

WRITINGS ON DANCE 25 FALLING BEHIND:
WINTER 2012 POLITICS AND BODY STATES



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WINTER 2012

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IMAGE SEQUENCES FROM PERFORMANCE OF STEVE PAXTON'S SATISFYIN LOVER*

INSTITUTE OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES MELBOURNE 2009

STILLS PROCESSED FROM VIDEO DOCUMENTATION BY MICHAEL BUCKLEY (STRATEGIC MEDIA)

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PREFACE

The contents of this issue have arisen from and supplement the four events in the *Falling Behind* performance series held at the Institute of Postcolonial Studies (IPCS) in 2009. The four events staged encounters between audiences and artists working broadly in the mode of dance.

With the performance series we aimed to present different opportunities for sensuously apprehending as much as understanding 'the other'. The events were also provocations in terms of the Institute as a civic space and how it might be used and inhabited.

At the same time we tried to use this venue to cut across the more conventional codes of performance and its reception – using the different spatial and interdisciplinary possibilities of the IPCS for their transformative potential. Further to this we were also interested in what happens before and around events – the 'pre-movement' and the poetics and politics of setting up.

All the events were oriented towards allowing human matter to be perceived as such: if we regard all events as already intelligible ... one watches, responds, dances, whatever it is, with the event, which is different to an understanding of the event.

Dance holds language back so that potentially other values can be recognised. This issue of *Writings on Dance* attempts to re-word these events.



REBECCA HILTON / 10 REALISATIONS MADE POSSIBLE BY ACTS OF DANCING

#1

I'm eight years old and it's Saturday morning. I'm learning ballet from Mary Anne Rogers. Mary Anne is eighteen and she is in the *corps de ballet* of Ballet Victoria. She is beautiful in a quiet way, with waist length, thick, brown hair that never gets messy. She is really nice. We're in her family lounge room in Bulleen, the couch is pushed back against the wall, and I can hear our mothers talking in the kitchen. *Swan Lake* is playing all crackly on the record player. It's one of those heavy, old records from a big book of records. The cover is mostly aqua with a drawing of a ballerina swan on it. I'm copying everything Mary Anne does. She lifts her chin ever so slightly so I lift my chin ever so slightly, she floats her arms out and in so I float my arms out and in, she lifts her heels and balances on her toes so I rise up onto my toes. I'm organising my body to do things and through the doing of the things, I'm noticing other things, sensations: I notice my hair moving against my face and my neck, the air is not resisting me but the floor is, I feel very light sometimes and very heavy sometimes. I am looking at Mary Anne but I am feeling me. I'm noticing sensations that I realise must be there all the time. It's like a whole other world inside the usual world.

#2

I'm fourteen years old and I'm at Lynn Golding's ballet class. We're in a big, old studio at Her Majesty's Theatre in the city. It smells like dusty wood and Cedel hairspray. The pianist is a very old man who wears a hairnet. Miss Golding is tiny, charismatic and sometimes mean, especially to the boys, but she likes me and I like her. In the middle of an *adagio* combination she has us walk in a circle, slowly and gently raising our arms towards fifth position. She's saying, 'Walk about, as if in a dream.' She really does look like she's left us and gone elsewhere and I'm noticing that thinking dreamily is helping me to do several things at once even though I'm only directly thinking of one thing.

#3

I'm fifteen years old and I go to the Victorian College of the Arts Secondary School. I'm starting Year 11 and it's our first day back from the long summer holidays. I've just had my first period. I feel awful about the way my body has changed. I don't feel like me. Anne Woolliams, the Dean of the Dance school, sees me from the other end of the large studio. She looks horrified, exaggeratedly, theatrically horrified. She exclaims 'What's happened to you?' I say nothing but think to myself; 'Puberty, puberty's happened to me'. At that moment I realise that she is just an ordinary person. She's not so special and she is sometimes rude and sometimes wrong and I stop being afraid of her. Not being afraid of her coincides with me liking dancing again. I hadn't even realised that I had stopped liking dancing. I realise that I want her approval but I don't need it. Dancing is for me, not for her or for anyone else.

#4

I am nineteen and I'm in Sydney. Sydney is shockingly beautiful to me. It's so shiny. The harbour is everywhere and so is the smell of frangipani. I'm in a company called Dance Exchange. I remember seeing Dance Exchange perform when I was at high school. I could tell there was something going on even though it kind of looked like nothing: it seemed possible rather than impossible. Dance Exchange in 1984 is Russell Dumas, Lucy Guerin and me. Russell's loft is completely white, including the floor. He lives there and we work there. Russell doesn't divide his life into separate parts: there isn't the dancing part, the friend part, the work part, the home part. For him everything flows into everything else. I really take to that idea, it makes me feel like a real artist. He teaches us something called 'ten steps in a circle'. We repeat it over and over: we experience all the possible ways to manifest these ten steps. It's disconcerting how boring and how interesting it is. We're doing these ten steps, the same ten steps over and over and I'm noticing that they are not the same at all. In fact they are different every single time.

#5

I'm nineteen and a half. Russell's new studio in Newtown smells like linseed oil and we're still working on ten steps in a circle. I'm staring at Russell who is walking the ten steps with us. He's quite grumpy. His body is so smart that he can't understand how ours could be so dumb. So I'm dance stalking him, I'm trying to be him. It seems like the only possible thing to do, the only way out, in, forward, anywhere. I'm trying to embody his obsessiveness, vitality, specificity, strength, delicacy, his singular combination of daring and knowing. He makes walking virtuosic. I can't do it like him at all, nowhere near. But, in attempting to do it like him I know I am learning and changing, ineluctably changing.





#6

I'm twenty-one and I'm in New York for the first time. I'm in a studio on Broadway below Houston fighting my best friend Lucy with a stick. We are working with the Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen fluid systems and we are trying to connect with our arterial blood flow by hitting each other with the sticks. Russell is watching and laughing at us. Lucy and I are slightly outraged. We say that we are not really mad at each other, we are fake mad. How can we connect with our arterial blood flow if we are pretending to be angry? The teacher (I think it's Susan Milani) says that it is not the actual aggression, but rather the aggressive nature of the movement that is connecting us to our arterial blood flow. It doesn't have to involve our feelings. The simple doing of movement transforms us; it doesn't need to be connected to feelings or even to ideas. The movement is enough.

#7

I'm twenty-four and I'm in the Stephen Petronio Company. We are rehearsing at the Movement Research studio on Varick St in New York. Stephen is amiable and handsome, long and lean. The seven of us are watching him intently as he dances in front of us, mainly with his back to us. The movement seems to explode through and out of him, it's casual but electric, all spirally and convoluted: he's moving in every direction at once but staying on the spot. He's improvising, doing short bursts of this very complex movement and then turning around to see who's caught what. We are building a phrase of material and we call this process throwing and catching. It's collaborative but competitive and it's kind of stressful, hard on all of us for different reasons. I can pick things up very quickly, I can co-ordinate movement fast and make it look 'good' almost immediately. Choreographers seem to like this. I'm beginning to notice something, though: I'm noticing that to pick up movement quickly I necessarily have to make it into something that I already know. I'm noticing that the people who take longer are getting more information about it, about the connections between that particular movement and their particular bodies. It's a conversation instead of a reiteration.

#8

I'm twenty-eight, it's a bright Spring day and I'm in a darkish L-shaped studio in the East Village with Lucy Guerin. We're standing side by side. I am to her left. We are looking into a mirror. Lucy's body is so coherent, organised, neat. She's pretty in a way that seems to constantly transform, even as you're looking at her. She is choreographing a twenty-five minute long, unison duet for the two of us. The movement she's making is peculiar and particular and it's pouring out of her. As it's pouring out I'm catching it, committing it to memory. She's generating and I'm incorporating. It feels symbiotic. We don't talk much, hardly at all. We don't need to.

#9

I'm thirty and I'm alone in John Jasperse's studio in Bushwick, Brooklyn. I have just broken up with my boyfriend for the third time and I'm trying to make my first dance. I have spent days here alone trying not to lie down. If I lie down I'll go to sleep and I can't afford to pay for the studio space if I'm just going to sleep in it. I am being very hard on myself and every time I move I am reminded of somebody else's movement: there doesn't seem to be an original bone in my body. I start thinking about the word – 'original' and this gets me to thinking about how we learn dancing. I'm thinking that we learn most significantly from other people's dancing and from dancing with other people. People whose bodies brim with history, knowledge, understanding, and we gain access to that history, knowledge, understanding as we dance with and beside them. I'm thinking about how all of that information both transforms us and is transformed by us and leads us to here, to now. We change and the form changes with us.

#10

I'm thirty-two and I'm in Jennifer Monson's loft in Williamsburg. We meet and improvise together when we can. It's not 'for' anything, there's no outcome, no performance, no reason for doing it other than the doing of it. We are practising Authentic Movement. She is dancing for thirty minutes with her eyes closed and I am watching her, and then we switch. Jennifer dances like nobody else I know and I'm trying to figure out what it is that is so singular about her. She's curious, she's fearless, she's not at all vain; she's completely engaged with the thing that she's doing while she's doing it. She's absorbed in the doing of dancing the way a child gets absorbed in a particular activity. I think she is constantly noticing sensation and constantly being transformed by the sensation she's noticing. I think that by watching her I'm empathetically having that experience and that by dancing with her I'm somatically absorbing that experience. I'm thinking that dancing is deeply, incontrovertibly, socially constructed. It fleshes out, manifests, that space between interiority and community. Dancing is a continuous, incorporating, synthesising transmission of us-ness. We are a movement. We are an action. Occupy us.





MARIE BARDET + ISABELLE GINOT / HABIT AND CHANGE: DISCOVERING THE PRESENT
 — AN ESSAY ON THE INVENTION OF TIME IN FELDENKRAIS METHOD:
 LEARNING THROUGH MOVEMENT, QUESTIONS OF TEMPORALITY

TRANSLATED BY SALLY GARDNER AND FRIDA KOMESAROFF

This article is one stage in an interdisciplinary research process conducted by a group of researchers, somatic practitioners, and dancers investigating uses of somatic practices¹ in dance, and within contexts of social vulnerability and exclusion where such use has been less common.²

In order to carry out this research we have had to question the epistemologies of somatic practices.³ Such epistemological work is necessary, we claim, because while somatic practices are often said to lack theory, in fact it seems to us that what we are really dealing with is an inherently diverging theory. On the one hand – and this is particularly true for the Feldenkrais method which we will be discussing here – there exists a theoretical corpus developed in texts written by the founders and their disciples. On the other hand, there is a second, implicit theoretical corpus which grounds and organises the practice itself. This second theoretical corpus is often transmitted orally during practitioners' training, and is implicated within the practice itself. Although scarcely formulated as such, this second corpus is often infinitely more coherent and complete than the first. Furthermore, the first corpus (often taken as 'the' theory of the technique) sometimes contradicts the second.

