's powerful and I think it's no small measure of this form's success that it involves so much touch communication. It does something to people that is attractive. The training of the senses and improvisation as a practice is I think relevant to dance making and to living. I think that Contact formed at a certain time, but I don't think it's a '60s activity necessarily, although it does have a lot of those values in there. Steve was also trying to get away from the master choreographer telling the company what to do type of structure, to develop a more collaborative kind of dancing making.

The practice of Contact as Steve originally defined it was very specific, and in that way drove the investigation deeper into a very specific area of physical practice; it was limited, and so the investigation could go further. A funny phenomenon happened in England. Steve was going regularly to Dartington College in Devon in the '70s to teach and Mary Fulkerson was also there teaching Anatomical Release at that time.

I went to do something in England in the early '80's and met some dancers and they kept referring to 'Contact Release'. In their experience Contact and Release were one; they didn't know that these practices were separate. They learned them together, or so closely to one another, they sort of fused. It's really interesting to me to see how these things form. Because there's no set pedagogy for teaching Contact Improvisation, people bring in their Tai Chi warm up, their Releasing or Alexander, BMC, modern dance, gymnastics stuff and then they set people to improvising and still other strands come into it.

At one point Steve was concerned about this and he wrote a piece in *Contact Quarterly*, called, "A Matter of Delicacy", about when you teach, how you make your references clear (or if you do), so that the people who are coming in understand that this is BMC actually, this is Authentic Movement, and this is Contact. Although Contact Improvisation itself of course is an amalgam of ideas and practices, so where it starts and 'other' things begin is anyone's call.

'Ecology' does not simply mean 'environment' in the physical sense. An ecology depends on how all people, phenomena or available raw materials 'sit' with each other, how they interrelate and how they are perceived to interrelate in social contexts. ... Some social ecologies include more than just people and their physical environment, especially if the natural environment and other living things are perceived to be active participants in people's lives and cosmologies. If there is a religious or supernatural aspect to the society, that also will become part of the scenario.[1]

DIY? ECOLOGIES OF PRACTICE

A RESPONSE BY **ANNE THOMPSON**

RETHINKING MY SOCIAL ECOLOGY

Every now and again, as the saying goes, you read a book that changes your perception of the world. I was wanting to think about Australia. I was wanting to feel a stronger connection between the art I made and the society in which I lived. Perhaps I was wondering what was the 'key' to making a 'successful' show. The desire was vague as many desires are. Vagueness protects desire. I picked up Ghassan Hage's *White Nation*.[2]

I had been living with the idea that I was an active part of a 'benevolent' multicultural society in which cultural difference was tolerated and in some instances celebrated. This 'belief' structured my perception of my local suburb which I saw as interestingly, culturally diverse. Apart from a friendly wave this cultural diversity demanded nothing of me nor I of it. I saw my neighbours and myself as living benignly alongside each other. Although my partner and my friends are Anglo-Australian I thought of myself as 'friendly' to non-Anglo Australians. I approached 'non-Anglos' with 'interest' and friendly 'enthusiasm'. I felt I was welcoming. I imagined myself as genuinely committed to multiculturalism.

Hage points out that these ideas and beliefs rely on an assumption of 'governing right' – that 'I' have the right to 'tolerate' (or not tolerate), to 'appreciate' (or not appreciate), to 'welcome' (or not welcome) non-Anglo Australians. 'Governing right' is the province of those 'Australians' who assume that Australia is 'their home', Australians like me. We assume that we are at home and these 'others' (people not like me) are visiting. Hage

thus breaks down the distinction between 'evil, white nationalists' (Pauline Hanson and her supporters) and 'good, white nationalists' (like me) by demonstrating that both positions are equally dependent on the assumption of 'governing right'. Hage prefers the descriptor 'white' to Anglo-Australian. I do too now because it shifts the discussion of race relations away from a genealogical perspective which has been used repeatedly to classify indigenous people to their detriment[3] towards an analysis of social privilege and lack of privilege. The term 'white' also has salience in this country because of the White Australia policy. This policy produced a notion of an official Australian population type, the 'white Australian'. These were the Australians who were welcomed as 'official Australians' with the rights of those who belong.

Official multicultural discourse constructs white Australians as tolerant, in need of cultural enrichment and drawn to such enrichment. It constructs migrant and indigenous Australians as 'tolerable', culturally rich and obligingly generous in sharing their 'culture' (if they know what's good for them). The basis for tolerance then is a contract whereby the 'exotic-ness' of the 'other' becomes economically, culturally and often times spiritually useful, to those 'at home' here, we 'white' Australians.

Now I see the performance of this 'governing right' everywhere, this 'gentle', ongoing insistence that 'we' in 'our wisdom' will manage cultural diversity. This insidious assumption repeatedly constructs the 'non-white' as having less 'rights' than 'us'. It keeps us in control even as we 'bend over backwards' to construct a more 'equitable' society. I am thus implicated in a racist social order even when I consider myself to be 'tolerant' because I assume myself to be the reference point for decisions made in this country.

I am articulating this insight into racism with reference to myself to personalise it and because the philosophy of individualism dominates the manner in which whites discuss 'race' issues in Australia. Judith Brett suggests a reason for this in her discussion of 'the politics of grievance' in *The Resurgence of Racism*:

> The problem we are left with is essentially a problem of politics, of which traditions of political thinking are available to people to make sense of their experience and to connect them to the national politics of the day. Today's social and economic experiences seem too diverse and fragmented to be understood in terms of classes competing within the framework of the nation state. Thus individualism regains its commonsense plausibility for many who would have once looked at class models.[4]

It is this liberal humanist 'individualism' which has proved to be such a problematic paradigm for whites when confronted with Aboriginal political demands, particularly those centring on land, whereas immigration can be accommodated if immigrants are understood to 'contribute' to and as participating in the existing society and culture.

Current Aboriginal political claims challenge the white assumption that 'we, whites' are the caretakers of the nation, that we have 'governing right'. If we assume the nation to be our home 'carried in one's blood and bones', linking 'one's own life to previous and future generations', how do we honour prior claims to land and demands for compensation which challenge the fact that we built our 'home' on the back of attempts to eliminate the indigenous population? If we assume the nation to be 'a society of many cultures, many ethnicities, many faiths, united in their tolerance of each other and their respect for the law' or many citizens 'with its implication of shared experience'[5], then Aboriginal claims appear 'unfair' because 'inequitable'. Whites then either reject such claims or attempt to 'rationalise' such claims, by constructing Aborigines as 'disadvantaged'. What is desperately needed is a different political model and notion of nation. Post-colonial discourse provides one. It is the one that I am currently exploring.

Post-colonialism provides a useful key to any analysis of one's social position in Australia – an historical perspective. This is important if one is to account for relations between different groups of people in Australia and if one is to understand one's work as part of a continuum of cultural production which is in turn the product of a range of discourses which may no longer exist as conscious beliefs, but which may have entered the realm of 'common sense' or 'super-ego/moral pleasure' driving how we behave.[6]

> [Post-colonialism] is the term which is used to describe an engagement with and contestation of colonialism's discourses, power structures and social hierarchies. In Alan Lawson's words, post-colonialism is a 'politically motivated historical-analytical movement [which] engages with, resists, and seeks to dismantle the effects of colonialism in the material, historical, cultural, political, pedagogical, discursive and textual domains' (1992:156).[7]

QUALIFICATIONS

ONE

I consider 'whiteness' to be a shifting construct. Borrowing from Pierre Bourdieu's sociology[8] I see it as defining a group with a certain social (economic and cultural) capital. The exact nature of this capital differs from person to person and has differed through time and place. Thus some of us can be 'whiter' than others and some of us may lose 'whiteness' through a change in social circumstance, of environment or in personal appearance. I am using the label to refer to those Australians who assume a certain unqualified relationship to the nation, who assume the nation to be 'their' home and assume that they have the right to determine what happens in that home.

TWO

Hage makes it clear that the realization by whites of the part they play in maintaining a racist social order is not occurring (and did not occur) because 'we clever, kind whites' came to this understanding unprompted. It is not a further reason to pat ourselves on the back for being 'humanitarian'. (This is not to discredit the important theoretical and practical work that was performed by white feminists, anthropologists and cultural theorists). It is occurring because it has become impossible for whites to ignore the social changes which challenge the dominance of white culture and the militant voices of migrant and indigenous people demanding change.

THREE

Humans define and perceive their environment in different ways. These ways are the products of history, need and desire. I may see my suburb as rich in resources or as having inadequate resources. I may view my shopping centre as inundated with 'Asians' or slowly becoming reflective of a cultural diversity I desire. I am not imagining all 'white' artists see their practice as located the same environment nor suggesting that they should. This is also not to deny that the challenge to white 'governing right' is 'real' at the present time and needs to be met. It does! I believe we are being asked to consider the colonial history of Australia by indigenous Australians and to understand this history as present in contemporary Australia.

FOUR

I know many white Australians have not been so slow on the uptake as I have been.

FIVE

This view of Australia may prompt action in other fields of social endeavour rather than the arts.

Sally Gardner writes:

> The role of art is to serve no purpose – which is not to say that art lacks purpose. ... art's role is not to be an agent for change. If it were it would have a function. And art ought not to have a function.
> But is art political? The political in art lies in its refusal to be an instrument. Art speaks only for itself.
> ...
> Art is deeply committed to the world: it is definitely of the world. Its special character lies in its ways of being about the world – which are not the institutionalized ways.
> Art stands in a complex relationship with the world. Understanding the way in which artists' experience of the world is translated into the form of art is very difficult and very elusive.[9]

Philippa Rothfield writes:

> According to Deleuze, there was a time when practice was the instantiation of theory, and another time when the opposite was true, when practice was what provoked theoretical developments. Now, he claims, the relation is neither totally one thing nor another. Instead;
>
> > *from the moment a theory moves into its proper domains, it begins to encounter obstacles, walls, and blockages which require its relay by another type of discourse ... Practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another. No theory can develop without eventually encountering a wall, and practice is necessary for piercing the wall.*
>
> The notion of a relay between theory and practice is important. Not only does it reject a total opposition between the two terms: it recognises the movement between the two. And perhaps this is my stalemate: any attempt to solve the problems of feminism and its repertoire of privilege and domination cannot remain in the realm of theory alone. Although there is a sense in which feminist theory is a form of practice, it is not so in the relevant sense. A theoretical concern within feminism over its relation to the underprivileged will have to engage with those spheres of practice in which such domination occurs.[10]

ECOLOGIES OF PRACTICE: A PERFORMANCE ECOLOGY

Performance is a social act, so the performance ecology automatically is part of (or the same as?) the social ecology. ... A performance ecology, therefore, is one constructed by humans from all aspects of their 'being-in-the-world' in order to consciously show and tell how 'being in the world' is for them.[11]

So if I assume the social ecology in Australia to be the inter-relationship of all people living in this country, how then to think about, view and make performance as a white Australian?

When I looked back on my career in the Arts I saw that I had only ever worked with white Australians. This empirical fact alone bears analysis and has significant implications. It suggests why I have never seriously engaged with my cultural position as specific to a particular culture rather than the 'norm'. A number of writers (Ruth Frankenberg in America and Aileen Moreton-Robinson in Australia)[12] argue that racism tends to be best articulated by those whites who have social and personal relationships with non-whites. These whites are more likely to understand themselves as implicated in racism and to address racism as they live their lives.

To better understand the position of the white, Australian artist at this time I interviewed a number of white artists involved in live performance. In what follows I am going to speak about my interview with Margaret Cameron.

THE POLITICS OF PERFORMING

I was curious as to why Margaret made solo work. I presumed that the reasons might have something to do with the current economic climate so I asked her whether economic circumstances shaped the way she made art. She responded with:

> I am so happy when I am in a creative process. It's a complicated kind of happiness but it's alive. And that's me! That's my artistic self! That's it! So yes I may make solo work because on the one hand it's possible, but more essentially, I think it's because, if it expressed itself differently, I could be here painting. I'm just here. I'm just living my life. I need it to be part of my life. I need it be my life. A painter will paint, won't he? He doesn't need to get involved with galleries and all that. But it's

> his way of being. If I couldn't do it, if I had to get really involved in complex structures that would stop me doing it, that wouldn't work. It can grow and get bigger as long as it's feasible. It would have to be able to be made for me. If it hasn't been made then it hasn't been made. So I think ... it is very very intimate that relationship. I need to be able to pick up a piece of paper and write. I need it to be that close, that available.[13]

Margaret consistently challenged the epistemological model I kept attempting as a researcher. I wanted to 'know' how she thought about her position as a white artist as if this thinking was/could be separated out from her work. She refused to separate herself, living in the world, from her art. Talking to Margaret about her art (forgive me Margaret for speaking of you so 'objectively') involves talking to Margaret's performances. She answers my questions with quotes from her work. She performs her work in answer to my questions. Her work is her conversation. It speaks for itself.

An example: I asked Margaret about 'acting'.

> I'll just go back to the text for a minute. It says, 'Don't imagine there is some grander scheme beyond the politics of our exchange ...
> I'm not just talking about art. I'm talking about exchange too. The politics of our exchange, you and me, that is the art' ...
> But then I say, 'But excuse me, I am only an actress.' ...
> So I only enact ... I only animate what I see or feel or hear.
> But then ... and here's the doozey. 'Lend me your imagination.'
> Because theatre is about perception. There's that wonderful idea, 'theatre is in the mind' ...
> 'I manifest failure that you might interpret the principles.' That goes back to the theme 'That the experience of loss is the relevant experience [in life].'
> Then I ask, 'Is this a responsible use of public space? Is this possible in a theatre?'[14]

The quotes are from *Knowledge and Melancholy*.[15] In speaking about her work in the theatre Margaret draws on the thinking she has done for this work, on the words she has formed into 'dialogue'.

Margaret's practice is 'acting'. She appears to inhabit the world as if it were a stage. Her descriptions of her 'life' in *Things Calypso Wanted To Say* [16] suggest that she is studying her performance and the performances of others all the time. It seems she views 'living' as performance. Cameron describes an encounter between herself and a girl on a beach.