In this article, we will focus on the Feldenkrais method beginning with the hypothesis that, in discovering and inventing his method, Moshe Feldenkrais sought to address problems that were neither therapeutic (how to heal?), social or pedagogical (how to teach movement?), nor yet political (how to make the world a better place?), even though all of these 'problems' do in turn appear to direct his research.⁴ The main problem focusing his work seems rather to be that of 'change', a problem which we will formulate as: 'what is it that allows for change in human action and behaviour; what prevents or obstructs change?' This question of change is a recurring theme in Feldenkrais's discourse, and crystallises just as intensely in Feldenkrais practice. In both cases, specific conceptions of time and ways of thinking change emerge as intrinsically linked.

In this article, our own problem is a double one: it seems to us that, on the one hand, Feldenkrais practice (and we are talking here about Awareness Through Movement which is practised in groups) is a site for constructing and experimenting with a specific experience of time. The temporal aspects of the endogenous theory (i.e. of the texts) can prevent recognition of this particular invention of time. We will need therefore, firstly, to separate ourselves from these temporal models in order to *describe* how the practice of Feldenkrais produces a specific experience of time. On the other hand, we need to return to Feldenkrais's 'general theory' and to question the kind of change that is envisaged there. What is this change, actually? Our concern here is a political one: we need to be wary both of the apparent 'neutrality' of change in Feldenkrais (i.e. that Feldenkrais can produce any desired change whatsoever), and of its universality (Feldenkrais allows not a specific change but the very experience of change itself, as an absolute), so that we can discern how to draw conscious and political uses from it.

PROBLEMS OF HABITS

Interestingly, in his many writings Feldenkrais says little about his method. In these writings, he draws instead on two main kinds of resources: on the one hand, there are the major theoretical or philosophical issues and debates

to which he would like his practice to be linked in order to give it universality.⁵ This ambition (which we are tempted to call megalomaniacal) reflects the need for legitimisation felt acutely by all the founders of somatic practices of the same era. It adopts motifs that are widespread elsewhere: the ill-effects of civilisation, loss of contact with 'nature', evolutionary progress, etc.⁶ On the other hand, Feldenkrais looks to popular scientific knowledges for arguments not only to legitimate his practice, but also for theoretical resources to *invent* it. Among the 'scientific' models of change referred to in his writings are those of phylogenesis and the progressive appearance of the human species, and ontogenesis and childhood development. These scientific references (phylogenesis in particular) occupy an important place in his writings in a popularised version which is both partial (as though explaining to the neophyte the scientific models necessary to understand the method), and instrumentalised in favour of his own work. Feldenkrais's texts, multiply constrained as they are (not the least by the need to legitimise his work with scientific arguments), appear weighed down with concepts that are not his own (concepts foreign to those appearing in the practice), which he rarely uses scientifically, and which conceptualise a practice that coheres little with the one he is at the same time discovering and inventing and which, much more than the texts, constitutes the heart of his work.

1. We use the term 'somatic' anachronically. It was proposed by Thomas Hanna in the 1970s to refer to a group of corporeal practices which had certain principles in common. We are bringing under this term earlier techniques which are part of the same tradition. See 'What is somatics?' in Don H. Johnson (ed.) 1995 *Breath Bone and Gesture*, North Atlantic Books.

2. The Parisian organisation AIME (Association of Individuals Engaged through Movement) – <http://www.individus-en-mouvements.com> – develops corporal and somatic practices as resources for people living with chronic illnesses such as HIV and/or VHC. Initially AIME opened its studios to participants referred by patient organisations, and subsequently works with patient support organisations and organisations and shelters supporting people living in

conditions of social vulnerability or loss of autonomy. These experiences have convinced us of the pertinence of proposing non-therapeutic corporal practices in such cases. At the same time, however, we have become extremely aware of the complexity of what is at play in such practices when they become integrated to institutional, medical or more or less disciplinary contexts and where the status of the individual as 'accompanied' or 'taken in charge' by the institution sometimes comes into conflict with the status of the 'participant' as constructed by the somatic workshop.

3. This research group dates from 2010 and includes in addition to the authors, Carla Bottiglieri, a dancer, Body-Mind Centering practitioner and doctoral candidate in dance; Joanne Clavel, a Doctor of Ecology and researcher in art and ecology; Beatriz

Peciado, a philosopher and activist; and Violeta Salvatierra, a dancer and doctoral candidate in dance.

4. Here again there is a divergence between the two theoretical corpuses: in his works, Feldenkrais seems to attribute to his practice at least all of these goals; in the practice, and even in a very orthodox definition of the Feldenkrais practice by the practitioners themselves, the method is fundamentally educative and not therapeutic.

5. For a critique of Feldenkrais's texts and their uses see: I. Ginot, 2010 'From Shusterman's Somaesthetics to a Radical Epistemology of Somatics', *Dance Research Journal* 42/1.

6. Especially by Matthias Alexander, Elsa Gindler, Bess Mensendieck, Gerda Alexander.





This 'theoretical model' appears by turns teleological (the human species is the result of a line of 'progress'), anthropocentric (the human dominates all other animal species because gifted with a more advanced, if more fragile, nervous system), and regressive (the loss of natural animal reflexes is badly compensated for by damaging social and familial education). Arising from a certain reading of evolutionary theory, this teleological model frames the Feldenkrais method within a linear temporality inconsistent with another central value in Feldenkrais discourse, namely: the possibility of change. Finally, there is a further temporal theme which we must discuss at greater length since, contrary to the other themes above, it occupies a crucial place in Feldenkrais practice. This is the theme which opposes 'habit' as repetition of the same, to experiential learning or the sought after ideal change. If it is difficult to find in Feldenkrais's main writings a scientific source or sources specific to this 'theory of habits', it is perhaps because, even if it does not form the object of dominant scientific theories, this question is actually broached obsessively throughout the 19th century. It is the main target of the great majority of somatic methods before or contemporary with Feldenkrais, and is focused around a question which could be formulated thus: 'why does human bipedal posture, unlike that of animals, tend to degrade with age?' The founding somatic practitioners, like Feldenkrais, draw on explanations ranging from various versions of evolutionary theory through rather vague sociological analysis to biomechanics. In the majority of their texts, a 'dystopia' of habit as necessarily repetitive, fixed and harmful is opposed to an ideal process of constant learning in which there is a permanent renewing of gesture. The process proposed by the Feldenkrais method, by contrast, would seem to exclude repetition and progresses inexorably in linear fashion. Moshe Feldenkrais was, nevertheless, well-informed of the theories of reflexes and acquired automatisms and did not deny the *necessity* of habits (which he linked to his reading of phylogenesis: habit is the necessary and finally fixed learning from which the nervous system of animals benefits directly at birth). What he criticizes is rather

that the learning process in the child stops because of defaults in the education systems of our very imperfect societies. According to Feldenkrais, habits stop functioning as a plastic system that keeps adjusting to new exchanges with our environments as it does in infancy, and becomes a congealed system. Hence, it is not a matter of undoing habits but of making them newly malleable (variable) by renewing the process of learning that 'society' (non-naturally) has stopped. Feldenkrais's practice develops and experiments with this plasticity, while his attempts at conceptualisation remain caught in binary models which, it seems to us, contradict the 'experience' and the experiment made possible through the invention of the practice. There is, however, another conceptual tradition anterior to, then contemporary with, the emergence of the first somatic methods which seems to offer a different, pertinent model to describe *the experience of change*, and thus a model of temporality consonant with a Feldenkrais lesson.

RAVAISSON

In fact, the question of habit was also articulated within 19th century philosophy, in particular in what could be called a minor branch of French philosophy extending from Ravaisson and his treatise *De l'habitude* (*On Habit*) to Bergson and his conception of habit in *Matter and Memory*. At a moment when philosophy, like psychology, was defining itself as an independent field, the problem that habit posed was situated at the crossroads of fundamental problems. For example, in order to rethink the question of freedom, a series of distinctions had to be finely re-articulated: between the innate and the acquired, nature and culture, the physical and the psychic body and consciousness, past and present, repetition and difference, the voluntary and the spontaneous, the conscious and the unconscious ... These distinctions provide less the hidden explanatory framework for the then barely emergent and almost unknown somatic methods, than a series of problems and perspectives which we can take up again today, using Feldenkrais practice, in order to problematise the relation between habit, change and temporality. Any work which

claims to 'mount an attack' on habits, for example, those inhabiting our ways of moving, implies thinking a certain triangulation or permeability of these dichotomies which vary according to the times.

In his short treatise, *De l'habitude*, published in 1838, Ravaissou identified in a particularly fine manner diverse problems around habit that we will call collectively 'corporal'. The problem with habit, he said in early 19th century terms is that it is found before reflective awareness and beyond mechanical determination. It is simultaneously active (voluntary) and passive (involuntary) inscription, and therefore emerges as a specific site of articulation between activity and passivity.⁷ At the same time it is situated at the intersection of what he calls 'the body' and 'the soul' (which we must not think of as a priori existing categories, identical, say, to what Feldenkrais calls 'body and mind' but as a problematic and changeable distinction whose stakes we must each time try to understand).

It is thus the condition of habit to be situated at these multiple articulations – however they may be conceived in a particular era – and to demand that we invent ways of rethinking the relations between voluntary and involuntary, body and mind, etc. 'Physical and rational theories are equally lacking here. The law of habit can only be explained by the development of a spontaneity that is both active and passive and which differs equally from mechanical determinism and reflective freedom.'⁸ Located in the articulation between mechanics and will, between passivity and activity, habit requires the elaboration of its own theory – one which understands reality as at the same time active and passive, and explained neither by the simple mechanics of a pure materialism, nor by the freedom of

a pure idealism. More precisely, Ravaissou's philosophy provides us with the idea that habit locates us in a 'middle' between pure will and pure passivity. '... Habit is the common limit or intermediary between will and nature; and it is a moving intermediary, a limit that is ceaselessly displaced and which advances imperceptibly from one extremity to the other. Habit is thus, so to speak, the infinitesimal *differential*, or the dynamic *inflammation* between will and nature.'⁹ Through an effort resisting the 'either/or' of will and determinism, habit emerges as a dynamic field of inflexion between the two, escaping at once the purely determined and the pure reflexivity of free will. Ravaissou even concludes this passage in terms of a 'method': 'Consequently, habit can be considered a method, as the only real method, by an infinite *converging series*, for approximating the relation, real in itself but immeasurable to thought, between Nature and Will.'¹⁰

How can this dynamic inflammation, mobile limit, moving frontier, differential tendency, which cannot be rationally understood but is nevertheless somehow graspable, become a method? How can habit through its dynamic, tending and differing nature, inspire a dynamic work upon that tending, that in-between in movement?

PROPENSITY AND TENDENCY

This 'spontaneity' which is neither purely 'fated' nor reflexively decided needs to be thought as a particular moment of action, dependent on an 'anterior involuntary propensity where the subject is not yet distinguishable from its object'.

It is through this propensity and tendency, 'mobile intermediaries' between will and determinism and between subject and object that we might envisage a change of habit: developing in the soul *simultaneously*, we could say with Ravaissou, 'not only a disposition but the penchant and the actual tendency to action, as in the organs the tendency to movement. Finally, the pleasure of action succeeds by degrees the fugitive pleasure of passive sensibility.'¹¹

7. Ravaissou, 2007 *De l'habitude*, Allia, Paris. English translation: *Of Habit*, translated by Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, with a Preface by Catherine Malabou. London: Continuum.