> 'Excuse me,' she said, 'but what nationality are you?'
> 'Well', I mumbled, 'Australian' (not wanting to let her down)
> but my heart was beating with the possibility, the suggestion, that somehow I was not!
> 'Oh', she said – still interested, 'we thought you were French'.
> (A thrilled mixture of syllables gurgled stupidly in my larynx!) ...
> 'I do try to be a bit foreign', I blurted blushing. 'I hope you're not disappointed to know I'm Australian!' 'Oh no', she says – still interested. ...[17]

For Margaret material reality and social relations are mutable, charged with desire and imagination. Is imagination desire? There is no 'art' distinct from social reality but the art of social reality. This quote from *Things Calypso Wanted To Say* also points to her concern with 'being Australian' which emerges as a discomfort and as a longing to be 'European'. This discomfort and longing is connected to Cameron's perception of herself as an artist, her desire to be an 'artist'.

> On the radio someone says, 'To steal someone's perspective is to kill the person'. She is an immigrant and an artist. She has a beautiful accent and she is automatically legitimate! But what if you are struggling to find a perspective – that is – you were born in this country! The washing machine is emptying the water, gushing down the sink. Doing the washing and hanging it on the line is soothing; that is a perspective I suppose, but is it the only one? I mean women have been doing that for centuries.[18]

What I am trying to point out is that the way we view ourselves (the 'identity' positions we identify with) will dictate the manner in which we are 'political'. I see myself as a white, middle class female who researches in the area of multiculturalism and the performing arts and who directs shows. I am thus going to see the opportunities for 'political activity' in the social realm of my daily suburb, the University and in the wider community as well as in my work as a director. Margaret clearly identifies with being an 'artist'. Her politics are sifted through this frame. So when I ask Margaret about her economic circumstances I hear about whether she can attract the resources to keep presenting her work. I don't hear about food on the table. This brings me to the question of the usefulness or not of identity politics. I can only say that politics, as far as I am concerned is strategic and at this time I consider it strategic that whites identity themselves as part of a colonial history which devastated and continues to impact upon indigenous Australians.

Bang! A Critical Fiction [19]

In this piece, which I have read and read about but not seen, Cameron wears a cowboy hat and speaks with an American drawl. She performs with a chest of drawers which becomes her 'companion', her 'home', her 'psyche', her 'horse'. Her 'adversary' is her shadow, Lonesome. It is a domestic western. Cameron has a conversation with herself about loneliness and other aspects of living through dispersing her self into objects – the chest of drawers and her shadow. I'm aware that my pleasure in *Bang!* could be a modernist attraction to the image of the woman wrestling with her soul – both an identification with the individual as hero (a white construction) and an attraction to psychic reality having more interest for me than material circumstances (also a white privilege). Both these tendencies are the province of the white artist. But the more I thought about the work the more I relished it's play across terms – between woman and man, Australian and American, house and frontier, internal landscape and external landscape, the enemy without and the enemy within. I relished the parody.

PARODY AS A POST-COLONIAL DEVICE

Performance can challenge the fit between the coloniser's identity and culture and the 'colonized'/indigenous people's identity and culture by highlighting the mismatch between the performer's body and the body he/she is assuming, a mismatch of social power. In *Bang! A critical fiction* there is a mismatch of gender and cultural identity – an Australian woman plays an American man. If America is understood as an imperial power, the Australian woman can be understood as one of the colonised assuming the role of the colonizer. The performance becomes parodic, ironic or ambiguous as a result.

I found Richard Dyer's discussion of the Western a useful way to frame my thinking about the parody in *Bang!*. Dyer attempts to articulate 'whiteness' in American representational fields. He considers the Western 'an imaginative form which purveyed the experience, the thrill and exhilaration, of the exercise of' Imperialism which has been constructed in white terms as an exercise in 'enterprise'. He suggests that it 'is in the visceral qualities of the Western – surging through the land, galloping about on horseback, chases, the intensity and skill of fighting, exciting and jubilant music, stunning landscapes – that enterprise and imperialism have had their most undeliberated and powerful appeal.'[20]

He suggests that 'a whole series of tropes of whiteness' proceed from the Western:
1. that 'the greatest threat ... comes not from the native peoples ... but from within, from bad whites'.
In Westerns Indigenous people are 'unworthy opponents'.
2. that 'an act of violence' will sort things out and
3. that 'the desert' is 'a tabula rasa for the establishment of white society'.[21]

MARGARET CAMERON IN 'BANG! A CRTICAL FICTION' (2000)

Cameron's performance can be understood to comment on each of these tropes in turn. I'm not suggesting this is a formulated strategy but that the work does speak to a genre that frames the performance. Cameron's imagination has done the work and that work resonates outside of the theatre as well as inside.

Firstly, the threat in her frontier drama is a threat from within (not a 'worthy' white opponent). It is the threat of loneliness (that shadow, Lonesome).

Secondly, this threat is not dealt with through an act of violence but through conversation.

> Ah know's why you go ridin' Lonesome
> But one day you a' gonna lose somethin'
> Ah can't keep tellin' you this
>
> You caint go ridin' everytime there's trouble
> Ya gotta settle down!
> Ya listenin' to me? ...[22]

Thirdly, Cameron articulates a different ethics of relationship to environment and 'thangs' to the Imperial ethics of the classic Western where the world is 'there for the taking'.

> Thangs don't belong to people
> And people don't belong to thangs
> They just stay as long as they have the fancy
> then they move on out ...
>
> You caint live inside another thang
> Most thangs have got trouble
> An' before long you get that trouble on you
> an' that gets real confusin'[23]

Westerns occur on 'the frontier', conceived of as a border that is pushed back by the civilising mission of white men. Cameron rides a different 'frontier', her own psychic landscape. In the piece Cameron rides the chest of drawers. She writes, 'It represents an inner sanctum (perhaps the unconscious) ... an organ of secret psychological life ...'[24]

A SHIFT OF PERSPECTIVE

The piece can be enjoyed as a poignant, witty and telling parody and as a celebration of a genre of Holywood movie that has wide appeal as a representational system. However, Cameron shifts the piece away from simply being a parody or a theatrical quote with the following conversation with the chest of drawers. Cameron evokes with uncanny accuracy what has come to be one of the symbols of white Australia's refusal to relinquish any ground to indigenous demands – John Howard's refusal to say 'Sorry'.

> Ah don't want say Ah'm sorry
> before you say yer sorry – that kind o' thing
> 'Cos Ah don't mean Ah'm sorry
> Only mean Ah'm sorry in a sorrowful kind a' way ...
>
> Not that Ah'm sorry 'cos Ah did something wrong
> Ah didn't do nothin' wrong,
> Ah aint got nothin' to repent on
> Not that Ah understands anyways
>
> Might o' done somethin' wrong a long time ago
> Might had somethin' wrong done to me a long time a go
> Somethin' Ah caint even remember ...
> dunno know, Ah dunno everythin'!
> Ah mean, Ah'm sorrowful
> Ah'm sorrowful in a rectification kind o'way.
> So Ah'm aint sayin' Ah', sorry
> Ah'm sorrowful.[25]

In this moment Cameron's cowboy is both a parody of the male, enterprising, Imperialist drive and a theatrical representation of white Australians as colonisers, as possessors of this same drive, as cowboys of a different sort. This playing across many axes of identity produces a complexity of meaning which I find enormously satisfying. I am asked to inhabit a more complex world than the one I started this paper inhabiting. I am asked to sit with, rather than refuse ambivalence and ambiguity. In this place there is humour, there is straight talkin', there is abject grief and there is possibility. Cameron's refusal to say sorry is different to John Howard's. In Cameron's there is a desire for 'rectification', 'Ah'm sorrowful in a rectification kind o'way.' Cameron talks about finding that word:

> Now 'rectification' – I was so amazed when that word appeared. It became a central word in the whole piece. I wrote a song. 'I'm rectifying myself' was the chorus. So I looked it up. It just means 'to get something straight'.
>
> So what I think is fantastic about reconciliation as an issue ... the Christian thing is so old in us, it's hard to make the term relevant. It's just not hip to have a conscience because that's the way we understand religion, as conscience, conscience as Christianity. We don't understand 'conscience' in the modern world. In our world what does it mean?
>
> What's happening with the reconciliation process is that within our world it has bloomed, it has come up to surround us. It is part of the very air we breathe. ... It's in the air we breathe and it's on the earth we are building on and it's about getting it right. It feels right. And so there's going to be a lot more possible – to have 'reconciliation' out of it's darkness, and out of the Christian frame which is not relevant to us.
>
> ANNE: In the Christian thing 'reconciliation' is caught up with an invisible other but in the race debate it's caught up with another person. It's facing another human being and saying, 'how do we make this right between us?'.
>
> MARGARET: A sense of self that is to do with relationship, with interrelationship and with a relationship to the land. Home, what home means to the Aborigine. And it's our home. We all need a home and I think the Christian thing has been very strong here because we are so displaced. We know we have squatted here. It's there in our consciousness. And it doesn't feel great so it's not interrelationship. It's domination and all those things.[26]

What I want to draw out of this quote is Cameron's discovery of a term through her work as a writer which then extends her (and my) thinking about 'reconciliation'. It is this teasing out of terms and experience which I consider to be so important at this time.

In doing this work Cameron gives voice to 'the conflicted nature of being white in Australia'.

> In settler/invader colonies such as Australia, a broad-based application of postcolonial theory must attend not only to the position of indigenous peoples but also to the ambivalent discursive emplacement of the nonindigenous subject who is both colonizer and colonized. Working through Bhaba's concepts of colonial mimicry, Alan Lawson theorizes this settler position as one always already marked by a 'dual inscription' ... that continually frustrates any attempt to formulate a coherent postcolonial subjectivity. In his formulation, the settler experiences colonial authority as a lack of authenticity due to separation from the distant imperial culture that s/he can only mimic. At the same time, the settler exercises authority over the indigene and the land while expressing a desire for native authenticity through a long series of 'historical and fictional narratives of psychic encounter and indigenization'. (Lawson 1992, 157)[27]

However, there is no 'indigenous other' in Cameron's piece. Cameron's cowboy rides alone in an empty landscape. Her 'settler' is not seen to exercise authority over the indigene and the land nor is 'he' a 'native', more 'native' than indigenous people. Cameron expresses no desire for an authenticating 'native position'. This need for an 'indigenous or black other' to foreground the specificity of white culture, our reliance on, our use of the 'other' to articulate ourselves has been consistently critiqued.[28] For it is just another 'use' of the 'other' for our own purposes with no respect for the 'other's' independence from our desires. Cameron does not engage with this territory. She is dealing more with the first part of Lawson's 'settler position', with the experience of colonial authority as 'inauthentic'. To gain authority Cameron mimics an icon of American representation, an American, white, movie hero. This distance between self and representation allows 'thangs' to be said.

When asked to think about her work in terms of 'race' relations and current indigenous demands Cameron sent me the following email.[29]

> One idea that I have come across this year is that reconciliation as an underlying need or drive is apparent in much new Australian writing ... in scripts that are not related to indigenous Australian issues ... that this 'story' is becoming part of our understanding of ourselves in the world ... we are no longer 'new' ... our history is finally being reabsorbed into our psyche ... [we are becoming] people with a history. I think our view of ourselves was as a people in exile, was of being convicts rather than colonisers ...

In *Bang!* Cameron's 'cowboy' wrestles with 'his' past, a past which has produced 'his' present circumstances, a past which lives on in the present, a past that cannot be eradicated through will, but like Cameron's shadow, a past which must be confronted because it will not go away. Cameron attempts a reconciliation with this past. The provisional nature of any such reconciliation is paramount in the work. This reconciliation is a work in progress.

All of Cameron's works feature attempts at reconciliation with others, with self, with situation, with desire, with art. *Things Calypso Wanted To Say* constructs Cameron as a reluctant Australian (one might say as a 'convict', as displaced here). She wrestles with her own 'cultural cringe' at this time. Being 'Australian' impedes her sense of being an artist. Part of this well theorised 'literary and performance trope' is the belief that Australia is 'too new', does not have a cultural history to draw on. Part of this trope is that Australians do not value art and art making, that the climate is too harsh or too mild, the people too pragmatic or hedonistic to engage with making art.

> And *Bang!* is really ... I suppose the simplest way of saying it, is that there's some kind of reconciliation going on about aloneness or loneliness or one's experience of oneself in relation to the unknown. That involves loneliness. That is a solitary experience, that experience of oneself in relation to the unknown. And some experience of one's relation to the unknown becomes ... it's a kind of religiosity ... It can be seen as religiosity but what I'm trying to say is that it's one's experience of relationship so it's not about God. This sort of feeling about being in some kind of relationship with the unknown is what makes us have relationships.[30]

Bang! is a representation of a white woman arriving at a moment of being completely alone and wrestling with the uncertainty and unfamiliarity of that moment. She has her past and there's some past business that needs dealing with. The future is unknown and not yet part of the present story. 'Being alone', 'not mattering', 'facing the void'. This is what Cameron chooses to investigate. It is this which, I am beginning to think, is the precondition of being white at this time. We do not know how to deal with 'not mattering', with not being at the centre. We do not know our own 'whiteness' as a longing for continual relationship including relations of dominance. We do not know how to feel and see our own privilege, our own desire for privilege. We do not know 'how to deal with certain kinds of difference', particularly different life choices, independent desires. We do not know the future. This is the experiential reality of many whites and the political reality facing Australia as a nation.

It's been said before. The only way forward is to be in this place, to inhabit 'not knowing' as we meet the 'other'. But we must meet 'the other' and listen. And perhaps we might understand through such listening, how our being white is not and should not be the 'normal', the 'valued' cultural position against which all other communication, desires and actions are judged. Perhaps we could forgo the right, the privilege, the habit of 'knowing', the pleasure of 'governing right'. And perhaps we might understand something new, something I haven't come to yet ...

And of course, it can't end there.

FOOTNOTES

1 Anne Marshall, 'Casting About for the Scent: Researching Aboriginal Performance'. *Sun Sisters and Lightening Brothers: Australian Aboriginal Performance, Australasian Drama Studies*, October 2000, p. 9.

2 Hage G., *White Nation: Fantasies of White supremecy in a multicultural society*, Pluto Press, Australia, 1998.

3 There have been many attempts throughout the history of white settlement of Australia to classify Indigenous people according to the 'mix of blood in their veins' for purposes of determining their economic rights or cultural worth. This fixation on classification reflects the extraordinary intensification of colonial administration of Aboriginal affairs from 1788 to the present. Elaborate systems of control aimed, until recently, at exterminating one kind of 'Aboriginality' and replacing it with a sanitized version acceptable to the Anglo invaders and immigrants. Perhaps, Aboriginal affairs is the longest 'race' experiment in history? It is certainly a monument to the failure of social engineering. The Commonwealth definition relies on High Court opinion. It is more social than racial: an Aboriginal person is defined as a person who is a descendent of an indigenous inhabitant of Australia, identifies as Aboriginal, and is recognized as Aboriginal by members of the community in which he or she lives as Aboriginal. This definition is preferred by the vast majority of Aboriginal people over the racial definitions of the assimilation era.'
Langton M., 'Well I heard it on the Radio and I saw it on the Television', Australian Film Commisssion, 1993. p. 29

4 Judith Brett, 'John Howard, Pauline Hanson and the Politics of Grievance', in, Gray G. and Winter C., (ed.), *The Resurgence of Racism: Howard, Hanson and the Race Debate*, Monash Publications in History: 24, 1997, p. 20.

5 Ibid. pp. 23–24.

6 In a discussion of ethics and morality Zizek suggests that psychoanalytic discourse proposes 'a fundamental and irresolvable tension' within any subject. He points out that the Superego, the system that Freud proposed at one stage to be an auxiliary to the Ego which supposedly emerges to manage the tension between social norms and unconscious drives, is itself pleasure seeking in the manner of the Id. It is not a moral and rational force free from libidinal pressure, a coherent collection of 'moral shoulds' which command the individual to temper his/her behavior. To the contrary, it is structured around an original guilt based on the realisation that one's own pleasure displeases the 'other'. It is fueled by the desire to reconstitute a feeling of 'oneness' with this 'other'. It is thus a channeling of pleasure along a certain axis, a sado-masochistic axis. The foregoing of certain pleasures is compensated for through the admonishment, punishment and control of pleasure seeking 'others'. This tension challenges the western notion of 'morality' as a state of being free from desire, a 'self-forgetting or self-sacrifice'. It implicates relations with 'others' in all moralities.
What 'bothers' us in the 'other' ... is that he appears to entertain a privileged relationship to the object – the other either possesses the object-treasure, having snatched it away from us (which is why we don't have it), or poses a threat to our possession of the object....That is to say, racism is always grounded in a particular fantasy ... of 'them' who, by means of their excessive enjoyment, pose a threat to our 'way of life' which by definition resists universalization.
Zizek S., *The Metastases of Enjoyment: Six Essays on Women and Causality*, Verso, London, New York, 1994, pp. 70–71.

7 Gilbert, H. and Tompkins, J. *Post-colonial Drama: Theory, Practice, Politics*. Routledge, London and New York, 1996. pp. 2–3.

8 Bourdieu P., *Practical Reason*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1998.

9 Sally Gardner, 'Manifesto', *Writings On Dance 6: Questions of Power*, p. 11.

10 Philippa Rothfield, 'A Narrative on the Limits of Theory'. *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought,* Edited by Norma Greive and Ailsa Burns, Oxford University Press, Melboune, 1994, p. 114.
Quote is from 'Intellectuals and Power: a Conversation between Deleuze and Foucault' in M. Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory: Practice, Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1977, p. 206.

11 Anne Marshall, op. cit., p. 9.

12 Ruth Frankenberg, *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, Routledge, UK, 1993.
Moreton-Robinson, A., *Talkin' Up To The White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism*, University of Queensland Press, 2000.

13 From an interview with Margaret Cameron, 20/12/00.

14 Ibid.

15 *Knowledge and Melancholy* was first performed at La Mama Theatre in 1997, then at Dancehouse, Melbourne. It is due to be performed at Playbox Theatre, Melbourne, June, 2001.

16 *Things Calypso Wanted to Say!* (1989–1995) was first performed at La Mama Theatre in 1989 (text by Margaret Cameron, devised and directed by Jenny Kemp) and subsequently at Anthill Theatre, Melbourne. In 1990 it was produced by Performing Lines Pty Ltd at The Performance Space, Sydney, The Peacock Theatre, Hobart (Salamanca Festival), and the Playhouse Canberra (The National Festival of Australian Theatre).

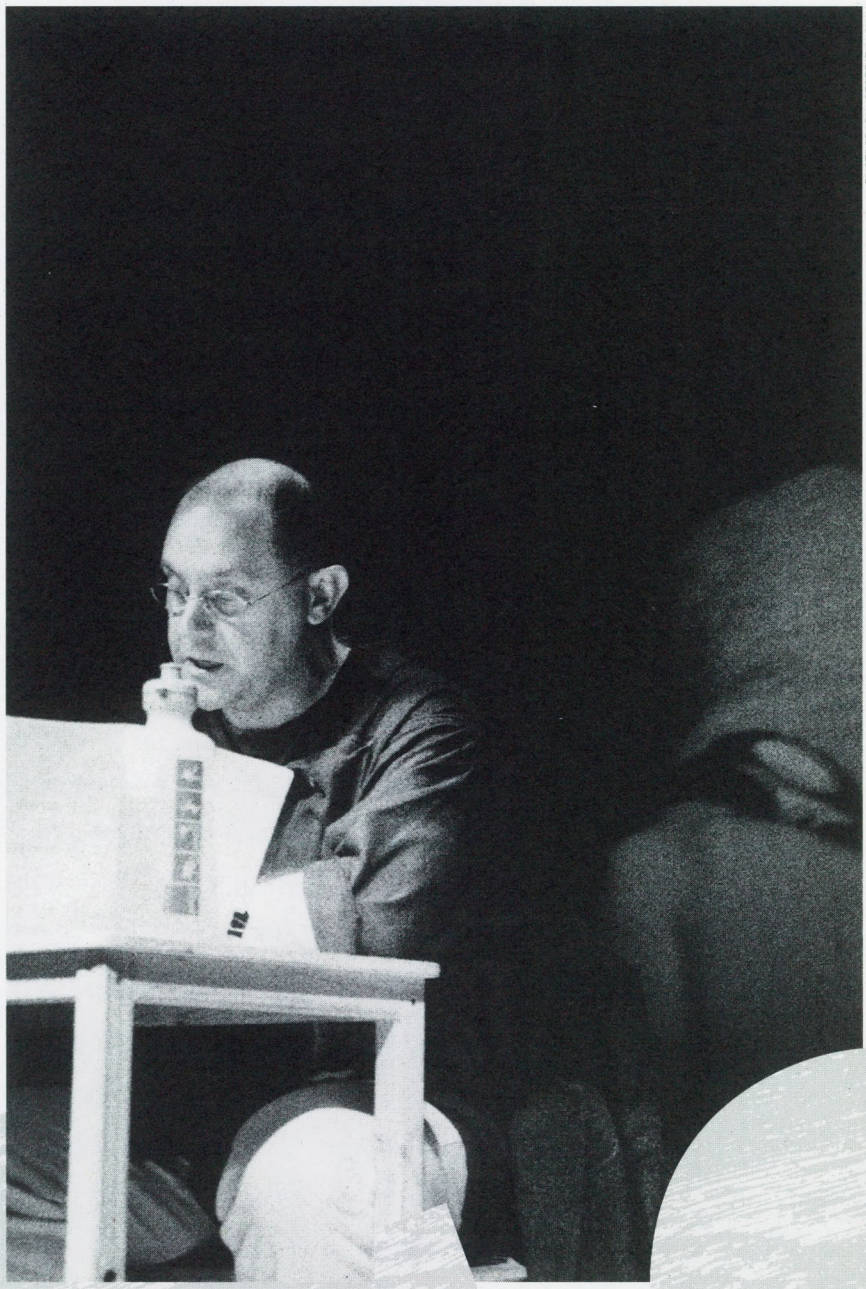
17 Allen R. J. and Pearlman K., *Performing the UnNameable: an Anthology of Australian Performance Texts*, Currency Press, Sydney in association with RealTime, 1999, p. 97.

18 Ibid. p. 98

19 *Bang! A Critical Fiction* was first performed at La Mama Theatre in October, 2000. It is due to be performed at Playbox Theatre, Melbourne, June, 2001.
20 Dyer R., *White*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p.33.
21 Ibid. pp. 34–35.
22 Margaret Cameron, *Bang!* Manuscript, pp.13–14.
23 Ibid. p. 3.
24 Ibid. p. 1.
25 Ibid. p. 19.
26 From the interview.
27 Gilbert H., *Sightlines: Race, Gender and Nation in Contemporary Australian Theatre*, The University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1998. p.97
28 'It often seems that the only way to see the structures, tropes and perceptual habits of whiteness ... is when non-white (and above all black) people are represented ... Toni Morrison, in her study of whiteness in American literature, *Playing in the Dark* (1992), focuses on the centrality, indeed inescapability, of black representation to the construction of white identity, a perception shared by the very influential work of Edward Said (1978) on the West's construction of an 'Orient' by means of which to make sense of itself ... white discourse implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject ... to focus exclusively on those texts that are 'about' racial difference and interaction risks giving the impression that whiteness is only white, or only matters, when it is explicitly set against non-white, whereas whiteness reproduces itself as whiteness in all texts all of the time'. Dyer, op. cit., p.13.
29 From an email from Margaret, 9.12.2000.
30 From the interview.

Whatever it is

A PAPER IN PARTS BY MARK MINCHINTON



PHOTOGRAPH: GEORDIE SLONIN

[00:00]

[arranging papers while Sally Gardner makes introductory remarks]

[00:41]

[Mark Minchinton holds papers in front of him, a pile on desk, speaks]

can I be ... terribly sixties please
and ask you to come closer
cos I really like intimacy
come closer
I mean it's up to you
you don't have to
if you want to stay back that's fine ...

[00:56]

[most of the audience come forward]
I just like the feeling it helps me
support *me*
in this

[01:06]

[unidentified voice (possibly Sally Gardner): *Do you want us to give you a massage?*]
[laughter]

yes

[01:08]

[murmuring voices]

[01:17]

okay
I've called this
whatever it is
'Whatever it is'

[laughter]

that's its title
I don't know what it is
and I ...wanted to start by telling you about Gérard Genette who's one of my favorite French structuralists
everyone should have a favorite French structurualist ... he's written this book called
Paratexts[2]
'paratexts' are those things like the jacket blurb
the foreword and the introduction and the preface and the epigraphs
those ... things that are part of a book but somehow not quite the book
... I find when I start to write or think about things

[02:04]

I get stuck in the paratexts
I love epigraphs and I love ...introductions and there's always this chiastic process this sort of onion peeling process of ... continually getting closer to something and I often get there and find that the onion has disappeared as I've peeled my way through so everything in here is by way of introduction

[02:24]

[laughter]

and ... by way of introduction
I wanted to say that usually when I do things in front of people these days despite many many years experience as an improvisor and a performer
I ... really like having a text
I love having a script ...
I usually spend forever
honing it down
making sure it's really witty and funny
you know that
the words all just resonate like brightly polished jewels
and I've done a bit of that this time but I've tried not to do that as well

[03:03]

so this is a bit of an experiment in a way and I'm faintly terrified
but nevertheless
and again by way of another introduction I want to read you something from a writer called Ronan Bennett
from a book of his called The Catastrophist[3]
this is the epigraph

[03:19]

... and my words. What worth have they? From my youth I have lived by disguises — and with each disguise a new set of words to please the ear of my new audience ... I have forgotten what my real words are. I have lived disguised from myself, in permanent doubt of my own emotional **[03:36]** authenticity; and since I am never alone with myself, since I am always watching the character playing my part in the scene, there is no possibility of spontaneity. — Ronan Bennett[4]

that's the epigraph

[03:51]

now again by way of another introduction I'm ...going to read you something from something that I've been writing for some time now

[waving papers]

and I'm going to keep looping back to these bits of writing that I have [choosing them more or less at random] as I go through
for my pleasure your pleasure
do what you will with them

[04:06]

AT THE MARKET

She is in a crowd. She wears her sheepskin coat. She feels incongruous. The crowd moves around and through her. She does not notice. There are many of them and only one of her, but she does not notice. She moves, with her coat, her bag, her boots, through the crowd, and wonders where she is. There is yelling and bargaining going on around her. She swallows the crowd. Her eyes move disjointedly. Her breath is uneven. But she moves metronomically, swallowing them up. She is not concerned to appear reasonable. It is hot, but she wears her sheepskin coat. **[04:46]** The market is full, is light, is noisy, is happy. She wears her sheepskin coat. The crowd has been swallowed. She has swallowed the crowd. But there is more. She moves slowly. Her eyes move sideways, *she* moves sideways, waits for a thought, a motion, a feeling. Wears her coat. What do I feel? she thinks. Realises she doesn't know, only that she must swallow the crowd, keep moving, wear her coat. She moves forward. Her body is full, exploding, shattering. She shatters. The crowd parts. She falls away from herself. Finds herself in the **[05:22]** market, is hot, is bothered, is too old for this kind of thing, tries to let go. She catches sight of herself in a window and sees her coat looks old, that she looks old, that she is old. She pulls away

and faints inwardly. Time passes and she is on the bus back home, moving through wheat fields, silos, parched land. The constant thrum of the bus engine alternately lulling her back to sleep and driving her insane. She is alone, her time has passed. There is nothing to be done.

do it yourself
ah DIY is the title of this
gathering

[06:02]

[returns to papers]
[Stage direction: repeat and play]
DIY. DYI. IDY. IYD. DIY. I dee why. I why dee. Dee why I. Gee why I? Do it yourself. Do yourself it. Do yourself it. It yourself do. It do yourself. Yourself do it. Yourself it do. Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it. Do it. Do yourself. Yourself do. It do. It yourself. Yourself it. Do. It. Your. Self. Do it you. You do **[06:29]** it. It you do. It do you. Do self. Self do. It self. Self it. Self it do. Self it do your. Self do it your. Self do, you['re] it. Do self, you're it. You're it, do self.
[small laughter]

[06:44]

SOME QUESTIONS

Do — What kind of doing? How do you know when you're doing? Who do you do it to? Or for? Or in place of?