8. *Ibid.*, p.45

9. *Ibid.*, p.50

10. *Ibid.*

11. *Ibid.*, p.65





Although Ravaissou's study pre-dates our own realities by two centuries, from it emerge two hypotheses for our research over and beyond these last considerations on the pleasure of action and not just the enjoyment of the senses: on the one hand, repetition as inscription and manifestation of acquired habit can also be that through which habit can be modified and directed. On the other hand, the tendency to movement and the penchant for action that are a mixture of activity and passivity constitute 'the matter' of habit upon which a change of habit can be anticipated.

Changes through repetition, attention to the junction between sensation and action, and the tendency to movement constitute a specific frame from which to think the articulations between past and future through the experience of the present, of repetitions and differences. In fact, the experience of the present through movement and the affirmation that there is change at the heart of habits characterising the Feldenkrais method require, in order to be fully understood, a theoretical-practical frame of change and temporality. This can only be found in an ongoing dialogue with the practice.

REPETITION, VARIATION AND DIFFERENCE: TEMPORALITIES OF FELDENKRAIS PRACTICE.

In order to understand the nature of this 'change' as the ideal of Feldenkrais method, and at the same time to extricate ourselves from the theoretical impasses within which Feldenkrais's discourse seems to enclose us, we will use as our starting point a Feldenkrais lesson and, specifically – in order to facilitate the description – a group session known as 'Awareness Through Movement'.

HERE AND NOW

Lie on your back. Observe how your pelvis is resting on the floor. What parts are in contact with the floor? Which parts are making full contact with the floor? Which parts are just brushing the floor? Which areas are not touching the floor? Does your pelvis feel heavier on the left or right side?^{21,2}

Awareness through Movement (ATM) always begins with the ritual of 'gravitational scanning', often lying on the back. It can also be done in other positions, and again at the end of the lesson and also during it. This scanning sets in place the elements of the coming lesson from the subjective point of view of the participant. The first element is a guiding of the participant's sensory introspection: s/he does not follow a norm presented by the teacher (who might have said, 'stretch out on the floor with your legs in parallel, making sure that your pelvis is resting with its weight equally on both sides'), but rather must determine what his/her own 'map' of contact with the floor is, using the proliferating perceptual questions and observations, and without being offered an ideal map to emulate.

The second element contained in this scanning is that of 'presence': the participant is to experience a 'here and now' of contact with the floor, before these contacts are changed through the movements which are to come later in the lesson, and above all without predicting what is to happen.

The third element is the perception of 'small differences': not only those between the support of different parts of oneself in the here and now but also those between 'now' and 'just before' or 'just after'. In fact, the attentive participant, as s/he allows his or her attention to scan the points of contact with the floor, will soon experience modifications in the feel of these points of contact as an effect of the simple act of shifting his or her attention. It is therefore impossible to know when the 'present moment' starts or finishes. It is impossible to define a beginning and an end, a before and an after of sensation, just as it is impossible to discern what comes from an objective difference (did that really change?) or a subjective one (was it me who thought something changed?). Finally, through these tiny variations, the participant begins to experience the 'blurring' which thenceforth will organise for the whole lesson the experience of voluntary and involuntary, of active and passive, of conscious and unconscious.

A PRESENT OF TENDENCIES AND ANTICIPATIONS

The lesson's present is in the first instance an attention to small changes principally through noticing differences of contact with or pressure on the floor. The participant new to Feldenkrais is likely to take this initial 'scanning' as a 'still photograph' of his or her sensations; but everything in the conduct of the lesson by the practitioner will lead her or him to notice that there is no difference between the moments of scanning and moments of action, at most only a difference of degree. What unites the times of rest or scanning and the times of action is the guiding of one's attention which is always fixed on the present moment, either in the process of initiating a movement (described by the practitioner) or of observing, at rest, the traces left in our contacts with the floor by the previous actions. The participant thus learns gradually to explore the time of rest or apparent inactivity as those moments when s/he senses 'towards which movement' her rest is tending or 'which movements' have left their traces in her resting. Thus, gravity, the primary context of Feldenkrais practice is not so much an object of work in itself, in the sense that one should learn to place one's weight better on the ground or to let go (as if in relaxation, for example), than a means of perceiving ways of moving and of organising through movement. In fact, what emerges from this gravitational panorama is more a certain relation to gravity than specific information and, more precisely, a relation to gravity insofar as it sketches a relation to movement and a way of entering into movement (*se mettre en mouvement*). It is precisely that this here and now, when the variation of supports as they change according to the different ways of tending towards movement are perceived, emerges from a present which is not an instantaneous 'full

stop' for a photo 'capture' of the situation but rather a present which lasts and which stretches between multiple differences and which thickens with these tendencies towards moving. The first time frame of the method is thus a present of tendencies rather than the present of an instant – an abstraction that can never be experienced.¹³ Thus, a certain 'thickness' of the present through an attention to small differences in tending to move furnishes the temporal frame of what now follows in the lesson: namely, repeating and varying a co-ordinated movement.

The temporal attitude of the participant in a Feldenkrais lesson is thus progressively elaborated in terms of familiarity with a continuous present, which is affected by what has already taken place and the anticipation of what is going to happen. For, as we discuss below, a Feldenkrais lesson is wholly organised around the perception of 'changes'. These changes, however, are not goals (a lesson does not 'aim for everyone to obtain the same change' but that '*something* changes'); changes cannot appear outside the present as a point to which the trajectory will lead us, but exactly in the here and now of the lesson. So one expects change and is aware of a temporality oriented towards an 'in a moment it will be different', while knowing that this change can only appear in the here and now of attention. One expects something, without being able to plan it: one can only notice, 'It is happening' now.

REPEAT AND VARY: SMALL DIFFERENCES

Bend your right knee and put your right foot flat on the floor. Allow the right knee to descend slowly towards the left, and then bring it back to the vertical. How far can you let it go comfortably? Does your right foot stay flat on the floor or does it roll to the inside when you lower your knee? Try allowing your foot to roll, then keeping it flat on the floor. Which way feels more comfortable? Which requires less effort?

12. Here, as in the sections to come, we give 'classic' examples of instructions given by the practitioner during an ATM. Taken together, however, they do not represent a complete lesson. Nevertheless, if the reader wants to stop reading in order to explore

the experiences s/he needs to create the temporality of the lesson fragments by repeating the movements and observations several times, varying them and, especially, allowing pauses according to her or his own rhythm and time.

13. See Henri Bergson, 1939 *Matière et Mémoire*, Chapter 2, University Presses of France.





Now continue the same movement and notice your pelvis. Does your pelvic contact with the floor change when you lower your knee or when you bring it back to vertical?

During these variations, the first experience is that of change, or more precisely the perception of differences. The practitioner repeats the instruction several times and develops variations on this instruction – which may have to do with the kinematics of the movement as in the example above, or with the focus of attention. The participant is thus constrained by the very precise restriction of the instructions which distances this method from any spontaneous searching or free expression of the self. By slow repetition, this rigorous score of verbal instructions aims for the participant to sense as many details as possible and the multiple co-ordinations that are in play through the gravitational organisation and orientation. One is to perceive the differences between a movement (*allow your right knee to move towards the floor to the left*) and the same movement undertaken according to a different instruction (*allow your knee to fall while keeping the foot flat on the floor or allowing it to roll over*). Then, as the variations multiply, one begins to perceive differences that are beyond voluntary variation. Thus, a whole modulation of perceived changes is elaborated between what is already in the process of changing and what is made to change through an instruction, intermediary between the voluntary and involuntary. One does not progress from ‘worst’ to ‘best’ but observes the differences, non-hierarchically, between ‘before and after’, an experience made possible by the structure of the lesson which provides regular points of comparison, and the ‘voluntary production’ of differences, created in response to the verbal instructions.

The Feldenkrais lesson which proposes, apparently paradoxically, to repeat at length almost the same movement while apparently seeking to escape from habit, actually assumes that in doing the same movement several times and attending to the small differences and tendencies towards the movement, that the ‘almost’ will prevail over the ‘same’:

repetition becomes experiencing multiple variations. Thus, the tendencies towards movement sharpen and the work concentrates less on effecting the movement or performing the sequence than on what initiates it – ‘the tendency to’, ‘on the point of’ – opening a singular temporality of tendencies and intensities during the execution.

The sought after change in Feldenkrais occurs, thus, through the experience of tendencies rather than through the observation of the adequacy of the results. Here we have a distinct apprenticeship through movement which proposes an attention to differences within tendencies-in-process rather than the acquisition of new co-ordinations for one’s repertoire,

Try different ways of letting the pelvis follow the knee. How many different ways can you find of lowering your knee to the left? When your pelvis rolls as the knee descends or ascends, what happens to your thoracic cage, your ribs? What do you feel in your right hip? What way of doing the movement feels most familiar? Which requires the least effort? What is the difference between your pelvis rolling or not rolling as the knee moves?

Exploring, thus, the variation in a particular co-ordination during a lesson, rather than learning and retaining several ways of doing something, several schemas, leads us to explore the very notion that there are several ways of doing something. Thus, rather than learning variations, the method is based in an experience of variability.

VARIABILITY

It is a question, therefore, not of replacing a bad habit with a good one, one movement by another, than of experimenting with and experiencing the variability of processes of moving. In other words, this work seeks to inflect the process of moving: if there is change, it is a change through the experience of variability rather than the learning of different variations.

‘Understand that what is in question here is not simply the replacement of one mode of acting with another, which would be a purely

static change. What I am suggesting is a change in our way of acting which aims at a dynamic change in the whole process of one's action.¹⁴

This is where the distinction between learning movement and learning *through* movement gains its meaning and implies several consequences: thinking in terms of learning through movement is to wager that, to a certain extent, habits linked to the past and new ways of acting to come can be at play in the present of an experience. The experience of a here and now through movement can allow us, as we retrace the dynamic through which habits are acquired, to pay attention to the initiations and ways of orienting oneself during the movement, to inflect, inhibit and change the unfolding tendencies. Such, in our view, is the meaning of the notion of 'reversibility' which is critical to the practice of Feldenkrais.¹⁵ But practitioners often reduce reversibility to the idea of a movement which could at any moment be interrupted and reverse its direction – thus excluding speed and momentum. We believe, however, that the notion of reversibility can be understood more broadly as the possibility of varying the movement while it unfolds.¹⁶ Understood thus, reversibility – what we are calling variability – radically recasts the relation to the past and the future, thus avoiding our reaching for a performative schema projected into the future.¹⁷ In the same way, the past is no longer the unchangeable source of conditions determining our gestures and from which we must tear ourselves in order to find a freedom of movement in which *everything will be possible*. The past becomes instead the dynamic web of experience through the different tendencies to move in such and such a fashion, partial determinations exercised in an unstable time; potentials which can be actualised rather than projections of possibilities that will be realised. As such, the temporality of these actualising potentials, these unfolding tendencies can only be

multilinear, thick and tangled. If dynamic attention can take hold of and be caught up in this tendency to movement, it is in a thick present, where delays and inhibitions, inflexions and transformations, spacings between the lines mixing perception and action, activity and passivity insinuate themselves. It is this attention which weaves the new from the roots of habits, rather than trying to cut them off or oppose them. Rather than learning new ready-made formulae for the future, it introduces variability. It breaks with habit as an inflexible determination and repetition of acquired schemas in order to introduce the potential of variation. Thenceforth, habit is no longer there to be purely repeated or absolutely annulled but to vary and develop itself.