> *(Note: according to the Chambers English Dictionary, 'do' is 'connected with' (and I don't know how they know this), the Greek* tithenai, *meaning 'to put, or, to place'). This fact is probably a distraction.*

It — What is *it*? What could *it* be? Who is *it* for? Who gets to do *it*? Who assesses or judges *it*? How do you know when you've achieved or done *it*?

> *(Note: according to the CED, 'it' is related to* **[07:38]** *Sanskrit i, meaning 'here'). Putting 'do' with 'it' might have something to do with location.*

Yourself — Which self or selves?

> *(Note: according to the CED, 'yourself' is the emphatic and/or reflexive form of 'you').*

Note again:
'Do it yourself' is an imperative
which has become a description.
Who gives the order?
Who is telling,
and who is listening?

an aside

[08:19]

or another *aside some might like to say*
when I was working on this I wrote some stuff and I did some writing and I printed it out on scrap paper
my partner is a um
—that euphemism
whatever 'partner' might mean—
my partner is a criminologist and a lawyer and is presently in the throes of finishing up the writing of a book[5]
and on the back of these pieces of paper [which was part of a draft of her book] were some headings and I thought I'd read them to you

[Back page of notes: Jude's Chapter]
the first one says

[08:56]

[holding up sheet of paper]

PERCEPTION OF DANGER

the second one says
[holding up sheet of paper]

TRAINING, INITIATION & GROUP BONDING

and the third one says
[holding up sheet of paper]

ISOLATION, IN-GROUPS, LANGUAGE & VIOLENCE [6]

I'll leave that there

[09:25]

[laughter]

now

Generally, DIY is applied to home renovation or repair, perhaps boat building, or some other hobby or amateur interest. It implies something vital is broken and that you can't afford to have a professional fix it [laughter], or that you have a perhaps irrational commitment to controlling its repair or construction yourself [laughter]. You'd like to have three workmen come and do your ceiling rosettes for you, but instead you spend many weekends with your partner wearing overalls, visiting Bunnings, and covered in plaster dust [laughter]. Finally, you get a professional to finish or fix up what you've done and/or drive family and friends mad pointing out the painstaking detail you've gone to, or you modestly downplay your achievement: 'Oh, that seventeen foot high retaining wall in pin-tucked blue stone arranged in a pattern recalling Escher's flying ducks?' [laughter], you say, 'you don't want to know about that do you? Do you?'. Or you grunt noncommitally as someone asks [10:33], 'Did you build this?', pointing to your three hundred and forty-five foot exact reproduction of the *Cutty Sark* done in bottle tops and old corks [laughter].

Of course, television and radio have discovered DIY and there are now a plethora of shows showing you how to *Do* Whatever *It* Is Yourself. There's something about these shows which makes me wary and which I wonder about in relation to *it*, whatever it[7] is [11:04] —something to do with their role in marketing materials and products, not to mention the fantasies of control, autonomy, and independence, and their link to other programs around the world which market similar products and fantasies to the middle classes, which should perhaps be a warning to those of us who might like to claim that we do *it* 'our'–'selves'.

[chooses another sheet]

SHE SEES HERSELF CLOTHED IN WORDS

She sees herself clothed in words. The screen of books. She passes through corridors, soft, viscous, muscular. A vast internal organ, never ending. Areas of light alternate with passages of darkness. The floors move. She climbs the legs of a vast 'K', falls through the loops of an 'R'. She has to adjust to keep her balance but easily does so, she is in command. She has movement more than sight. She feels the light through the window, the warmth of the sun, knows that the sea is outside inside somewhere down there. She feels the edge of the desk in the reading room, the green light, is released into the books, enveloped in velum, parchment, the intoxication of glue. She is the sound of vowels, [12:17] lifting, organising themselves as they rearrange her throat. She is carried up to the dome of the room, looks across the starburst of desks, hears the sea outside, a magpie's call, wonders how she came to be here and here and there and here at once. There is a burst, a wall of light between the darkness. She is overwhelmed. Her breathing settles. She

thinks of Whitby where Dracula landed in England. The floor is still. thinks to herself, am I squinting or crying? Returns to her seat, moves again, carries on, moves back inside. Released. Is crushed in pink. Struggles to speak. Her brain tightens.

[Outside the sea rolls, a bird falls into it and rises again disappointed. The sun is bright. She sleeps in the window seat. She dribbles as she breathes and her handbag sits quietly on the floor.]

so

[13:02]

What's broken here? What requires renovation? What would I like to modestly point you towards? I need to confess:

in fact when I am in front of large groups of people I have an overwhelming urge to confess

I am wondering what I am doing here. Here at a conference, colloquium, call-it-what-you-will, advertised via Dancehouse. This is not an unfamiliar position. I've been wondering *What-am-I-doing-here?* about everywhere I've worked or practised since around 1974 [laughter]. I always seem to be, or at least to feel, [13:40] more or less out of context wherever I work. A foreign and exotic plant disrupting the local ecology:

just to pick up the other part of the title[8]

a thistle or ragwort, or maybe something less spectacular, one of those low-crawling noxious weeds that takes over everything—blackberries? no, too, tasty and vigorous. Of course, one place's weed is another's national plant;

witness thistle

and not all plants that disrupt the local ecology come from overseas—sometimes the most insidious and interesting ones are those that come from some area nearby, in the peculiar racial parlance of botany, *native* but not *indigenous*: the wattle or banksia that comes from elsewhere and takes over.

they've got lots of them down at Airey's Inlet

[14:32]

now

Doubtless, my anxieties about my place are a relic of an incomplete adolescence and have to do with complex issues of personal psychology—which I'm equally doubtless neither you nor I would find profitable to explore [laughter]; but I like to think that some of it is the condition, the engine, the nub, of whatever it is I do.

Masterpieces, someone said,

actually it was Marcel Proust[9]

are always written in a foreign language; and many people have mused on the connection between exile and writing: the distance that allows 'creativity', analysis, &c, to flourish — think Beckett, Joyce, Conrad, White. Some people are, of course, exiles in their own country or language.

and I don't want to claim [anything special here]
I think my exile is a very very minor kind of exile ... there are people [in this country] who are in much greater exile than I am
anyway
that's just a thought
and having had that thought I'm going to change my thought

Something he was going to say but didn't

And leaving aside for the moment the question of what constitutes a 'masterpiece', I just want to take up briefly this theme of 'foreignness'.

There is a tension between this sense of foreignness, of not belonging, and a desire for recognition for the successful acts of camouflage, that is, when I have managed to blend in.

[15:44]

and go back to something else

[But first, something he didn't read on 25 November 2000 in place of something he did]

HE TALKS TO HER ON THE PHONE

He talks to her on the phone.

She tells him that she was at home. That it was 3pm. That she was listening to the radio. The traffic news came on. *Avoid Templestowe,* it said, *there's been an accident.*

She tells him she thought, *Templestowe: that's near Harry's route home.* And she tells him she worried. She tells him this and he thinks, *Harry doesn't go through Templestowe, he doesn't even leave work until six, what's the point of this?*

She tells him she phoned Harry that night. Harry tells her he's had a good day. Everything's fine. But wait, no, something strange happened on the way home.

He left work early to drop something off. He detoured through Templestowe. He's driving his car in heavy traffic when an old man walks on to the road, is hit by the car in front, is thrown over the top of the car, and lands, dead, at the front of Harry's quickly braking vehicle.

Harry rushes out to help the man but it is, of course, too late. Harry waits for the ambulance to come and then drives home. In his mind are the man's slippers. He was hit so hard that he was lifted straight out of them. They are left in the middle of the road mutely recording the position of the old man's last living steps as the cars thunder by.

Her voice lingers over the details of the slippers.

In 1994 or 1995 I wrote the following:

> **[18:07]** It amazes me my life has been organised around performance. Most performers and directors I know have been interested in performance since childhood, many attended theatre throughout childhood and teens, many sought training in their youth: I never wanted to be a performer [or director], and never (formally) trained in drama, theatre, or performance. When I performed in my first 'professional' production at the Pram Factory in 1979 I had seen only six theatre productions, four of which I had acted in.
> My interest in performance grew out of the compelling knowledge that I was unqualified for anything else, and the conviction that it was more interesting than factory work. I did it because I could do it, people paid me to do it, and I wasn't interested in doing anything else. But I did do it.[10] [murmuring and laughter]

I wrote those paragraphs in an academic paper as a way of claiming a particular sort of knowledge that was unavailable to those who did not 'do [pause] *it*' [laughter]. 'It' being, in this case, the construction and performing of performances in collaboration with others.

and I loved [what was said] before about collaboration [being] something to do with the enemy

'Doing it' validated the claims I went on to make. Just 'doing it' was enough.

now

On a wall in a stairwell of the university I work at **[19:26]** is an ad. Along with a photograph of the person named in it, it has a text which says, 'Warne's rule: there is no such thing as a natural'. There are other ads in or near the same stairwell along similar lines. One says, 'Moneghetti's rule: there is a beginning, a middle, and another beginning' [laughter]. There are others. I have been walking/climbing past these signs for many years now. I don't know who put them there.
I was also going to write that I don't know why they are there. But of course in a large sense I do know why they are there. These signs advertise *Nike*.

just do it

[20:15]

Wanting to say that I don't know why they are there, what I really mean is that I don't know the specific details of how they got there or how they impact on those who see them.

How many people read these ads each day?
Do the people who see them like or approve of them?
Do these ads appear anywhere else?

Personally, I've never seen other copies of them, but I lead a sheltered life.

Were the ads placed as a way of 'brightening up' otherwise blank walls?
Did a group of people place them or an individual?
Were they placed at the same time or different times?
Were they purchased?
If so, from an individual's pocket or a University budget?
Is there a condition on how long they stay there?
What would happen if I took one or more of them down?

actually I went to the university this morning to take one of them down and I piked[11]

Were there once more?
Were these particular ads once placed somewhere else in the building or the University?
Was the placing of these ads a condition of some sponsorship won by the University or part of it (note, the building they are in contains gymnasiums, basketball courts, and academics who study sport in various ways)?
Did someone approve their positioning?
Was permission even sought?
Did the authority for their placement come from the University, Faculty, or School?
Are there people in the building or University who would disapprove, be angered, insulted or otherwise upset, if I removed the ads?

How did they get there?
Did someone *just do it?*

Now there is a line of flight I could take which would see me deconstructing, bemoaning, whingeing about **[21:49]**, the gross-over funding of sport compared to the perhaps gross under-funding of the arts [in this country]. Whether it's fifty, thirty-five, or twenty-five million dollars per gold medal it just seems to me to be too damn much, no matter how great the 'trickle down' effect to people in armchairs might be (and I believe [laughter] as much in the trickle down effect in sport as I do in economics). What sort of cultural 'industry' would we have if one tenth that sort of money were spent on, say, dance?

No wonder we're doing it ourselves [laughter].

But I am not going to talk about that.

I would like to note that I said before that the ads advertise *Nike*. Not '*Nike* shoes' or '*Nike* athletic wear', but '*Nike*'.

Nike is of course the Goddess of Victory, Hesiod tells us that but I'm not going to talk about that ... that's just an aside.

Nike is primarily a **[22:59]** brand. Brands (*Nike, Coke, Microsoft, MTV*) and branding—the process by which the signs and logos previously attached to products are allowed to float free and become ubiquitous products in themselves which can be reattached to virtually anything (including flesh),

did anyone see all those little swooshes tattooed on people at the Olympics[12]

especially to things as amorphous as lifestyles or personal philosophies [*Benneton, Nike, Lego, MTV, Marlboro, Subaru* &c]—are intrinsically linked to globalisation (that shorthand for the development of trans-national corporations, the breakdown of nation states, the enslavery of populations through economic free trade zones, the changes in the flow of capital and concomitant changes in our Imaginaries, our conceptions of self, nation, citizenship, the rule of law and its enforcement, &c, that are happening as a result of the reorganisation of capital flows by new communication technologies, aka, the World Wide Web &c &c, *ad nauseam, ad nauseam*). As Naomi Klein documents, brands have common strategies (1. create branded celebrities; 2. destroy the competition; 3. 'Sell pieces of the brand as if it was the Berlin Wall'[13]) **[24:01]** , they also have common economic bases (free trade zones that exploit marginal groups), and an almost unlimited capacity to deterritorialise and reterritorialise attacks against them, even incorporating irony about themselves into their campaigns so that consumers can engage in 'ironic consumption'[14]—as I am doing now (?).

during the week

Louise Adler wrote that 'the future for emerging artists depends on a clear sense of the tensions between the global cultural economy and the necessity for an authentic local culture if we are to compete in that global marketplace'.[15]

Leaving aside the question of whether the 'global marketplace' is an appropriate description or metaphor for the site(s) of cultural production(s), I think she is sort of right. How do we, or more to the point, how can *I* connect what I do, *it*, if not to the global marketplace, then at least to global issues of power and domination?

In the same article, Adler also claims that 'we have abandoned the idea of artist as hero'[16].

[pause]

[25:15] I suspect there are many who haven't abandoned this idea at all.

WHAT HE FEARS

This is what he fears: being stupid; being obvious; being unsophisticated; being too slow; being too fast; being too complicated; not being complicated enough; being alone; being overwhelmed; being simple; being out there having to explain; not being out there; being theatrical; not having the energy; not being able to make the connections; being unsuccessful; being successful; no one liking it; everyone liking it; being too fearful; not being fearful enough; being afraid of the wrong things or the wrong people; not knowing enough; not knowing the right people; having no friends; **[25:56]** not having enough money; not seeing far enough ahead; being lost in the past; not knowing enough history; **[26:00]** seing too far ahead; seeing so far ahead that it immobilises him; being hated; being loved; being admired only for his body or his mind; not having any friends; having too many acquaintances; having so many friends he will lose time having to keep up with them; being lost; losing his child; losing his mind; losing his wallet, his way, or his sense of direction; his mother dying; his mother outliving him; being forgotten; being remembered for all the wrong reasons; being caught out; being bankrupt; being rich; being lost at sea, or caught under an overturned boat; scuba diving; [laughter] being out of his depth; being too afraid to go out of his depth; being alone when he is old; having to look after himself alone forever; not being left alone; being caught masturbating; losing his sexual drive; ceasing to be sexually interesting; worrying too much or too little. [laughter]

how am I doing
for time?

[unintelligible; then from audience (Margaret Cameron?): *Are you supposed to have an hour?*]

no

[unintelligible]

now

The education sector, where I mostly 'do it', has of course been severely affected by the global market economy. Klein notes that the effects of globalisation and branding has led to much being lost: More fundamentally than somewhat antiquated notions of 'pure' education and research, what is lost as schools [universities] 'pretend they are corporations' ... is the very idea of unbranded space. In many ways, schools and universities remain our culture's **[27:27]** most tangible embodiment of public space and collective responsibility. ... at this point in our history [Klein is a Canadian] the argument against transforming education into a brand-extension exercise is much the same as the one for national parks and nature reserves: these quasi-sacred spaces remind us that unbranded space is still possible.[17]

...I wanted to make a little connection there to something to do with contact improvisation as possibly ... an unbranded space[18]

The course I teach in—a performance studies course—has been asked for the usual reasons to earn more income. Leaving aside for now any questions about the ethics or justice of this, or a realistic assessment of its chances of achieving that greater income, the only way we can do that is to make new connections, reconfigure, redescribe ourselves (yet again) and what we do, to seek alliances, and make a new course. That has meant a great deal of re-evaluation of what we do and why we do it. I've found this confronting, challenging, exciting, wearying, tedious, necessary, and boring beyond tears in about equal measures.

and I'm going to accelerate a bit here

[28:37]

trying to crunch things up a bit

when I first came to the university
I was employed
I think I was employed because I'd spent about I don't know about fifteen or twenty years making performances and being a performer and I'd made about I don't know about eighty say performances in that time
of various sorts and various sorts of involvement
since I've been at the university I've been involved in about eight in the eight years or nine years that I've been there

[29:10]

and it made me think about what the hell do I do what the hell am I doing in this place teaching people how to make 'art' supposedly
although I'm not sure that's what I teach people to do
and how do I justify that to myself

[29:28]

and part of what I think about that is that it has something to do with this thing about outsiderness
it's not actually the thing that gets made
although I don't want to argue for a kind of dematerialisation of practice
but it's something to do with this process of
making connections
making
forcing things into a kind of crucible which allows them to connect in all sorts of different directions
and it's actually the connecting

a bit like in contact impro
I'm using it as a metaphor
that it's actually the connecting that's the important part of it
and I was going to go onto a rave a rave I seem to have been going on about for an awfully long time
not just here in this moment but in a larger moment
about
what
you know
to quote a French theorist
to quote Deleuze and Guattari is kind of minoritarian practice[19]
a kind of
trying to get to some sort of collective ennunciation that has a connection to a political immediacy and which destabilises otherwise rigid structures
language is one of them
and that is the practice and I don't know that I've got a lot more to say other than that

[31:10]

More that he was going to say but didn't

Some history. It is an historical accident that I ended up in theatre. Again, there may be some sort of psychological explanation, but like so many things, it was largely chance and opportunity that took me there.[20] Once there, there was always a tug between the pleasure of doing it and my desire to understand what it was about—how whatever was being done was contingent upon a whole series of economic, social, and ideological circumstances. This often made me a difficult person to be around. But in this era, when so much more is happening, isn't it important to have people who can ask questions from and make connections between a variety of sources? Who can, de- re- and self-contextualise materials?

I was, I now realise—and notwithstanding a student career in which I was not only inadvertently erratic but also positively resistant—lucky to be formed (educated, trained, disciplined) at least partially in the tradition of the now outmoded humanist university. Because it was the seventies and education was relatively cheap, and because of who I was and am, I spent many years—certainly many more than would now be allowed—picaresquely finding my way through some of sociology, history, linguistics, Old & Middle English, Latin, 17th, 18th, 19th and 20th Century English and American poetry and novels, classical Greek and Latin poetry, history, and, to a lesser extent, philosophy.

Trite as it is to say this, I now recognise that that education, no matter how much I was frustrated by and rejected it at the time, has profoundly affected me. As difficult as I found large institutions then and now, I realise that I was privileged to go through what was for its time a relatively radical university, and to be exposed to some more or less passionate, knowledgeable, and rigorous teachers/thinkers. I was also exposed to some awfully dull and unimaginative people, but informing them all was at least the ghost of the notion that a broad humanist education was important.

It's commonplace to say that there has been an erosion of educational values, to look back to the old days wistfully. It is also commonplace to derogate academics and academia. Indeed, it's almost mandatory for academics themselves to reassure both students and external funding bodies that what goes on in academe is not 'too academic'. The university I work at has raised this type of reassurance to an art form. The intellectual, ethical, and educational malaise that infects my university (and others) profoundly discourages me. To spend my days preparing lessons for students who are, in general, incapable of writing if not a sentence then certainly an essay and who have no idea of or apparent interest in history or the contexts in which they live;

or being encouraged to attend seminars, conferences, committee meetings &c not because there I will find passionate, enquiring, well informed, visionary people (or even some who might, in Edward Said's words, 'instead of doing what one is supposed to do ... ask why one does it, who benefits from it, how it can reconnect with a personal project and original thoughts'[21]) but because it will look good on the resumé, meet Management determined quotas, and bring in ARC funding; or writing material for refereed journals which, in theatre at least, are for the most part dominated by moribund writers and groups &c is deeply difficult.

I don't want to overstate this: I think there are many wonderful students and academics, and somewhere in myself I trust that the seeds of ideas we expose them (and the less wonderful students) to flower somewhere deep within them at some time. And I certainly don't blame them for their deficiencies in writing, knowledge of history, context, and critical skills. But despite the sometimes good efforts we make to address these concerns I find it personally debilitating in the long term to continually deal with those inadequacies when we are so under resourced, and universities themselves really only pay lip service to addressing those skills. That I have had to explain not only the differences between the First and Second World War, their dates, who was involved, and how they came about, but that there *was* a First World War (let alone the what, when, where, who, and how of, say, the Renaissance, Enlightenment, Classicism, or Modernism in the West) is not just a sorry indictment of the education the state provides at secondary level, but a measure of how damn hard I work. What is the point of sending students off, saying we have given them an education, letting them loose to make 'art', to do *it*, if they not only don't know that the foundational narrative of Australian discovery is one of the crowning myths of the Age of Reason, but they don't even know who or when Captain Cook was?

...I'll ...leave you with this
seeing as we're near the end
or seeing as this is the end ...

DROWNING AT SEA

He wakes on a ship. A sailing ship. The sea is green, white, foaming. Gales have been blowing for days. The ship rolls and pitches.

All passengers but him are seasick. **[33:33]** He leaves his cabin to escape the nausea noise. He walks the empty decks, looks up the near bare masts. As the ship falls into a trough the waves appear to rise to half mast height, and there at eye level, not thirty feet away, is a man in the sea. For a moment they look at each other before the man slips beneath the rail as the ship lifts up onto the crest of a wave.

He calls to the crew, and as the man is brought up again to the level of the rail he throws him a rope. It lands next to the man but he does nothing. The ship slows and the crew climb out on a davit, lower chains, and try to catch the man. He makes no effort to reach them. The man slips further astern, raises his hand in a brief wave, and appears to smile before finally slipping beneath the water leaving only a small trail of bubbles.[22]

the footnote to that which I must read you
seeing as we were talking about paratexts
says the above is based on an incident in Herman Melville's voyage to London in 1849 see ... da de da da ...nausea noise are Melville's words as are these I was struck by the expression on his face in the water ... it was merry
thanks

[34:02]

Yet more he was going to say but ran out of time to, or was too embarrassed to speak about not being sure of its validity in a conference like this, or feeling that it was too self-serving.

WHAT HAVE I BEEN DOING FOR THE LAST EIGHT YEARS?

• In collaboration with my colleagues I have written and rewritten the Performance Studies course at Victoria University a couple of times.

• Developed and taught many practical, studio, and theoretical or discursive subjects across many areas, including performance composition, projects, psychoanalysis, history, performance theory, &c, and especially a foundation subject that attempts to marry institutional, pastoral, and practical skills/concerns.

• Created the space and some of the culture for a postgraduate course in performance that includes the possibility of presenting works of art for assessment.

• Supervised or co-supervised about twelve postgraduate students in a variety of projects; most of these are making art works. The form of these art works has varied from sound performances, dance/film/video, a mini-opera and site-specific performance, to community theatre projects. I am also supervising a student researching and writing a thesis on the performance of space and subjectivity in 'gay' saunas.
My role has been to help the students to successfully explain their work to the larger university and academic community, to oversee them developing their work, and to provide the intellectual, emotional, and practical space to complete their work; most of these students have been well established practitioners who already possess their own practices and are using their studies to upgrade their qualifications and as a place to experiment with work they could otherwise not do.

• I have assisted officially or unofficially in the development to production of three or four scripts which have subsequently been presented in public at festivals or in theatres.

• I have collaborated as a performer and writer in a few performances presented at different venues.

• Written articles and made presentations about performance and performance research in, at, or to various publications, conferences and the like; sometimes these have included more or less scripted performances. I have also written chapters for a book on Australian theatre history and a book on sexual identity. In collaboration with my partner I have also written about embodiment and representation in policing.

• For the last few years I have been working intermittently on a writing project that I see has the potential to be a novel, a sound or moved performance, and/or an interesting footnote.

• My present involvement in anything like recognisable performance is represented by my work as a performer and dramaturg on a large project that may be presented as part of the Adelaide Festival in 2002.

• I am at present in the throes of putting together a study of gambling as performance in collaboration with one of the local councils, and researching and writing about gambling and car-driving as practices of late modernity.

So what do I do? What is my practice? Facilitation. The making of things easier for others. Bringing disparate things together, being able to provide feedback from a range of experiences/readings/contexts and suggest other ways of putting them together, being aware of the implications, histories of things, ideas, practices and providing feedback on them. Do I make things? Do I do it myself?

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FOOTNOTES

1 In *A Thousand Plateaux: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, p.6)Deleuze and Guattari write of the multiple that. '[n]o typographical, lexical, or even syntactical cleverness is enough to make it heard...'. This transcription of a paper delivered to the *DIY? Ecologies of Practice* conference at SPAN Galleries, Flinders Lane, Melbourne, 25 November 2000, does, I must admit, attempt some typographical cleverness.

2 Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation, Literature, Culture, Theory* (Cambridge ; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

3 Ronan Bennett, *The Catastrophist* (London: Review, 1998).

4 *ibid*., 128–29.

5 See Jude McCulloch, *Blue Army: Paramilitary Policing in Australia* (Carlton South, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2001).

6 These headings do not appear in the published book.

7 'Making work'?

8 See above, n.1 above.

9 In *Contre Saint-Beuve*. I read it first, though, in Deleuze and Guattari. Proust's phrase 'les chefs-d'œuvre sont écrits dans une sorte de langue étrangère', is directly and indirectly cited throughout much of Deleuze's writing (alone and with Guattari). See, for example, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986) pp.16–17 & 19*ff*; Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues* (London: Athlone Press, 1987), p. 4; Gilles Deleuze, "He stuttered," in *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorothea Olkowski (New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 25. Boundas (*ibid*., p. 25.) accepts Sylvia Warner's translation— 'The beautiful books are written in a sort of foreign language'—from Marcel Proust, *Contre Sainte-Beuve, on Art and Literature: 1856–1919* (New York: Meridian, 1958). In *Dialogues* Deleuze cites the entire passage: 'Great literature is written in a sort of foreign language. To each sentence we attach a meaning, or at any rate a mental image, which is often a mistranslation. But in great literature all our mistranslations result in beauty...' (Deleuze in Deleuze and Parnet, *Dialogues*. p. 5.).
Warner is again cited as the translator, this time in Marcel Proust, *By Way of Saint-Beuve* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1958), p. 194–95. See also Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* p. 98. Take your pick.

10 Mark Minchinton, 'Towards a Minor Theatre? Theatre Making Processes in Three Australian Theatre Groups and Their Directors.' (Doctoral thesis, University of Melbourne, 1996), p. 15.

11 This is not a true story, I did not go to the University to take down the advertisements but to look at them. My partner (see above n.6) reminds me that there is a t-shirt available that has printed on it 'Just pike it'; I know of another that says, 'Just don't'.

12 See Naomi Klein, *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, (New York: Picador USA, 2000), p. 56: 'Not only do dozens of Nike employees have a swoosh tattooed on their calves, but tattoo parlors all over North America report that the swoosh has become their most popular item.'

13 *ibid.*, pp. 51–56.,

14 *ibid.*, pp. 77–79..

15 Louise Adler, 'VCA's Adler cautions: "Management isn't a popularity contest"' *Age*, 21 November 2000.

16 *ibid.*

17 Klein, *No Space, No Choice, No Jobs, No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, p. 105.

18 I'm not so sure I'd want to claim that now [June 2001].

19 See Mark Minchinton. 'Saboteur, guerilla, pedestrian', *Writings on Dance 10*, Autumn 1994; and 'Dancing the Bridge – performance/research: a polemic', *Writings on Dance 16*, Winter 1997.

20 See above, p. 6; and p. 6 n. 10.

21 Edward Said, *Representations of the Intellectual: The 1993 Reith Lectures* (London: Vintage, 1993) p. 62.

22 The above is based on an incident in Herman Melville's voyage to London in 1849. See Herman Melville, ed. Howard C. Horsford & Lynn Horth, *Journals* (Evanston Chicago: Northwestern University Press Newberry Library, 1989) and Herman Melville and Eleanor Melville Metcalf, *Journal of a Visit to London and the Continent, 1849–1850* (London: Cohen & West, 1949). My version is based on Laurie Robertson-Lorant's account in her biography of Melville (Laurie Robertson-Lorant, *Melville: A Biography* (New York: Clarkson Potter/Publishers, 1996)). 'Nausea noise' are Melville's words, as are these, 'I was struck by the expression on his face in the water ... [i]t was merry.'