Thus the temporality that emerges here is non-linear, it is anchored in a present thick with multiple tendencies to move and is the site where habit and novelty are entwined. It is composed of dynamics that are *in the process of unfolding* through a variability that is at once infinitesimal and powerful. More humble and perhaps more powerful, change in Feldenkrais is less the objective augmentation of movement possibilities in the sense of a greater repertoire of moves, than the variability of potentials which are woven as much into the way of doing a movement as in the breadth or quantity of possible movements. Learning through movement supposes a non-linear time realised less in terms of goals or plans and more through experiences of a present thick with variations-in-process.

INTERTWINING TIMES

The production of this 'continuous present' which is at the heart of the lesson occurs, as we see it, in the interval between the two temporalities which in their parallel unfolding constitute the session. The first 'time' is that which the practitioner explicitly structures. Paradoxically, it follows a teleological, causalist

14. Moshe Feldenkrais, 2010 'Bodily Expressions' [1964], trans. Thomas Hanna in *Embodied Wisdom, the collected papers of Moshe Feldenkrais*, edited by Elizabeth Beringer, North Atlantic Books, Berkeley, CA, p.4.

15. For Feldenkrais's definition of reversibility see 'Bodily Expressions' op.cit., p.18.

16. Such is the analysis suggested by Alan Questel. See 'Balance' in *Feldenkrais Journal*,

no.24, pp.25–41, 2011.

17. Cf. Henri Bergson, 'Le possible et le réel' in *La pensée et le Mouvant* (1938), éditions PUF, pp.99–116.





and accumulative logic – even if this does not always appear explicitly to the participants. In the examples of instructions mentioned in this article it can seem thus: ‘in order for the knee to be able to lower towards and lift from the ground with greater amplitude and ease, the ankle must articulate, the pelvis move in the direction of the knee and that this pelvic rotation should include a rotation from bottom to top of the spine, right up to the head, in proportion with the movement of the knee.’ Such instructions might appear as though progressively constructing the aim of the lesson so as to improve the co-ordination in question through bio-mechanical analysis.

The second kind of time, however, is different. It animates the attention of each participant (as many ‘times’ as there are participants). This is a lived temporality in which certain moments of the session take on a specific value while others disappear. The vectorial logic which organises the chronology of the practitioner’s instructions entwines with the lived experience of the singular, subjective present of each person. This prevailing of the subjectively ‘lived’ over the objective, unfolding process is made possible, paradoxically, by two specificities of the first ‘time’, that of the practitioner: on the one hand, in describing the kinematics of the movement, the practitioner frees the participant from projecting towards the goal (or *ideation*) that is indispensable for any action under normal circumstances. While the practitioner takes over this ideational phase for everyone, each participant’s attention can (and must) be directed toward the unfolding process. On the other hand, the direction of the lesson by the practitioner towards a sort of biomechanical ideal (the most economical organisation of the movement) is hidden from the participant by the absence of comments of value. The biomechanical ideal, in say a gymnastics context, would be made quite explicit to the pupils whose job it would be to get as close to this ideal as possible. In contrast, the Feldenkrais practitioner does not articulate the norm from which s/he is working, but instead continually proposes subjective measures within a proliferation

of variations, requiring each participant to construct her or his own scale of values. The direction towards which the practitioner is aiming is thus obscured by the other aspect of her/his teaching, the instructions to attend to the process which divert the goal of the lesson in order to call each participant’s attention to his or her own ends or, in other words, his or her own provisional perceptual and sensory values.

What produces the ‘effect’ (of change) is thus the presence (attention or attentive awareness) of the student which is ‘devectorialised’ within the linear accumulation of variations. Change is thus the intervals and meanders organised by the practitioner’s instructions (her or his double temporality), recomposed (woven and unwoven, as Michel Bernard would say) with the student’s own internal guiding.¹⁸ It is thus through this double temporality and its deliberate intertwining that a singular experience of time, what we are calling the experience of variability, emerges. This seems to us what is most at stake in a practice like Feldenkrais.

CHANGE?

It can be seen, therefore, that Feldenkrais’s efforts of theorising in his writings fail to realise what is at stake in the practice in so far as they borrow from representations of time attached to the notion of progress. They remain enclosed within a vectorial and linear time as in the expression often used to sum up the aims of the practice for the public: ‘the impossible becomes possible, the possible becomes easy, and the easy becomes enjoyable...’ This rhetoric of progress and improvement echoes only one part of the teaching. In fact, the linearity of the kinematic instructions, as we have seen, is masked from the participants by the emphasis on the process in its present and thick dimension. Nevertheless, as the theoretical discourses insist, the teaching does aim to ‘produce change’ and the pedagogical rhetoric insists massively upon this expectation of change. But this expectation of change is itself also ‘derailed’ by variability: if each participant, in the lived experience of the lesson, is actively

seeking multiple and continuous change, how can he or she know what change to expect? The 'right movement' is not the one aimed at through the lesson (the one indicated to everyone by the practitioner), but that which each student elaborates for her/himself as he/she experiences variations and the vagueness of this variability. That is why the discourses – theoretical, explanatory, and promotional – respond very little to the question, 'what change does Feldenkrais method aim for?' (or what use is it?) More precisely, these discourses resist assigning a definitive aim to the practice, all problems apparently finding their solution 'thanks to Feldenkrais': improving one's mobility, one's efficiency, one's relationships and feelings, etc. Rather than seeing in this apparent (and dubious) universality of the method an effect of marketing ('whatever your needs, Feldenkrais method is for you'), it seems to us that it is rather the question itself that is problematic. Feldenkrais practice seeks less to produce a specific change than to allow one to experience that 'there is change': what we are calling variability. But this absence of particular, a priori predetermined results does not imply that one might re-assign to it universally valid and so-called 'neutral' aims. Instead, it implies a specific situation. This 'change' appears as the play of effects attached to all the multiple tendencies present in the situation of the lesson and the manner in which it takes place. Far from pointing towards the idea (widespread amongst practitioners) that 'the Feldenkrais method is neutral', or in other words, that it can serve all possible intentions, on the contrary, the change

produced is strictly dependent upon the context: the personal context of the individual taking the session, and the institutional, social context of the session, the attention of the practitioner and his/her explanation of specific aims etc. In other words, the subjective tendencies which are experienced and discovered in the light of variability are also intertwined with the tendencies of the context. Far from being a neutral method, Feldenkrais practice is thus particularly available to the inflections of its different uses.

To the question 'what change does Feldenkrais aim for' we must therefore substitute 'what changes are permitted and contemplated by the practitioner or the (collective) mechanism producing the lesson? For this change, thought as variability, we must thus invent not 'criteria of evaluation' envisaging results and applying frames of measurement, but ways of narrating what does change, and for thinking the ways of doing and deciding on the setting, assuming that if there are criteria, they can only be immanent criteria in the sense that Deleuze and Guattari speak of: 'Experiment. It is easy to say? But there is no pre-formed logical order of becomings and multiplicities; there are criteria but these do not come after: they are exercised ongoingly, in the moment, enough to guide us among dangers.'¹⁹ In order to invent ways of navigating between the impossible predetermination of fixed and expected goals, and the mute condition of doing and saying nothing, instead, we must re-activate our attention to the effects in train.

18. 'Dynamique de métamorphose indéfinie de tissage et dé-tissage de la temporalité qui s'effectue à l'intérieur d'un dialogue avec la gravitation'. Michel Bernard, 2001 'Sens et Fiction, ou les effets étranges de trois chiasmus sensoriels',

in *De la création chorégraphique*, Editions Centre national de la danse, Pantin, p.63. ('The dynamics of the ceaseless weaving and re-weaving of time at the heart of the dialogue with gravity'. Michel Bernard, 2001 'Meaning and Fiction, or the strange

effects of three sensory chiasmus' in *On Choreographic Creation*, published by the Centre national de la danse, Pantin, p.63)
19. Deleuze and Guattari, 1987 *A Thousand Plateaux: capitalism and schizophrenia*, Minnesota UP, Minneapolis.





ELIZABETH DEMPSTER + MAMMAD AIDANI / HOW WE WALK, SIT AND STAND

ELIZABETH DEMPSTER

Aesthetic engagement with everyday movement is today strongly associated with New York based post-modern dance experiments of the 1960s. However, avant-garde dance is not the only domain of experiment with the aesthetics of everyday action. Following her immigration to the US from Germany in 1938, Charlotte Selver began offering classes and private sessions in what she later termed Sensory Awareness and in 1950 she began to offer courses at the New School for Social Research in New York City. Selver had been a student of somatic bodywork pioneer Else Gindler, and her work, like Gindler's, proceeds through close attention to the simple activities of daily life. This focus is evident in the title of one of Selver's early courses at the New School – *Walking, sitting, standing, lying: the four dignities*. According to Selver's partner Charles Brooks, the phrase “the four dignities of man” is taken from an ancient Chinese Buddhist text. In the Buddhist context, each dignity represents a specific mode of contact with and relationship to reality. In the original text the four dignities are described as embodying the “respect inspiring deportment of the Buddha”; thus the humble actions of walking, sitting, standing and lying are the frames or planes of composition through which human life is lived and they are also a means for its transformation.

Everyday life has a dual character: it is in many respects repetitive and habitual, but it may also be a site of utopian social praxis. In her 1997 essay “Ghost Gestures: phenomenological investigations of bodily micro-movements and their inter-corporeal implications”, philosopher Elizabeth Behnke proposes that close attention to everyday life as it is experienced at a subtle bodily level might be the basis for social and political change. She suggests that somatic awareness offers a powerful lens upon the inter-corporeal or inter-kinaesthetic realm, and that learning to pay attention to and with our bodies is key to the development of ethical responsivity. Behnke asks: “What, for instance, are the interkinaesthetics of genuine mutual

responsivity? And what sorts of practices swing into play and reinforce the style of bodily micro-movements that further healthy intercorporeity?"

One of the underlying propositions of the *Falling Behind: politics of body states* performance series held at the Institute of Postcolonial Studies was that performance practices have a distinctive contribution to make to the cultivation of embodied ethical responsivity, especially insofar as performance offers opportunities for sensuously apprehending as much as understanding 'the other'.

The fourth and final event of the *Falling Behind* series was a reconstruction of Steve Paxton's 1967 large group piece, *Satisfyin' Lover*. The work employs three of the four 'dignities' – walking, standing and sitting. Paxton's work proposes questions about how performance might speak to the condition of everyday life. He is deeply curious about the sorts of communication and social interactions that arise in performance – amongst performers, between performers and spectators, and amongst spectators. On this occasion, theatre practitioner and interdisciplinary scholar Mammad Aidani provided a provocative context for reconsideration of this post-modern dance classic. As moderator of the post performance discussion Aidani asked us to consider the political and civic status of the walker/performer and invited a perception of the performer as citizen.

A transcript of the post performance discussion follows.

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1. Brooks, Charles (1986) *Sensory Awareness: The Rediscovery of Experiencing through Workshops with Charlotte Selver*, Felix Morrow Great Neck, New York.
 2. Behnke, Elizabeth. (1997). "Ghost gestures: Phenomenological investigations of bodily micromovements and their intercorporeal implications". *Human Studies* 20: 181–201.