DANCING WITH....

REBECCA HILTON AND LUCY GUERIN REHEARSING 'HISTORIA'. PHOTO: BEN SPETH

AN INTERVIEW WITH **REBECCA HILTON**
BY **SALLY GARDNER**
MELBOURNE MAY 2001

Rebecca Hilton has returned to live in Australia after an absence of thirteen years during which, based in New York City, she established herself as a highly respected and admired dancer and teacher. After graduating from the Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne, Hilton performed with Dance Exchange in Sydney and Dance Works in Melbourne. In New York she became a member of the Stephen Petronio Company (1988–96) and danced with many other artists including Michael Clark, Tere O'Connor, Jennifer Monson and Lucy Guerin.

There are many different dance-making 'ecologies', ranging from those structured by highly formalised organisations (dance companies) to the kinds of informal but enduring artistic collaborations based on friendship or a kind of bodily compatibility. Hilton's life as a dancer has encompassed an enormous variety of these modes of dance-making. However, in talking with her it becomes clear that underlying the diversity of situations and working relations in which she has found herself there has always been a desire to pursue the most satisfying and most challenging dancing experiences. There is a sense that for her there is a great enjoyment both physical and intellectual in dancing, and a real generosity in wanting to convey that to others as a teacher. But Hilton's reflections also represent a perspective on dancers' subjectivisation – how they constitute themselves and their identity as dancers through their relations to 'training' and to choreographers and choreographic processes.

SALLY GARDNER

You have just returned from Frankfurt. What were you doing there?

REBECCA HILTON

I was rehearsal directing. John Jasperse, a very good friend of mine from New York, who is the most successful choreographer, I guess, out of my generation – mine and Lucy's (Guerin's) – has had a lot of support from William Forsythe. So he took his own company over there and was making a piece and Frankfurt Ballet was 'presenting' it, and supporting it. I had a relationship with John in New York where I would go along to his rehearsals a lot and – just look. There isn't a name for it – I guess in the theatre its dramaturgy and it's the equivalent of that in dance. I've done this a little bit for Lucy as well. In New York it's something people do – having your friends come to rehearsal and having some kind of intense feedback sessions. I've done this with Jennifer (Monson) as well. It's not something that happens so much here ... for some reason. I don't know why that is.

GARDNER

In this role, what are you looking at?

HILTON

I have long talks with John about the ideas and the first thing I look at is how the structure or the vocabulary or the performance quality is serving the idea. And if it is, if I feel like it is. It's still very subjective but it's a very interesting way of pulling apart the strands of what it is that makes a dance. And seeing how they're woven together and whether that's functional in terms of what the concept is. And that includes everything – the way the dancers are doing it, the way the material is developed, the way the pieces go together. John is one of those choreographers who makes lots of chunks so it's a big deal how those chunks are resting against one another. Whereas Lucy is very different. It's usually very important for her to have the idea, the overarching concept there before she's even started the work, usually. She enters a process very differently and makes a piece quite lineally. And it usually doesn't change a great deal from her conception of it, which is really fascinating to me.

GARDNER

It was William Forsythe's company and they paid you?

HILTON

John didn't make the piece on the Frankfurt Ballet. He brought his own company there. But Frankfurt Ballet is very supportive of John and paid for me to go over there for three weeks.

GARDNER

And what do they, the Frankfurt Ballet, get out of it?

HILTON

Nothing. They just love John! You get the sense that there is some kind of 'heir apparent' thing going on with Billy and John somehow. Billy just thinks John's a really interesting young artist and wants to support him. That's what he's getting out of it.

GARDNER

Then what does Frankfurt get out of it?

HILTON

You mean the city? Well they're premiering it there and if it's a big hit they'll get the kind of kudos that comes with that. It's a gamble. They don't really get anything but Billy can do whatever he wants there. He's not what you might expect of someone that famous. He's very enthusiastic. Dance still really excites him and he's very generous. I think the way a company is run is a good indication. I think the director has some kind of responsibility for the emotional weather of a company and this is a really good example. Those dancers feel very respected. They feel that they contribute in a way that's very necessary to the company. So it's a really

good creative atmosphere. Whereas in other large companies I've been around – Lyon Opera Ballet, Berlin Opera Ballet – the focus is often on relations between dancers and management and they are often very tense. So it is nice to be around a big famous company that feels like the kind of smaller company I was involved in in New York – in terms of people really focussing on the work and what that meant.

GARDNER

Well, they are committed to the work of a particular choreographer. I also get the sense that if there's some kind of maturity about practice relationships can be quite informal or not strictly categorised, and that this becomes the most productive way to work. I'm thinking of your working relationships with Lucy or with Jennifer.

HILTON

I think a lot about that increasingly as I'm entering my dotage and I spend a lot more time sitting on the other side like some strange kind of Margaret Mead – its very anthropological watching people relate. The peer thing is very important to me. Jennifer and Lucy are really close friends and have been for years and there is a certain ease of relationship, an ease of exchange of ideas. And there's no kind of authority issue or ownership issue.

I remember when I joined Stephen's (Petronio) company – he's six maybe eight years older than me – it felt like we were of similar age. We, the dancers, felt like we were developing the company along with him. It's been difficult for him to make the change now the people in the company are twenty years younger than him. It definitely changes the way work is made. It changes the work. In some ways I think it was a relief to him because he didn't have to explain himself or have people talking back. You know there is a certain aspect of working with your peers where you are challenged almost permanently. In some respects you have to explain yourself. I think that sometimes as an artist it is important to go to that place where it's all intuitive, where you don't know what you're doing. I know that watching John work with his company, for instance, I see patterns of behaviour there that I know I did with Stephen. I'd get rigid if he couldn't explain to me what it was he wanted me to do. I would dig my heels in and be unco-operative. I resented him not knowing. I feel like I had invested so much in that work that I wanted it to be the best work it could be. Being a dancer, and a young dancer at that time and very self-involved, to me that meant it was all about *how I felt* in the work. It was impossible to step out of it. Your experience as a dancer in work is you dancing around, and everyone else is a satellite around you.

GARDNER

What does digging your heels in, as you put it, do? What does it produce?

HILTON

I think it's different for everybody but I think it's all about balance. There might be an incredibly petulant person in that situation but in another situation they're giving an enormous amount. There's a place where that balance tips in every dancer's life in relation to every choreographer because it is an authoritarian relationship. Even though it's very collaborative it's still their work and you're serving it somehow. For me there's a point where the balance tips and I'm getting an attitude because I'm thirty and basically I'm tired of someone telling me what to do all the time. But I'm uncomfortable with saying it that way so I make the situation difficult in order to be able to leave. I think that is a classic if you've had a long term relationship with someone. It's a way of... evicting yourself and remaining blameless. They are very intense relationships, you know. It becomes like family.

But the thing that always held me was being interested in the process of making the work. Some of the work didn't end up being the best thing I'd ever seen but I was interested in the process. So when I go into situations and I see dancers who don't have that involvement I get really confused. I think, 'Why are you here?' And it's not a judgement about the kind of work, it's just, 'For god's sake go and find something that engages you!' 'Don't sit there and complain how you didn't get paid overtime.' That's what I find a lot more here. In New York there wasn't any money, there just wasn't any, so the discussion never went to that place. It stayed in the creative realm. And here all the time it goes to 'management'. I've noticed that with Chunky Move. That's where all the difficulties surrounding the creative process end up. I find that really weird.

GARDNER

If you don't find the creative side compelling enough ...

HILTON

I talk to the dancers about it: 'It's your responsibility to find a place that does compel you. This is a career that's like a firework. Wasting three years in a place that's not inspiring you is not anyone's fault here. I think dancers have real difficulty taking responsibility for themselves – because of the way the training is or... I've had lots of conversations like this with dancers all over the world. Go and find something. Or at least look for it. And by the way there isn't an 'it'.

GARDNER

It's a question of expectations perhaps. If you set everything up in terms of four years of training and then a job, then at the very least there's bound to be disappointment.

HILTON

A lot of it is just serendipity, I think, it's luck. And there are some really great dancers who never find a home as well.

2 / TEACHING

GARDNER

When you're teaching what are you doing? How do you regard that relationship?

HILTON

It's very different in different situations. I consider teaching a vocation and I think in the dance world a lot of the time it's the only way you can survive so a lot of people just do it and they don't have any real interest in it. I think that's a difficult kind of conundrum. Teaching, I always feel the need to establish some kind of cycle of give and take. If it's just me up there parotting away and they're doing it... which happens, say, if I'm teaching a company I've taught for a long time, they're performing, and it's their warm up class. In these kinds of situations it's more challenging to get that circle happening, but I still try. I have just been teaching at the Victorian College of the Arts for half a semester. I don't think I'd survive teaching somewhere like that on a full-time basis. I think it would destroy teaching for me. I'd find it really hard to sustain because a lot of my teaching is directly related to my doing dancing. It will be interesting to see as I continue to dance less what happens there. And I'm a bit fearful about that. I mean, I can think of some really great examples of older teachers actually. But for me so far it's been directly related to what I'm feeding myself and that is coming out in the teaching. What I really hate about teaching is that people really want to put you up there and have you be responsible for them. So I spend a lot of time when I teach trying to break that: 'If I teach you anything it's about being responsible for yourself'. At the VCA someone will come up to me in the hallway and say, 'I'm so sorry I didn't make it to your class. My dog ate my homework...' And I say, 'I don't care I just wrote that you weren't here.' It's not that I don't care about them, I do. But that's a really good example of the weird way people think about teachers. It's like I will be eaten up with pain if they weren't in my class or something. The VCA is rife with that. The years I was there it was ruled with fear and loathing and you were just scared into behaving and zipping it up. Now they all talk back, but it hasn't been replaced by this sense of responsibility for themselves. I don't know how you develop that in an institution.

It's really interesting in terms of tracking a generation, how things really change. I graduated from there 18 years ago. Now I'm there teaching eighteen and nineteen year olds... There's a kind of hopelessness. I think they don't want to be perceived as caring too much because they feel like they won't get what they want. I didn't have that feeling. It's not that I felt like I could do whatever I wanted but it felt like I could try. So there's a lot of bravado and 'we're cool' and 'we don't care'. But they do. And some of them are really talented.

GARDNER

Are they inspired by you in the here and now as a dancer?

HILTON

I think someone who was a graduate from last year came up once and told me what a fabulous dancer I was! But I don't know. I don't think so. I don't think they look at teachers that way. I'm trying to remember Nan (Hassall) teaching me. I loved her classes but I don't know that I looked at her in that way – still as a viable dancing person – but she was twenty years older than me. My teaching style is much more 'buddy buddy' than Nan's. I get in amongst it a bit more. My personality's different. And I spend a lot of time, like I said before, trying to break down the I'm the teacher and you're the student thing. Which can get out of hand, let me tell you... I teach a lot by example. I'm very active in the class so part of the learning process for them is looking at my body and trying to transfer that to their bodies.

GARDNER

But if part of your image of dancing is so strongly placed somewhere else – 'on stage' or in the ballet company – then it would be difficult to see that, well, this is dancing right here.

HILTON

And a lot of these students wouldn't have seen me perform. But yes, for me a lot of the dancing that I do there is just as important to me as the dancing I would do at say the HET Music Theatre in Amsterdam. And I've always felt that way. I don't really discriminate. I think there is a kind of 'save it for the stage' mentality. Especially when they're in there day after day after day, you know, five classes a day. It is hard to maintain a connection to that.

GARDNER

Well, here there's perhaps the problem of an absence of some tradition where you learn through the relationship to a choreographer – to a person who is a teacher because they are an artist. The other model really comes from the ballet: you have your pedagogy and you have your theatre and you have to move from one to the other.

HILTON

Someone like Russell (Dumas) embodies both of those roles really intensely. I think about him a lot because so much of that information is still with me. And that was a very long time ago. I had problems with how that information was offered, sometimes. But being back here now there is more of a community of people who understand what it is that I do. He was alone. I think about that a lot having come back to Australia. Getting so used to the huge community of like-minded people in New York... the idea of Russell and Nan coming back and being a tiny island at that time seems so brave and hard. I don't know how they managed. I think they didn't a lot of the time. I'm doing a lot of reflecting on things like that at the moment.

3 / CREATING

GARDNER

Given your situation now, does that enable you to keep working with people at the same level that you'd been used to? Take the relationship with Jennifer Monson, it's a big distance to travel but it seems to be able to be breached.

HILTON

I was very happy about that whole experience (November 2000, performances with Monson at Dancehouse, Melbourne) and I think I could only do it with someone like Jennifer with whom I'd had a very consistent, very long dancing relationship. She's someone who is always dancing no matter where she is. I think I learned a lot of that from her – just how important it is, almost on a spiritual level. It was amazing for her to come. We had such a short amount of time and it was an interesting process to just dive in and try to find very quickly the places where we meet. And make a piece about that (*And*). It was very simple. And something that you could only do if you'd had that... twelve years we'd been dancing together. We haven't performed together that much but we were dancing together all the time. She just lived around the corner.

GARDNER

How does your relationship with Lucy work?

HILTON

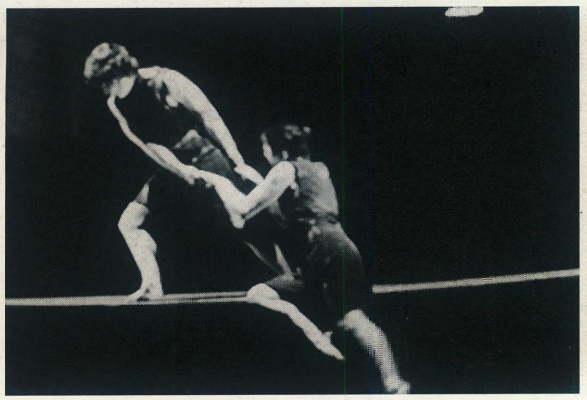
That's a very different one. It's inspired by the differences between us, whereas Jennifer's and my relationship is much more about our similarities. With Lucy and me it's like these two really different people thrust together. I don't know that Lucy and I would have found one another and formed a relationship if it hadn't been for Russell. We also spent six months away together in Dance Exchange and then just maintained a relationship that is more yin and yang, you know. It sustains itself because of how different we are. I don't think I ever was a great exponent of Lucy's work. It doesn't really suit me as a dancer. It was very interesting to me to get in to that work: how visible the choices are, the structure and the clarity of it. I'm a bit more like a storm or something, a bit messier somehow. And I think that was interesting for Lucy. She was always trying to make something for me that was me – and it never really quite happened. My relationship to Lucy's work was not about me as a dancer. It was very much about the work and the respect I had for her, her choreographic brain. And that is very much a friendship – above and beyond what we do in terms of dancing. Whereas Jennifer's and my friendship is really based on dancing.

GARDNER

You were working on something of your own (*Historia*) with Lucy at the Malthouse during the Melbourne Festival.

HILTON

I had been thinking about a way for Lucy and I to work together and the options for me to make my work. I found it very difficult here, not wanting to apply for a huge grant, put on a big show, do all the press; and at the same time I was not very comfortable making work in a limited amount of time on another company. I did that with Danceworks (*Happy Valley*) and there were interesting things about it but mainly it was difficult just being creative in that environment and the whole thing of sharing a programme and controlling the ways your work is presented. At Danceworks we worked hard and then it was in the North Melbourne Town Hall and it looked like a high school production to me. Things like that. So Lucy and I wanted to spend some more time together. Lucy has been producing a lot and she wanted to do some dancing. And I love Lucy's dancing and I love dancing with her. It has always been really interesting because it's easy but its so peculiar because we're so different. So I've had that desire and then I had the idea of this box that I could put anywhere and that would be a way of controlling the environment that I presented my work in so ... When Jonathan Mills called it all fell into place. My idea came out of all those strands of thought. I don't really call myself a choreographer so



OPPOSITE AND ABOVE: REBECCA HILTON AND JENNIFER MONSON IN 'AND' DANCEHOUSE NOVEMBER 2000. PHOTO: BEN SPETH

I get kind of shy about making that kind of statement. Up to this point, I've never applied for a grant. And I might be rehearsal directing or teaching and those things absorb my life. Actually Lucy and I had worked on it earlier in the year for about three weeks. We both found ourselves with some time and I had some extra money so we just did it. Which is something that doesn't happen much here – people just doing it.

GARDNER

It does perhaps amongst young people – like some of the kinds of things that happen at Dancehouse – they're 'just doing it'. But I suppose we are talking here about people with a very different level of practice and experience. In a sense you seem to be choosing not to follow an institutional path – becoming a 'career choreographer', for example, because it can't work for you that way. Your relationship to dance is highly professional but not 'professionalised'.

HILTON

Actually I've been asked to 'mentor' things a lot too. Maybe that's the way younger people are trying to address what your talking about. Dancer/choreographers are taking themselves out of that more formal dancer-choreographer relation but realising they can't just be alone out there splashing around.

GARDNER

I remember Lucy (Guerin) once indicating in a talk she gave that she had always preferred to work with people where, as a dancer, you try to meet their physical aesthetic. It was the sense that for her own development she had got more out of working with people who insisted on a particular kind of style, where you

REBECCA HILTON AND LUCY GUERIN REHEARSING 'HISTORIA'. PHOTO: BEN SPETH

tried to do what they were asking you to do, rather that being given a structure to produce your own material. But in a dance culture that is perhaps not so well developed the alternatives can unfortunately get reduced to an opposition between a kind of slave mentality where you can only get disgruntled about conditions and so forth, and feel that you're being dominated or oppressed as a dancer, and this other kind of choreographic DIY situation which can also be very unsatisfying.

HILTON

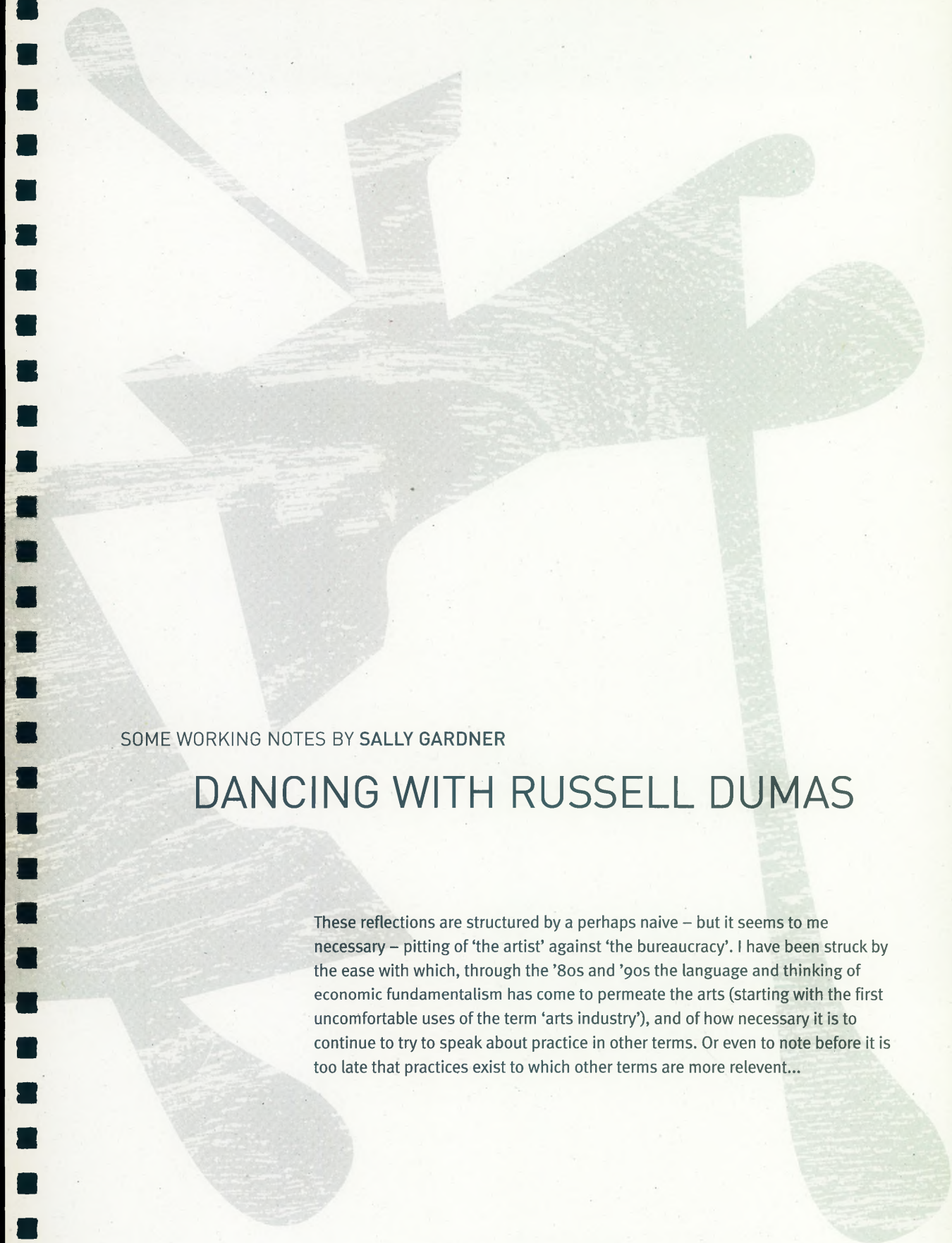
Often dancers in that situation feel abused because they're producing the work and not being given the recognition. But it's interesting you mention that comment from Lucy because working with her, it's completely about her perception of what that person can do. She's very in control of the situation – completely making everything up. Which I always enjoyed. Stephen was similar also. We contributed more – in terms of 'make a variation on this phrase' etc. but you felt very secure in his aesthetic context. The line is very difficult I think. I feel very comfortable and very extended creatively and I feel like I contribute a lot within a very defined context. But then you'll talk to someone else who would die being in situations as tightly structured as the ones I've been in. They prefer or need that kind of space. It's a personality thing, or what you're used to, or those first formative experiences. I went from the VCA straight to Russell Dumas, which was extremely aesthetically defined.

GARDNER

It seems to me that it's necessarily risky and confronting. If you're going to really learn something it requires getting very involved with somebody, somehow. If that doesn't occur then what has happened? I mean for dancing? It may be OK for some other kind of work.

HILTON

Exactly. I was in situations in New York with friends – just one-off projects. And sometimes just how indecisive they were and dependent they were on their dancers I found really difficult and not fair. But other situations – such as working with someone like Simone Forti where you absolutely produce everything – she's so there with you. As a teacher she is a phenomenal role model for me because she is *in* that class. She's experiencing it. It's incredible. It's not like she's teaching it. She may have been doing the same thing for twenty years yet she generates this situation that isn't about conventional pedagogy at all. She's completely involved, excited. Talking about people who are always dancing, she has just sustained her interest, her relationship to the world is ever opening.



SOME WORKING NOTES BY **SALLY GARDNER**

DANCING WITH RUSSELL DUMAS

These reflections are structured by a perhaps naive – but it seems to me necessary – pitting of 'the artist' against 'the bureaucracy'. I have been struck by the ease with which, through the '80s and '90s the language and thinking of economic fundamentalism has come to permeate the arts (starting with the first uncomfortable uses of the term 'arts industry'), and of how necessary it is to continue to try to speak about practice in other terms. Or even to note before it is too late that practices exist to which other terms are more relevent...

On the beach recently, I found myself somewhat unconsciously stepping out onto one leg and, swinging my body off centre, counterbalancing my free leg around in a low arc with a pleasurable but precarious sense of instability. This body memory, this recall of a physical situation – which is in fact not so much a situation but a disconcerting and risky setting in play of my whole body – very tangibly brought back to me the sense of how difficult, challenging and rigorous Russell Dumas' dance is.

But where precisely does the rigour, and challenge lie? Dumas is one of the few Australian dance artists who have made a sustained, original contribution to international dance culture. Although until a couple of years ago he received yearly financial support for his work, one of the things that Australian arts bureaucrats and many members of the dance community have found difficult to accept about this artist is that within the terms of the dominant paradigm of the dance 'company' he is so unprofessional and unmethodical. I use these terms self-consciously because both refer to frames of practice and ways of thinking that Dumas remains determinedly outside. The idea of 'professionalism' arises as the valued quality of a rationalised, industrialised, individualised, and disciplined modernity; it entails mutually exclusive divisions of labour and a normative conception of the body. 'Method' relates to a specific form of scientific rationality and objectivity, and a concern to see things in terms of predictable, law-like behaviour.

It is interesting that dance is so subject to concern about 'discipline' when the non-conformism of other kinds of artists rarely raises the same anxieties.

To work with Dumas is to enter into a relationship of some intimacy. This relationship is a relationship between consenting adults – but not on the basis that we are free, autonomous citizens, equal before the law. For the social contract between citizens is conceived as an essentially distant relationship: *In general we may say that civil society institutionalises the encounter between strangers; it provides a framework within which the development of closer,* gemeinschaftlich *relationships is not expected.*[1] Such a contract may facilitate some kind of dance but not the kind that Dumas is interested in making. For Dumas the dance relationship is, I would say, artisanal, medieval, not republican – it's an unequal relationship of knowledge and experience, not the basis of an organisation. In this practice, dancer and choreographer are not two professional categories or a binarised division of labour: they are the possibility of a particular kind of intercorporeal relationship. This distinction is perhaps what Sara Rudner is getting at when she says, *taking a class is a very different process from working intensively with one person. That's one of the hardest things about modern dance. Once companies got larger, the choreographer wasn't so available to teach in a certain way.*[2]

Rudner's remark above suggests the possibility that a dance artist might choose to work, as Dumas does, in an informal way because it is necessary to the kind of work he/she does and is not just a default position occasioned by economic circumstances in a marginalised art form. Some artists cannot elaborate their particular kinaesthetic concerns within company structures based on capitalist/industrial modes of production. To acknowledge this is to allow that dancers can be agents in history. They have not necessarily just accepted or reflected dominant structures but have actively shaped different kinds of relations necessary to creating different kinds of dancing.

One of the values that Dumas retains from the modern dance is that dance is made in relationships.

Dumas' work (his mode of production) is also provocative in Australian dance because it's a question of exploring perceptions ('what is it?') not of training (how to do it). His practice is oriented towards the development of a sensibility, an awareness of the nature of one's perceptions as a dancer. These perceptions are not limited to a narrow set of dance objects, exercises or 'movements': Dumas' mode of dancemaking encompasses cooking, eating, shopping, conversation, watching videos and many other activities as well as dancing. It involves the transgression of conventional boundaries between 'working' and private life – a 'domestication' of work if we understand the domestic as involving the sensuous life of the body. In other words dancing is both a highly specialised activity and at the same time a quite mundane practice of the self. Even the most difficult, complex or virtuosic movement possibilities are approached by referring back to the underlying organisation of everyday action – walking, running, twisting, turning. In the face of a much purveyed spectacular, glitzy body it's essential for Dumas to insist on an underlying ordinariness, even banality – similar to that of haiku poetry.

We roll around on the floor together and sit or lie on each other like seals...

Pleasure and dis-ease co-exist.