3 OCTOBER 2009

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5pm

LIBBY DEMPSTER / This is the fourth and final of a four part of a series of events that Sally Gardner and I have been running, in conjunction with the Institute.

What we are witnessing today is a work by choreographer Steve Paxton, which was first performed in 1967. Because it is a large group work we will have to travel together, about a five-minute walk up Queensberry Street to St Mary's Church Hall, where the actual event will happen. It's quite a short work, about 15 minutes, and after the performance we will return together to the Institute. Funnily enough just this morning I was looking back through Sally Banes's book about that period in post-modern dance and noticed a reference to a work that I had never heard of before. It was called 'Walking There' and it was made in 1968 and it is indeed a work for audience participation, so we'll be performing another one of Paxton's scores on our way up to the hall. Later it was retitled 'Audience Performance #1', but I think 'Walking There' has a nicer ring to it. So let's begin.

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6pm

It is my pleasure to introduce Mammad Aidani and we are really indebted to Mammad for stepping in at very short notice to replace our colleague Mark Minchinton who was unable to be here today. Mammad is a man of many talents. He is a theatre practitioner – in fact a season of his plays just closed last week at La Mama. He is a published poet, a philosopher and a scholar who works across several disciplines, and he is currently a research fellow at the University of Melbourne.

I asked Mammad if he would be willing to moderate a conversation amongst us, rather than give a formal paper as such ... that he would perhaps just assist us in drawing out some conversation starting out from the work *Satisfyin' Lover*, but perhaps opening more





broadly into the business of audiencing or witnessing performance. So I said come and see a work by Steve Paxton and Mammad then said, "Well, when we've seen the play..." And I said, actually Mammad, perhaps it is a play, but if it is, it's certainly a wordless one.

MAMMAD / Thank you for that.

Listen to my accent first, please. Yes I'm very interested in ethical observation and I have a question, which opens onto many other questions before I go on to your performance. I question whether theoreticians are right to call Melbourne, Australia a cosmopolitan city. A city which has allowed or not allowed many of its residents – I'm not using the term inhabitants, but residents – it sounds more of a legal term as opposed to the experience of a city which is lived emotionally. Is it a cosmopolitan city, which allows the emotional connection? When I am in Paris, when I am in New York (just trying to be devil's advocate here to stimulate some emotions, and assuming that I am among very critical minds as well) there's a sense of rush, a sense of cause and effect, there's more of the spontaneous; bodies moving (where, I don't know), bodies still, watching something. It involves and provokes my mind more effectively, hence the philosophical and poetical language – I'm talking about English – makes more sense to me, so that I'm more comfortable with my body in those cities, even though we think those cities are rather physically dangerous. Why is that, I ask myself? I'll go into that a bit further. Maybe my imagination stretches further in those cities. It's started here... I'm glad that someone said that Australia could hold 35 million people.

Now, to go to the performance. What I saw reminded me of Plato's concept that philosophical thinking starts with the concept of wandering. Someone just appeared. I have never seen this person before and then they left ... then someone else came. I remember that he was totally alone. The question raised in my mind was, why are they walking? I didn't want to believe that I was watching a performance, because this is what actually happens in everyday life. I wonder if we ask this question

when we see a group of people going up and down on Lygon Street, or Chapel Street, when we observe that. I don't know whether this has been choreographed or not, but I felt immediately connected emotionally because there were faces who spontaneously and consistently shared feelings of anxiety, "I'm in a hurry", "I don't want to look at you, but I'm here". And then exit. I'm conscious that that door leads me to the Melbourne that I've just referred to. The performance makes more sense to me when your body is out of that door. It's almost as if your walking is a pretext for me to feel whether I belong or not to this moment as I am watching. That's what I reflect upon, the ethic of watching. That's what we think about in a multi-cultural society. How much do we actually watch the other? What do we watch? What do we mumble if we are alone or not? So those kinds of things are quite potent, coming to my mind as I watch. And then I watch again. A group appears and disappears in a hurry. Was this self – choreographed or by the choreographer, who entices you to go to those spaces? I think that's possible.

So there's this concept of exit and entrance, which to me is very important to further question myself, my ethic of watching the other, because not knowing you I'd never be able to allow myself to feel that I am ... quite frankly, I'm not trying to romanticize this ... that I am a real inhabitant of this city. I have the same rights as you do; we have the same rights, but are we emotionally connected, as citizens? It's not enough to say we are generous people, because we know concepts are always constructs of what we bring to language through our different languages and upbringing. What does generosity mean to you, as opposed to me? I always watch your body ... when I'm in trouble. Your body is far more important to me to take an ethical action to protect me if I'm in trouble. Your words come second.

Well I'm an artist who uses language, but god knows what kind of language I use. I don't know. I use language as a pretext to say what is not there really, because we know it. So the body is practically carrying so much, so many

things. So those processes, those impulses, those conscious or unconscious materials that we have accumulated in our body seem to constantly demand of me, in relation to you, the question "who am I?" This arises in this context.

These are not very complex things that I am saying. We all are complex really. So when I observe this performance I realise yes, I have to use my imagination beyond what I plan to know conceptually. And so even the noise that you make towards the end ... I just loved that. I don't know how many of us who watched it noticed that. Whether it was spontaneous or someone mumbled or ... I don't care because I was part of the structure now, having my own process of watching, moving in and out. But that noise and when you came in some of you smiled and I didn't know what to do. I just loved that. Shall I clap? Who is going to initiate it? Again that reminded me of how we are living in constructs. I didn't know what to do.

Within that context language makes more sense to me really and particularly this beautiful language that I love so much. So going back to my initial observation and not giving any extra value to those cities, because I have been privileged, or not, living in those cities, the body definitely to me is before thinking. When you appear in front of me I didn't have any thought about that appearance and suddenly you give me something. What am I going to do with it? And that's what I got from your performance. So we are going to go to a few things that I think Paxton is very interested in and then open up for conversation.

It's that issue of constant, that constant thing that is about to happen. I'm very interested in what is going to happen. We bring the past into present. The present is so potent. We don't know what future holds really. So this is how ... it's amazing... such a simple walk, could involve and provoke these ideas. I'm talking to you because I watched this thing and I'm using all these complex words, simply because I watched a walk. So that reminds me of when I'm sitting in a café somewhere, I'm not just having a coffee I am corporeally connected

with other bodies, whether I know them or not. I don't wish them any harm, under any circumstances. That's what I call ethic of watching. To jump up and down and say I'm ethically responsible for the other, I'm for the other. I think this is a construct. I want to be sceptical about that. To jump up and down and write great theories about the suffering of the other is a wonderful moral response to the language, but I want to see the action. So the walking, any walking, but particularly this walking I think would give me that issue of consistency. I think that's a word Paxton uses a lot if you are studying him very carefully. I am not his student in that regard, but it seems to me he is very interested in this issue; treating the body, treating the memory is always consistent, constancy.

So all these things I saw and also this release, release in the moment. You have released so much. Whether I got it or not, whether you intended it or not, it leads into a consideration of the sensibility and sensitivity and awareness of the citizen.

So my question is ultimately taking this, the core of this project, we live in a multi-cultural society. What you have just given us may be to some people just a wishy-washy thing. It's not. I just came from a very ordinary part of this town, Epping. Yes, three hours ago I was with a group of people who could not speak English and I was racking my brain. How can I talk to these very articulate people? And here I am. So the issue is how do we, including myself, actually reflect on this cosmopolitan city, which is actually changing rapidly, physically and I was looking at these people's way of walking. We are constructed in the body of our languages and cultures and norms to adapt our body to walk like each other within that culture. No wonder that an Iraqi friend of mine tells me "When I see an Iraqi I could say he's an Iraqi". But you haven't talked to him, I say. "But I know how he walks or she walks". That's really strange. So that brings even more value to what you just gave us, to bring us something significant from which to ask critical questions. How is it that an Iraqi dares to tell me that he knows an Iraqi? And actually he goes further





and says I can tell whether he is from Baghdad or Basra. I think that sounds like a bit of an exaggeration, but that's how it is. It happens in my own culture and it's not funny. When I'm overseas I can pick up Aussies, regardless of whether they are Anglos or not. Now I have started observing and think maybe they are from Australia; they are not American. Maybe that's the sensibility of watching. Perhaps most of the time I could be wrong, maybe it's the way we dress; the way we carry ourselves because we are more laid back or more down to earth. I don't know. These are my assumptions.

So, thank you for the performance. I think for me the question is how far this wonderful performance could take the question of how ethically we are watching one another as inhabitants of the city, as opposed to residents of the city. We definitely know that we have our own private spaces, but for me the most important is public space. Without the city I am nobody in my home. If I don't have that city, then what do I have? I push my question a bit further. It's not dramatizing, it's not being ethnic, it's not being a refugee, it's not being mad, it's not being female... I have a very strong feeling for this city and when I look I want the other to respond.

In Italy wherever I am when I say *salve*? The response is there. Whether it is fascist, because he doesn't know me, she doesn't know me ... we smile. Not because I think they are nice or not; to respond is embedded in the history, in the construct, the habit of the inhabitants. Are we fragmentary citizens, simply because we are representing 20, or 150 different cultures? There are other questions that I'd like to raise and I'm thankful for this kind of performance.

So, if the core of the project is how we interact, how we corporeally observe each other, I think I got something very profound to go and become nicer. "Hey mate, how are you? Giddy." Or ask "Why, what's wrong with you?" on the bus. "I just said hello. What's wrong with hello? I don't have any intention to harm you," for instance. "Can I sit here?"

So these kinds of things held my mind and I loved it. Thank you very much. But this spontaneity I think you could elaborate because I think Paxton is talking about that constancy and spontaneity of body, generating. What does it generate? Thank you. I hope that stimulates something. Let's have a conversation.

What do you think?

SALLY / I think the work instantiates a public space of appearance. It's very powerful like that and also the way that we did it today meant that people re-appeared, which they don't necessarily do according to the original score, because I think that the notion of appearance is something that takes time. It's a time-based concept and ... I don't know, I wasn't in the audience... but that there was then the element of time is a powerful thing... the coming of appearance so that (perhaps) the single crossing might be crucial (laughs). Today you got another chance.

MAMMAD / Appearance is the release of moment. You suddenly released me into a moment. I was looking at the floor; it was empty and suddenly someone appeared. There is a moment; an event is taking place. I can't predict what is going to happen, but something is happening. What do you think, the rest of you?

FRANK / Can I just make a comment? There are a few aspects that I see a bit differently. I'm not convinced about the division between audience and performer. I don't even know who was performing and who was witnessing, as it were. And what should really be borne in mind is that this is a play that was written in the US in the late 1960s and we are replaying it (whatever you might mean by play) in whatever millennium we are in now. Now the late 1960s is a specific time. We can talk about Paris '68 ...blah blah... there are some very seminal activities from this period. The film *Easy Rider* for example ... we were just talking about that earlier. Now we are replaying the play as it were in a totally different context. What actually was happening in Melbourne in 1967? Well I'd rather not go into that.

So we are critiquing from a totally different era. When we hear statements such as “waiting for something to happen” ... now don’t forget in this particular era we have films such as Warhol’s *Empire*... for those that don’t know it, there’s a camera put onto the Empire State Building and it runs for 12 hours. The sun sets, the lights come on, it goes right through the night and there is nothing happening in the sense that you might see *Rambo*, and he kills the good guy/bad guy, whatever... these sorts of things. So it’s a totally different mind-set. You are using contexts such as past, present and future and I’m not convinced that there was a play and now we are out of the play. I’m not sure about that at all. Look, much of the group that are sitting in this room attended the play. Why should I think that the play, whatever you mean by that, is over? I’d like to argue – I’m not going to, but I could go on for hours and hours about this.

MAMMAD / That’s fantastic because when I said the past I meant I am a product of a past, my body is a product of a past, and when you narrate you select a historical moment, you tell me, you take me to your past in New York. That makes the conversation about the issue of the organic changes of the cities far more fruitful. The fact that you are aware brings that performance even more to my attention to watch, because I become more aware of what you had watched in a sense. In a sense ... it’s not an argument, how this performance, which has been re-performed again and again, in this context gives me material to have this interaction. I don’t have any dispute with you. New York was different then, even Melbourne was different. I couldn’t have imagined that one day I would sit here and speak English in Melbourne. In this moment, where I was in ’67, I was just a little kid. So the consistency of creating moments but never anticipating what’s happening in the future is fascinating.

Any comment about what we just heard?

LIBBY / Could I just add something? Our interest in doing this work was not historical, or certainly not a dance historical one. I have labelled it a reconstruction, but in fact our

motivation to perform it was really to do with how the score provides this simple organization to allow a relation to occur. That’s the interest in it and as far as the dear people who agreed to walk, they had a piece of paper thrust at them and that was it really. As far as how you make your way across and how you deal with having to sit for a minute in a chair facing twenty, thirty people, people managed that as they managed it. So its effect is complex... it’s a little machine that generates behaviour really.

And of course it did come out of a particular time and it had certain resonances then, which are different no doubt from those today. It’s been performed many times; it’s been done in theatrical situations and all sorts, but that wasn’t the main impetus for us.

MAMMAD / Your contribution to the conversation is very important because it makes the significance of the work even more important. Any of the performers, would you like to make some observations or remarks?

DAVID / As a performer... Was I a performer? I did a dance, but I am not a dancer. When I finished my second part I found myself thinking, “Oh, gosh I don’t think I did that very well ... and then hang on, that’s absurd”. This funny illusion about whether I did it well or not. All of these conundrums and contradictions seemed to be intrinsic to what I was doing and to what it was I’d let myself in for. And something apparently incredibly simple and naïve suddenly posed all sorts of potentially unanswerable questions and paradoxes.

ELEANOR / As I walked across I thought, now your relationship with me starts and that holds a whole lot of possibilities and that’s what I felt was the most powerful thing. Not just a relation, but a relationship.

BARRY / That for me was what I found so preoccupying in watching. You talk about bodies. I’ll be a provocateur and say, at least for this minute now, I don’t believe in bodies. I know that body discourse is incredibly popular but for me the person, or persons, or some quotient of humanness that we often call persons, comes all at once with the body





and so I could be so arrogant as to say “I could see you in that, I could see you in that” (makes trembling, wavering gesture). Not just your body. I see persons through faces and through gaze.

I was just saying to Chris... with some people you could feel the weight of the audience on the right hand side of their body. Some people were doing this (demonstrates). I’m exaggerating, but you could feel the weighty gaze of us. But it’s not just our gaze. It’s you already, all at once, coming as a person and it’s coming through your body. So you were both saying something about there’s a moment where whatever you are, performer, walker, however you’re negotiating that and whatever we are, there’s something in between; and sometimes it’s a visceral meeting because you can see it in people’s bodies. In some people the right arm didn’t move. There was one person whose right arm didn’t move and I thought is that part of the score, because I know there’s a score. Is that conscious? There was a person who was walking in these paths/motions (demonstrates curved path) as though it’s almost positive poles of a magnet. I thought, was that part of the score? Anyway, the point I was making – and this in some way what Mammad was saying – about when a person emerges they come all at once and not as a body, or not just as a body. You can see this other thing, the person. We might have to have a huge conversation about what that is.

And that seems to be the moment where, from the performers’ perspective, maybe we come all at once. Who’s that big mass of people there looking at me? Anyway I found myself preoccupied with that. I don’t have answers to that, I’m just thinking about that.

SALLY / Not to go past the fact that it is actually based on walking and that when you can walk you can enact your own desire, potentially. You can leave where you are and go to where you want to be or escape something. So there’s a big responsibility in that and there’s a lot at stake in walking. Plus you can also fall down, you could trip... so I think it’s obviously such a fundamental activity and there’s an incredible amount at stake there. It’s in the walking that

all these other things are able to be activated.

STEPHANIE / In doing this work I had such a sense of the historic-ness of the piece, especially as Steve Paxton is someone who has influenced my dance practice, the kind of dance that I do. So to actually do this piece, to be part of its reconstruction was really interesting, to have that awareness of history in what I was doing as well as an awareness of an audience.

PAUL / So it’s walking, but it’s not innocent walking. Everyone’s got their own way of doing it and their own internal experience. I’ve never performed so this was my debut and I felt panic-stricken that I might forget my script. And I said to Sally, remember to give everyone another sheet, and she said look, they’re professional dancers they’ll remember. After that I felt very secure, being amongst people I felt would be comfortable in this exposed environment. It was new and different for me and I did feel vulnerable in a way that I felt they didn’t, so I was comforted by the fact that I was amongst professional performers who would guide me and protect me in that way. So the internal experience is very profound.

MAMMAD / Absolutely. Maybe it’s not your intention, but hey, there’s a performance, a piece of work, it always generates more critical questions and that’s the beauty of this performance. You mentioned about vulnerability – I love that word. And you also mentioned professionals – that’s fantastic. Well let’s put this beyond the performance context and perhaps pay more attention to what I raised earlier on about residents and inhabitants. There are migrants, refugees, poor people here, people who have been abused, women, who are very vulnerable and there are those citizens who are very skilled in justifying what they do – professional citizens. I’m putting this performance and our conversation into that context, to bring the attention to the concept of vulnerability. In my strength in knowledge – I’m talking about migrants and refugees here – you don’t know the language; you don’t know the structures; you don’t know the institutional powers; you don’t know who

it is you are talking to. So that vulnerability perpetuates. If you say “you have the same rights as everybody else”, that makes a lot of sense, but I don’t feel it. I like what Paul is raising, taking us and giving more value to this performance, which you might have taken very simply, taking this to our city, in which there are many, many, many people who are feeling vulnerable, facing the complex institutions. Sorry if I am taking that away from you, but the dance, this walk, allows me to critically think about these kinds of things. Am I pushing my luck too far or? Am I just trying to depress you or what? Resist. Am I spoiling your party?

BARRY / I think in Paul’s first sentence he said, “it’s walking, but it’s not innocent walking” and straight away you can invert that and say, “it’s looking, but it’s not innocent looking” and it’s in that context I can relate to what you’re saying. It’s like you’re exploding the situation metaphorically into the concept of the city and the migrants and refugees within it. So the walking is not innocent, the looking is not innocent, therefore if we explode this walking project into an open cityscape that includes refugees, migrants, women – those who might be vulnerable – then whenever we look our looking is not innocent and therefore it has a weight.

ELEANOR / It begs the question of what is unsettling and what is containing? And what we yearn for when we are in either public places or in our own internal space? What is unsettling and what is containing?

MAMMAD / I want to go a bit further. When you were walking, you were imagining. What were you imagining?

CHRIS / Going for a walk.

MAMMAD / Any particular place?

CHRIS / Out. Out of the building into the sunshine.

MAMMAD / Into the sunshine...

LIBBY / Now I should mention that Chris was co-opted on the way up from the Institute here to the hall, so she may well have...

CHRIS / Missed an instruction?

LIBBY / No, no... she didn’t at all, but she may well have felt like walking out...

MAMMAD / Anyone else? What were you imagining when you were walking that space? How did you feel about us watching you?

ANNE-MARIE / It was tricky. Paxton gives these instructions for how we are to walk through the space and we are to be neutral and it’s just about the walking. You want that to be clear and pure. We’re going at a relaxed pace, but not too slow. There’s all these ... there are actually instructions and I was thinking about those things

MAMMAD / As you were walking?

ANNE-MARIE / Yes. And I was critiquing myself, as to whether I was being relaxed and neutral or not (laughter) and I definitely felt that sense of vulnerability in terms of being stripped of ...

MAMMAD / So you were physically deconstructed, rather than reconstructed?

ANNE-MARIE / I think I was doing a kind of deconstruction, reconstruction thing.

GRETEL / I have a question that springs from that. Is neutrality a part of the score?

LIBBY / Well let’s see. Let’s look at the notes to performers. “Performance manner is serene and collected. The gaze is to be directed forward relative to the body but should not be especially fixed. The mind should be at rest.” So I don’t think that an idea of neutrality is there, not explicitly anyway. Okay it says, “The dance is about walking, standing and sitting. Try to keep these elements clear and pure”. So it’s about the elements – now I’m walking, now I’m sitting, now I’m standing. The performer is to be serene and collected. It’s actually more marked than neutral. It’s not about neutrality, I don’t think.

DAVID / It’s full of paradox, because on the one hand one is invited to be serene and pure, and yet one is also commanded to start walking when the person in front of you is three-fifths of the way from your point to their point.





So, you're trying to judge what's three-fifths... So there's this precise, mathematical structure on the one hand and the injunction to be pure and serene on the other hand, and I think, what you're saying about vulnerability ... and I would agree that in a sense what was naïve and unselfconscious suddenly becomes incredibly self-conscious and one has to struggle with that as one enters, as one comes into view.

SALLY / I think that one's preoccupation with the mathematics of it, judging the distance and so on, is a very finely conceived approach on the part of the choreographer, to give the participants something to think about. And it's in that process of having to nut out that problem that they are already walking and not realising, in a way. So I think it's quite a clever ploy.

LIBBY / There's another thing related to that, and it's very obvious really, but I hadn't fully realised it before. This not a set up where you have a group of people and you walk across and you figure out where you are going to stop. It's all precisely set; you have this set of instructions. So the performance is not internally motivated and it's not cohesive. You have to make a judgement about your cue, count the number of steps of the person in front or whatever, but you are not feeling out or sensing when you should start. Many of us would be used to those kinds of improvisational game structures where you are responsive to others' impulses and actions: this work is not like that. And it seems to me that this performance is very porous to the gaze, it's open to someone else watching it, relating to it, precisely because each performer has their own little track, their own instructions and they're not having to make decisions about when to begin, when to stop or pause, for example.

SALLY / You don't impose on the situation.

MAMMAD / Did you see irony, paradoxes? I even laughed half way through. Someone did something and I just giggled. So, did you see those kinds of ironies or paradoxes in the walk?

BARRY / There were some informative moments, particularly when people got to the end. In the first instance when I say the end I mean the end of their trajectory before they have to find their way out the door. There's like a disengaging of the clutch. It's as if the performer is thinking, "I've got to engage the clutch. Is this first gear? Second gear? Ah, thank goodness." There's a kind of a moment there. I don't know if that's irony.