Dumas practises a kind of dance that is deeply tactile. The stakes are therefore raised on the question of ethics and of dancers' 'autonomy'. Dumas' is a committed ethical practice but in a way particular to modern dance – a way that cannot be described in the language of autonomy. Erick Hawkins thought of 'autonomy' as 'tragic' because it is based in the idea of a radical separateness. The autonomous dancing body has little experience of the other's body, its nearness and weighty impact, its density different from one's own, the impossibility of assuming it or taking it for granted. Proximity – touching – enjoins a responsibility between bodies and the mutual acceptance of their differences in the here and now. Autonomy, an idea which arises in the same kind of thinking as the idea of professionalism (or vice versa), involves a lessening of body to body contact – even if 'contact' is often spectacularised on stage. As Foucault put it, reflecting on history and modes of punishment,

One no longer touched the body ... [3]

To be paid for working with Dumas is to be paid to eat well or to travel. Both of which evoke the primary experiences of touching which are at the heart of culture:

It really does make a difference whether I am born to a bedouin where the sand is hot.[4]

Dumas' practice is both tactile and tactical – both words derive from the same root. Tactics is about survival. It's a way of accepting the inevitability that alternative practices have to define themselves against the mainstream and are thus defined by it – but that one doesn't, thereby, have to occupy the position of victim. Dumas' practice works as an intervention into a particular social configuration: it addresses the specificity of local conditions as opposed to the universal concept of 'The Dance'. It recognises that the myth of Australian

dancers as gutsy 'space-eaters' or 'cowgirls on pointe' is a disabling one. It acknowledges that physical assumptions come to exist at a very deep level of the body's musculature: that one's body is the condition of who one is and is thus not easily perceived objectively or changed – our bodies happen, so to speak, behind out backs. Ways of moving become naturalised and certain displacements or reframings are necessary in order to bring them to a level of conscious awareness and make them available to conscious strategies for change. For Dumas the relations between choreographer and dancer are relations of displacement. The dancer does not arrive already 'trained' in a technical sense, or able to reproduce the 'steps'. The fact that the dancer doesn't move in the way the choreographer moves makes clear that difference and specificity are at stake – something is being risked. This unstable situation provides the basis upon which a distinctive way of moving unfolds but is never contained. From this vantage point dance 'knowledge' cannot be acquired, freely circulated or made available as though it were information in a capitalist economic sense. Access to such knowledge entails work within complex relations of mutual obligation and unequal authority.

Dumas has an obsession with what he calls 'dance literacy' – with the problems of access to corporeal heritages. This is not an obsession with the past but is about keeping alive the forces that give culture its meaning.

FOOTNOTES

1 Black, A. *Guilds and Civil Society*. UK: Methuen, 1984. p.38
2 interviewed by Dempster in *Writings on Dance 8* Autumn, 1994 p35-41.
3 Foucault, M. *Discipline and Punish*. London: Allen Lane Penguin, 1977. p11.
4 Winnicott, D. *Babies and their Mothers*. London: Free Association Books, 1988. p.91.

BY **LAURENCE LOUPPE**

WHAT IS POLITICAL IN DANCE?

In a communication at the time of a colloquium on the History of Dance at Riverside (California, 1992) Sally Banes protested against the 'causalist' or reactive conception of the dancing body as simple 'reflection', or even vehicle of an era's ideology. In 'Power and the Dancing Body'[1] the renowned historian of post-modern dance affirmed an alternative vision of the dancing body as an agent of fractures and changes, of disruption in the social order as well as in modes of representation. Her argument was supported, as one might imagine, by a corpus of references as erudite as they were pertinent, such as the influence of Isadora Duncan on athletics practices in the Soviet Union. These influences were still visible in the Stalinist era even while the utopias of Lunatcharsky and the teaching of the Vurthemas had long since been relegated, along with all collectivist illusions, to the storerooms of history. But the body itself remembers. Retaining the marks of advances (sometimes so invisible as to escape ideological control), the body persists.[2]

In fact Banes' text seeks to identify, emanating from dance as practice and visibility, that which 'not only reproduces but in reality produces social conducts beyond the field of dance itself.'[1] We will not follow her in this direction here. Our purpose consists rather in observing where in the dancing body and its practices processes of politicisation lie. If the body of the dancer is a 'battle ground' it is above all because within its very movement currents of thought, ideologies, relations of force confront each other and have done so continuously throughout the twentieth century. I note here the exemplary analysis of Eugenia Casini-ropa whose 'La danza e l'agit-prop'[3] is one of the rare books in which the history of dance is the object of a real advance in both the study and revelation of corporeality. At each new stage of displacement in the structures of movement and the body something is won over history and, above all, over destiny. But this long labour of the body must still be identified and made legible in order to make its mark on history. Nothing is more difficult, however, for as Michel Foucault has pointed out, oppression always bears upon 'forces', not on 'signs'[4]. Forces operating in modes of production in particular are invisible and, devoid of any representation or discursive articulation, are all the more prey to violence and injustice. For the first time in history contemporary dance gave visibility to forces. It even made forces an essential vector of meaning (sens). It was especially through work on tensile qualities and the transfer of weight that force appeared as a tool of symbolic elaboration. In

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effect 'tension' is the artistic manifestation of latent forces – whether it is a question of intensification, or on the contrary in 'release', a way of letting go.[5] At the same time as it had set about uncovering this invisible of history, this essential motor of occluded imaginaries (indepted to the labanian concept of transfer of weight as a primary agent in the elaboration of culture) contemporary dance was constructing a body that might change the order of things through its awareness of forces. It was Dalcroze (to whom much is owed) who saw in the 'musicalised' body (a body highly sensitive to the play of its own tensions, alert to the tensional rhythms of its own matter) the renewal of a conscience attuned to a more just social order, an alteration in human relations through the poetic sharing of forces which become for the first time elements of thought.[6] Moreover, in a context where today the ideology of the spectacle and the promotional exploitation of the choreographic product have reached such heights (here and there this is beginning to be questioned) we have witnessed a reassertion of signs over forces. Which at the level of the exploitation and oppression of dancing bodies (as forces able to produce these directly exploitable signs) refers back to the appropriation of the modes of corporal production described by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish*. It is time then to give back to 'forces' their place of expression, their value as 'body work' to whose appearance we look forward through and beyond the spectacular packaging of dance which renders the body inoffensive, blandly miming those forces which have become too unsettling to be directly encountered by the body of the spectator. The latter being one who would risk being torn from the status of the cultural consumer s/he has become, a status whose maintenance has become her/his primary duty. In fact the perception and exchange of forces is entirely different from the consumption of signs. It relates amongst other things to a use value which would take precedence over exchange value.[7] By a quasi tactile expansion of her/his kinesphere the dancer can touch the other's body, transform it, work with it. Blinded rather than enlightened by a raft of ready made decodings which deliver her/him a universe of signs to interpret and evaluate on the spot, the spectator is often held apart from this experience of gravitational exchange which is trying to take place within her/his body. And which could little by little undo her/his adherence to the liberal, consumerist and exchangist vision of contemporary globalisation. And which would cause considerable damage to ideological representations founded on the economic and superannuated primacy of a body which is absence of the body in signs.

These are the terms of a war whose zone is the dancer's body. And when this body, through its actions (whether they be artistic or militant) undertakes to confront the ideological machine, it must do so with a body awareness without which it risks bringing to the scene of its acts (including in the first instance choreographic) only an ignorance which might regressively divert its purpose, leaving it vassall to a system of representation of which it is no longer but the fantom body, whatever the militant purpose to which a project adheres. If, today we can evoke the great moments when dance truly perturbed and displaced something in the established order of the body, one can see what important labour (*travail*) has been completed in the body itself to uncover and loosen its bonds. Without Bartenieff's work on the qualities of mobilising transfer of weight and spatial intent, of Hawkins on kinetic awareness and the transformation of sensory states into states of knowledge and consciousness, and of the American disciples of Elsa Gindler such as Elaine Summers – the dancers of Judson church and Grand Union would never have embarked upon their processes of contestation which were so powerful only because they grew from an experience of the body and the liberation or softening of tension – out of which the 'democratic body' could be elaborated.

On a completely different level it must be stressed that the processes described by Foucault are still at work, namely, the oppression which acts on forces, and which ends up signalling *as* oppression. Thus the violence of the consumerist treatment of contemporary dance during the '80s might be the origin of the moulds which have weighed heavily on the French body: stratification of the back, as if constructing a concave shell to protect the inner world, excessive control of the release of weight resulting too often in bound flow, the effacing of impulses that produce gesture etc – processes, or symptoms, less of regression (even though this is regarded by psychoanalysis as an indispensible economy of survival in distress) than of poetic self-protection in the face of immediate pressures, and a reaching towards more intimate landscapes where the body might resist its deadly appropriation and regain, even if through the exorcism of its own dynamics, a little ground of autonomy.

Today, it is a question of no longer being blinded by purely discursive commitments which do not touch that part of the body in which its use value and awareness of its forces reside. This is a situation all the more difficult to maintain in that the status of the dancer is economically imperilled in terms of economic survival and its recognition by the social and cultural collectivity which enthusiastically welcomed this unprecedented art as a resource for the invention and renewal of spectacle. But who has not yet understood what price in bodily labour, in ceaseless research has to be paid to keep alive the contemporary dance project? Nor what essential stake is raised by the dancing body in history. Nor what difficulties the necessity of a practice linking this body to a permanent mining of its own resources represents. There, precisely where meaning could be uncovered, stereotypical surface representations are exploited and replayed endlessly. From which arises the vital necessity – on pain of losing the use value of forces – of practices, workshops, conferences, movement analysis and reflection which the dancer needs to remain within the dynamic of a body becoming.

I am speaking here above all of dancers, not of officially designated choreographers (even though every contemporary dancer is the producer of unique choreographic material out of her own dynamosphere and corporeal sensibility at the very roots of the choreographic act). For in the vicissitudes of an hierarchical relation that is still obscure and poorly articulated it is sometimes difficult to distinguish at what level the exploitation of a body begins. The distinction between the tasks of choreographer and dancer are becoming more and more difficult to conceptualise especially since it is the latter who often produces the most essential part. And because her/his established presence in workshops and sites of investigation orients her/him towards a real research of which, generally, the choreographer does not feel in need. But such a remark must be qualified if only to avoid a reductive manicheism. There are choreographers and not only the lesser known who do participate in workshops and conferences or debates with dancers, which changes profoundly the scope of their creativity. Outside of these considerations it is still 'force' which is deployed for structural organisationsal ends, force which furnishes the sign. At the very interior of dance we find some of these archaic traces, as if the general system of production of goods had penetrated the space of the studio. Which would tend to efface in the aesthetic of contemporary dance the presence of its most fundamental values: the primacy of experience over product, of process over spectacle, of the intensity of labour (travail) over the circulation of a culturally negotiable product.

[Trans. S. Gardner]

FOOTNOTES

1 Sally Banes. 'Power and the dancing body', published in *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism*. Wesleyan UP, 1994
2 cf also Elizabeth Souritz. *Soviet Choreographers in the 1920s*. trans. Banes, S. Duke UP, 1990
3 Eugenia Casini-Ropa. *La danza e l'agit prop*. Bologne: Il Mulino, 1980.
4 Michel Foucault. *Surveiller et Punir* (see especially ch.6 'Les corps dociles'). Paris: Gallimard, 1976
5 Cf. the analyses of Claire-Lise Dutoit-Carlier in *Emile Jaques-Dalcroze, l'homme, le compositeur, le createur de la rythmique*. Collective work Neufchatel: Editions de la Baconniere, 1975
6 Banes, drawing on the work of the well-known anthropologist, Mary Douglas who was interested in dance, has read in the organisation of tension (hardening of the body as much in social dancing as in concert dance) the ideology at work in the body at the beginning of the plutocratic fever of the '80s (cited in Banes op.cit.) See also the political approach to tonicity in Hubert Godard, 'Le desequilibre fondateur'. *Art Press*, special issue, '20 years of Art Press', Autumn 1992.
7 Marxist terms which are returning today even in the field of the plastic arts where nevertheless the question of the art market has been debated since Duchamp. Cf. the article by Nicolas Bouriaud on the work of Pierre Huyghe. 'Les relations en temps reel', *Art Press*, #219, December 1996

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CONTRIBUTORS

RIC ALLSOP is a Research Fellow and head of performance writing at Dartington College of Arts. He is a founding editor of Performance Research and co-founder of Writing Research Associates, UK.

SALLY GARDNER studied modern dance in London and New York before becoming a founding member of Danceworks in Melbourne. Since 1988 she has made solo work and has performed with Dance Exchange. She is co-editor with Elizabeth Dempster of *Writings on Dance*.

REBECCA HILTON is a graduate of the Victorian College of the Arts. She performed with Dance Exchange and Danceworks before moving to New York in 1987. Since then she has danced with Stephen Petronio (1988–97), Michael Clark, Tere O'Conor, Jennifer Monson and Lucy Guerin and in the video work of Margie Medlin and Mathew Barney. She has taught extensively for companies, schools and festivals throughout the world. Her choreography has been presented in New York, Australia, South America and Europe. She has been commissioned to create works for New York State University, the Victorian College of the Arts, Danceworks, Laborgras (Berlin) and Behind the Scenes for the Melbourne International Festival. She recently directed 'Ullulation' which won the 2001 Midsumma Festival comedy award.

PETER HULTON is director of the Arts Documentation Unit, Exeter, England, and editor of Arts Archives. He is a Research Fellow at the University of Exeter.

LAURENCE LOUPPE is a dance historian and writer, based in Paris, France.

MARK MINCHINTON has performed in many different contexts around Australia for more than twenty years and is a Senior Lecturer in Performance Studies at Victoria University, Melbourne.

ANNE THOMPSON works as a theatre director and is completing a PhD in which she explores how 'being white' informs the work of 'white' performance artists in Australia.

MARGARET TRAIL graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts in 1985 and has since made numerous works for live performance, installation and radio, which have been presented across Australia. In 1995 she was awarded the inaugural ABC/Hybrid Arts Fellowship to work with ABC FM's audio arts program The Listening Room. In 1998 she was artist in residence at the Perth Institute of Contemorary Art and in 1999 was engaged in a collaboration with composer David Chesworth. In addition, Margaret is a full-time lecturer in the Performance Studies course at Victoria University of Technology, Melbourne.

NANCY STARK SMITH began her career as a performer and choreographer in the early 1970s. She was greatly influenced by The Grand Union and the Judson Dance Theatre breakthroughs of the 1960s. Nancy has been centrally involved in Contact improvisation as a dancer, teacher, performer and writer/publisher since its inception in 1972. She has travelled throughout the world teaching contact and related solo and ensemble improvisational dance work at various schools, art centres and studios. in 1975 she co-founded *Contact Quarterly*, an international dance and improvisation journal, which she continues to co-edit and produce with Lisa Nelson.

DAVID WILLIAMS is Professor of Theatre at Dartington College of Arts, Devon, UK.