DAVID / They were the amateurs I think (laughter).

BARRY / Clearly they weren't professional (laughter)!

GRETEL / I saw a couple of people, who I think are professionals, doing a little skip as they left around the corner, like "I'm out of here, off and around."

BARRY / Then there was a wonderful moment when people picked up their bags at the very end. You disappeared again and then everyone came out with their bags and then they were really relaxed and completely different walkers than they had been. So, there were those kinds of moments.

RUSSELL / Just going back to the postmodern referencing and thinking about what Paxton might have been doing in relation to the time in which he was doing it. It was giving a performative task, which was not unlike what Twyla Tharp did, although she was doing it with incredibly complex things and with dancers who were highly skilled. But still, this was a more quotidian version of that and the complexity was in that kind of judging the performer must do, although they were performing simple tasks. The attention is very much upon walking, which is very culturally specific. What you were saying before is spot on. We often don't notice our own culture; it's only the other that sees and if we want to see we often have to go to the other. We don't even see it when the other is mixed in with Australians, because it's as if just they are different. To get a sense of their otherness we need to go where they are the majority, so that we know ourselves as the other.

I think what this score actually does is give you the possibility of watching. You see what walking is, you do see the person, you see all of these things, all the anxiety etc. And it is precisely the absence of words, the absence of other things, that allows you to see. Just looking at the attention that's pulled to the face of some, or other parts of the body. So the question arises, what constitutes the social, how is it constituted in walking? All societies do this.

I think that the thing in the score, which is really wonderful, regardless of whether you know it's a reconstruction – because all of our life is a reconstruction. We do, we act and we reconstruct our behaviour all the time. The fact that this was ... someone said it was from another time. Well, isn't that what we are doing absolutely all the time? This is where we get the notion of our own movement signature, which is as distinguished as our hand (written) signatures. We get it from our parents, we get it from our culture and we reconstitute it everyday, as we are doing it now.

Steve Paxton's score for *Satisfyin' Lover* is reproduced on page 119.

The performers at the event in October 2009 were:

Christine Babinskas	Mick Douglas
Rachel Douglas	Atlanta Eke
Mary McCormack Eke	Victor Eke
Ann-maree Ellis	Sally Gardner
Leanne Glover	Aerin Hines
David Hines	Nicole Jenvey
Paul Komesaroff	Georgia Lloyd
Simon Lloyd	Eleanor McDonald
Joelle Moutou	Stefanie Robinson
Libby Dempster	Elliot Thomson

Naree Vachananda

Video documentation by Michael Buckley





PATRICIA HOFFBAUER / PARA-DICE JOURNEYS

INSPIRATION

In the summer of 2009 I decided to return to the studio to make a new work. I had been away from the studio since 2004 after the birth of my second child. I was able to use NYU's Performance Studies small studio on Broadway because my partner George Emilio Sanchez was working with the Hemispheric Institute and they had access to this space during the summer hours. It was August and the frigid room felt as though an ice-cold air conditioner powered the entire building. I asked Peggy Gould, an old time collaborator, to join me. In the studio there were lots of extension cords on the floor, a few equipment and furniture pieces like a computer connected to a large screen hanging on the wall, a lecturn, and a few chairs scattered around the space. It was a sliver of a room with no windows or real air. On the first day, I punched Merce Cunningham into the youtube search slot of the computer. I wanted to be artificially inspired by something far away. I had been involved in investigating cultural and racial stereotypes for much of my work and this time I wanted to use the body and movement as a primary motor for my creative engine. We looked at those images of *Variations V* for a long time, over and over, the several screens on stage, the poles etc. Carolyn Brown so beautifully elegant and Merce, such an extraordinary mover, he would change directions as fast as a deer while looking like a faun. We wanted to create material based on those erect Cunningham movements, be on one leg twisting the upper body, making complex rhythmic phrases that would propel us to move in a certain way. A way I had forgotten since the last time I left the Cunningham studio in the mid-1980s. Peggy and I were interested in moving in that deadpan style. I love Buster Keaton's nothing face as the wind catapults his body long distances. The next day I started to fidget with the cords and the lecturn. I stood behind the lecturn, moved my body spastically. Peggy circled the extension cords around my waist, between my legs, around my neck and moved me around like a horse. Not much like anything we had seen on that video of *Variations V*. We talked a lot during

those rehearsals. About dance, teaching, the trip to Rio I had just returned from with the Raindears, but mostly we talked about our ageing bodies, physical pain, loose tendons and ongoing sacro-iliac problems. We talked about our experiences in trying to figure out our bodies in this new stage. I told Peggy about one of the physical therapists I had worked with who warned me my uterus would soon be shrinking so I should ready myself for the day I would no longer be able to move. I thought of Merce telling her that, and how he faced his own ageing process publicly, casting himself in his dances until he was no longer able to walk.

One evening we had dinner at Emily Coates' apartment and she had her friend Eric Lee over. Against my prior decisions to exercise a different approach to making work, my old tendencies kicked in and, like the scene in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall* when Allen sees himself as an exaggerated cultural caricature through grandma Hall's eyes, suddenly I began to see Emily and Eric not as who they were, but as exaggerated Anglo and Asian caricatures. The image of a 2-track space structure started to emerge in my mind as a possible strategy for creating a simultaneous viewing experience for *Para-dice*. The downstage, prominent area would be designated for the postmodern, deadpan, hermetic "white" dance that Peggy and I would do, and a racialized, "hot" duet about an Anglo beauty obsessively followed by a man portraying an opium smoker would be placed upstage as a counter-narrative to the coolness of postmodern dance. Thankfully Eric was too busy, but the subject of race and culture had again infiltrated my mind and occupied my consciousness. I asked Emily if she would play a tourist to George's "Mexican," who had joined the group to replace Eric's character as an indigenous, native, urban savage. I also asked Peter Richards, another old time collaborator, and a performer-turned-video-maker to edit a visual narrative with excerpts of a few of Glauber Rocha's films and the dance scene from *Zorba, The Greek*. In this scene, Anthony Quinn's Greek peasant teaches Alan Bates' English intellectual to dance. Even at this early stage of the creative process, I knew I wanted to challenge pop culture's cliché treatment of

dancing as a metaphor for intimate contact, the physical experience that can bring the lost soul back to his/her true, authentic self, as in the case of Zorba and his pupil.

For our first showing at the 92nd Street Y's 75th anniversary in October 2009, and after only a few rehearsals with Emily and George, the piece was becoming about geography and alterity. Images of Glauber Rocha's *Entranced Earth* were projected on the back wall of the Buitendieker Hall to fester viewers' eyes with the expansive aerial shots of the black Atlantic Ocean. In the film, there are long shots of that ocean brilliantly juxtaposed to the score of Afro-Brazilian candomblé chanting as if to remind us that those waters were once a stage for terrible events. This ocean, familiar since birth and a big part of my life until I moved to the US, was like an open casket full of corpses, now that I think about it. In *Entranced Earth*, the struggle between the radical revolutionary and the populist politician is played out at Parque Lage, a defining destination in my Carioca life in the 1970s as the stage for my many adventures with infamous choreographer Graciela Figueroa; and as a member of her "Grupo Coringa". In that scene of the film the camera, as it rotates 360 degrees, pans each actor's face with the cascading green of the thick vegetation embracing the background. The Atlantic forest framing Rio de Janeiro is vividly present in this shot; you can almost smell the green the way you can feel the weight of the water in the shots from above.

For this *Para-dice* I wanted the ocean to function as a colonialist trope, a visual and textual allegory of maritime expansion. The problem would be to connect that ocean to my dance experience in New York. Perhaps, trying to configure colonialism in this performance context as illustration to my own maritime expansion might produce a landscape where dance and ocean would co-exist relationally. After all, I inherited some "issues" with my own transplantation to the US. Dance and colonial history, two seemingly disparate points in space, time, and history would be linked in this *Para-dice* by the big black ocean of Glauber Rocha's film. But how would I





connect the ocean to my experience with post-multiculti, postmodern dance? How would I present this connection in performance/ choreographic form and engage audiences coming to see “dance”?

RELEVANT PAST

Since the 2002–03 academic year, I have been teaching a course entitled *Bodies in Cultural Landscapes* which I developed in response to what I perceived to be a lack of political/ historical thinking in dance discourse, scholarly and otherwise. I had learned much through my interactions with students from ivy league and public institutions, and my performance in the classroom in the role of an academic provided me with a different lens to understand my work as an artist. My experience as a transplanted dance maker, performer, and participant in dance-related policy activities during the “multiculti” years of late 1980s to early ‘90s had made me aware of the absence of postcolonial thinking in the field. I had been very impacted by the hot, political, quasi-didactic dance and performance work especially visible during those years and was sadly aware this had become mostly footnotes to more current dance narratives today, perhaps due to the constant attacks those works suffered in that period, as in the “Victim Art” accusation by dance critic Arlene Croce. Although I was not into some of the prescriptive commissions given to artists of color to produce identity-related work, the institutional, discursive and financial support of those years generated a much needed diverse artistic landscape, even if its emblematic work did not make it to current performance history survey books, retrospectives, articles, film series, etc. But I constantly wondered if the absence of a particular sensibility from the grid of current dance making and thinking had left the field hobbling along in comparison to more diversely fertile grounds of other artistic landscapes. I wanted to infuse this new work with a dosage of old and recent historical perspective. I wanted parts of this *Para-dice* to evoke James Clifford’s *Ethnographic Surrealism*. In his essay of the same title,

Clifford articulates the crucial moment when surrealist and other European artists, hit by the melancholic mood of the in-between-world wars period, rejected paradigmatic Western aesthetic models and embraced African Art in search of artistic and spiritual renewal. In Clifford’s discussion of the surrealist-turned-ethnographer, Michel Leiris, he notes that Leiris’ field diary of the Dakar-Djibuti trip in 1931–33 expressed his critique of the trip’s colonial project and Eurocentric approach. But even if critical of the trip’s “mission civilizatrice,” Leiris embraced ethnography as a way out of his own artistic/cultural dead-end exhaustion. Comparatively, in my own sense of dead-endness, I was searching for the tools that would help me construct my own critical paradise. If I could make visible what had been left blank, pay homage to a carnivalesque attitude against a minimalist deadpan approach (two solutions for the same performance problem), then perhaps the 2-track spatial structure of this *Para-dice* would articulate how the miscegenation of bodies and languages was made possible by the European colonizing project and facilitated by the turbulent tides of the Atlantic Ocean. In this lost *Para-dice* I would make visible the representation of “others” critiqued in Leiris’ diary, born out of absence, made popular by National Geographics, and made “real” by those early ethnographers who forever froze non-European indigenous peoples in pre-historic celluloid as in the Alfred Cort Haddon films I teach in my course. Why couldn’t I transform myself into a lecturer performing my own exploration of the ocean as common denominator of colonial adventures, and challenge the silly evolutionary theories of culture and race proclaimed by not such “good” scientists in the recent past? And why couldn’t these lectures on the past offer a vestibule-like space for contemporary viewers to reflect on how current dance discourse has obfuscated particular forms and privileged others?

For George, who was writing the piece, these long speeches should also underscore the frustrated efforts of a lecturer whose pontifications are constantly interrupted by life. George wanted the lecturer to be more



Elisa Osborne in bikini; George Emilio Sanchez in swimming shorts; Pat Hoffbauer with glasses; Peggy Gould partially hidden. On screen: George Balanchine rehearsing with Suzanne Farrell. Photo: Julie Lemberger.







George in high heels; Elisa with back to audience; Peggy (left) and Pat. Photo: Julie Lemberger.

like an interlocutor, a figure that the Oxford American Dictionary defines as “the center man in a minstrel show who acts as announcer and exchanges jokes with end men.” This character, the surreal-ethnographer lecturer, would be my Doppelgänger serving as a bridge between *Para-dice* and the audience, and whose philosophizing would be constantly interrupted by my own “postmodern” dancing or the “loud” performances of George and Elisa Osborne. The replacement of Emily by Elisa after the 92nd Street Y performance brought to the forefront and clarified what I was trying to achieve with the 2-track split of the stage. Throwing away the idea of the white tourist in awe of the primitive native as a narrative helped me focus more directly on what I was interested in dealing with but didn’t know how to express – the dichotomy and connection between the civilized “us” and the primitive “them.” But many questions kept haunting me: was the schism of artistic genres I was physically staging by juxtaposing

the maximalist colorful south of the border stereotype versus the cerebral, contained, ascetic, northern type an identifiable binary relevant enough to cut through the playful tone of the interlocutor and get to the seriousness of the subject at hand here? Could this performance of otherness as the primitive urban savage still fit “their” reputation of uncontrollable maximalists who communicate through loud flamboyant expressions, use humor to entertain the ones looking in, and pretend they are not who they really are? Could this construction of alterity work as an allegorical confrontation to the cerebral, deadpan, excluding attitudes of postmodern dance I had learned and learned to love in the US? Would the montage of this performance of the “ethnographic other” juxtaposed against the choreographic and performative paradigm of high art produce the kind of friction necessary to translate postcolonial concepts that Rocha’s ocean could so poetically illustrate? And would



Pat singing with Peggy under her; Elisa in the background. Photo: Julie Lemberger.

the religious African drumming score accompanying the ocean images of Rocha's film be enough of a cultural trace to invoke the idea of cultural appropriation that so inflamed the makers of cultural taste in New York years ago when brought up by Brenda Dixon Gottschild in relationship to Balanchine's artistic inspirations? And finally, would my cannibalizing of irony be transparent enough as a performance strategy that the audience would see that, in inverting anger for laughs, exaggerating the interlocutor's playful asides, and accumulating performance chaos by littering the stage with chords and costumes, we were saying something very serious?

HISTORICAL CANVAS

The trafficking of cultures and peoples that produced paradises on earth would be text, subtext, and subject of this *Para-dice*. Instead of addressing the slave trade to Brazil directly, I decided to discuss the closeted race stuff in Brazil with the story of 1960s pop singer,

Wilson Simonal. After meteoric ascension, Simonal was demoted from superstar to persona non-grata due to unfounded rumors about his relationship to D.O.P.S, the military police in charge of state-sponsored terrorism against Brazilians during the dictatorship (1964–84). In the late 1960s, Simonal was accused by the left intelligentsia of being an informer and sarcastically portrayed in the lefty magazine, *O Pasquim*, as a cartoonish, happy-go-lucky Afro-Brazilian entertainer who was satisfied to sing songs that pleased the military Junta's ideological preference. His history both illustrates the larger issue of invisible racism and challenges the myth of "racial democracy" in Brazil. Simonal's race and class origin, still intertwined categories there, allowed him only so much popularity and only for so long (late '60s to early '70s) in the field of Brazilian music. The son of a domestic worker, Simonal's fame across Brazilian music genres, destabilized the hierarchy of upper class tastemakers in Brazil.





His love for dance music and Black American pop songs offended the sensibility of MPB (Musica Popular Brasileira) intellectuals who judged Simonal's inclination towards non-protest music as a kind of in-your-face entitled behavior lacking in political consciousness and subservency. Simonal's perceived unapologetic attitude was enough proof for some to believe he was an agent of American imperialism and were quick to chastise him as traitor.

In this *Para-dice* I wanted to address colonization through the layering of linguistic cultures. In my faux *Tristes Tropiques* lecture I taught my students/audience to repeat Arabic-derived Portuguese words like "almofada," "Alfinete," "Azeitona" so they would experience the hybrid nature of Portuguese language. I also wanted to address the linguistic coercion exercised by the Dutch, French and so-called good colonizer, the Portuguese, on native Brazilians. The linguistic hybridization consequent upon those colonial encounters was best illustrated by Father Anchieta's relationship with Indians in the 16th century. Anchieta, a 19-year old Portuguese Jesuit from the Canary Islands, arrived in Brazil in 1553 and learned the Tupi-Guarani language. He translated the catholic "Autos" so that Curimins could sing and pray for Catholic saints in their own native tongue. In the beginning of the piece, juxtaposed to the dancing that Peggy and I do, another image from *Entranced Earth* visually illustrates these negotiations in syncretism – the cross and the sword disputing the body of the Brazilian Indian. Perhaps the idea of farcical historical performances that syncretically combine African, indigenous and European cultures is summoned here as the camera pans from the dark ocean into solid, infinite, white sands and the Portuguese colonizer, dressed in carnival

regalia (allegorical reference to the royal family's last minute escape from Napoleon to Brazil), walks out of the water with the priest towards the large cross guarded by an Indian also attired in carnival's costume. Father Anchieta, as the first missionary to learn the "other's" language, found successful ways to reach the Indian's soul.¹

In the duet that Peggy and I do mimicry features prominently. We started using *Trio A* as a source of choreographic inspiration/imitation because the dance was textually and visually a choreographic document that translated some ideas we were interested in commenting on, primarily the deadpan effect realized by the performer avoiding the audience's gaze and therefore projecting a sensation of self-containment, inner focus, detachment. The duet with its quotes from *Trio A*, (Yvonne Rainer who choreographed the solo called it a "misappropriation" of *Trio A*) is made up of walking steps coordinated with arms resembling *Trio A*'s arms and affecting a pedestrian attitude. My first exercise in simulacrum, this duet also syncretically combined a few simple Cunningham vernacular steps as in triplet, spinal curves, and triplets with turning.

In this case, my intention in borrowing and pasticheing as a choreographic method was aimed at establishing a distinction between the so-called racialized performances of the upstage duo (i.e. their constant exchange of outrageous outfits, George's drag performance accompanying Elisa's sexy bombshell south of the border flirt, their hip hop duo complemented with a big afro, gold lamé overalls, gangsta rap outfit and dancing to Barbara Streisand's "Don't Rain on My Parade" from *Funny Girl*), and what I call

1. See Alfredo Bosi, 1992 *Dialetica da Colonização*. Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras, p.31. "The transposition to the New World of behavior and language patterns gave rise to unlikely results. On first sight, erudite culture seems to repeat, without alternative, the European model; but placed in confrontation with the Indian, it is stimulated, not to say forced, to be re-invented. Anchieta composed in

classic Latin his poem to the Virgin Mary while hostage to the Tamoio Indians at the beach of Iperoique; he feels the need to purify himself. The same Anchieta learns the Tupi language and makes the medieval catholic saints sing and pray in that language through the Autos where he directs the Curumins (Indian children). An antique literary form made noble by the Italian Renaissance shaped the content of

a colonial situation in the first case. On the second, the Jesuit indebted to the urgency of his missionary commitment needed to change the code, not for the message's purpose, but for reception's goals. A new and participating audience of a particular kind of theatre needed a language that could not only be the colonizer's." (My translation)

the dancery expression of “white” dance in our duet. Quotations are used around the word “white” to emphasize what Richard Dyer calls the invisibility of whiteness as a standard for human nature: “white people are not racially seen, or named, they function as a human norm”. Given that George and Elisa’s performances function in *Para-dice* as a self-reflexive commentary on cultural and racial stereotypes, the staging of our duet against their actions makes visible the rarely articulated aspect of postmodern dance – that it too can be racialized as other forms of dance have been. This awareness frames the duet with quotation marks also. When the duet is presented at the beginning of the piece accompanied by *Entranced Earth*’s “arrival and first encounter” images described above, the audience perhaps experiences (if unaware) this juxtaposition as an example of syncretic language. Like Anchieta who learned the Tupy-Guarani to get closer to his paradise on earth, my exercise in mimicry was a way out of my own cultural straightjacket destiny, as well as homage to how wide the horizon of artistic sources can be if and when we become aware of “other” cultural influences in our making of our selves. I too wanted my soul to be “saved” by elevated ideas about form and beauty that opened different doors to me than those prescribed for art making in Brazil during the dictatorship and for years afterwards: make protest work, sing about nothing, or be a surfer’s girl, wear tiny bikinis at “the Pier”, Rio de Janeiro’s hottest 1970s spot, and smoke a lot of weed. Understandably, I wanted desperately to have the gods of dance save my body and my soul and make my tupiniquim dream of going to Gringo’s land, my paradise, a reality.

Rather than bringing up the anthropophagic act made famous by modernist prophet

Oswald de Andrade’s *Anthropophagic Manifesto* with his “Tupi or not Tupi,” or perform the cannibalizing of French explorers by Brazilian Tubinambas, also immortalized by filmmaker Nelson Pereira dos Santos in *How Tasty Was My Frenchman*, I wanted to make visible a different kind of anthropophagy in my *Para-dice* – the cannibalizing of the colonizer’s cultural wealth by the native. So when I found Charles Trenet singing “La Mer” on youtube I was sold. The song illustrated France’s obsession with its own language and my obsession with the sea. “La Mer” refers to a place beyond the sea where love awaits you, a bit like in the scene of my favorite Carmen Miranda film, *The Gang’s All Here*, where Miranda, brought in by shirtless men directing bulls to pull her cart to the right destination, disembarks in a lost paradise of an island beyond the sea where her “girls” who, after working all day moving giant bananas around, lay down to rest while Miranda sings, “but if the moon is high in the sky, they have a very different kind of time...” Charles Trenet, in his version of “La Mer”, vocalized each word as one of my French teachers at the Alliance Française in Rio would: “le vin, pas le vent!” Every syllable was like “cho-co-lat”. I wanted that finesse to be dirtied by the efforts of a non-French-speaking person to register immediately after we hear Trenet’s singing.² The rest would be up to the audience to connect the dots. All I wanted was that his malapropism in enunciating the words would bastardize Trenet’s pristine French pronunciation.

MY PARADISE

Para-dice has been in my history and experience for a long time. In a way, I have made this piece many times. When my second child was born and life became totally distracted

2. In this moment of the piece I was interested in making a comment about the way in which the French language has figured prominently as a sign of intellectual status in certain parts of the world, most likely in ex-French colonies, but also in certain Latin American countries like Brazil, where it also reflects class status. So to have a “colonized”

person of color “mess up” Trenet’s pristine French translated my critique of the still prevalent colonial attitudes in these countries, as pointed out by Sally Price in her essay *Michel Leiris, French Anthropology, and a Side Trip to the Antilles* (2004): “The central contribution of the French language to national pride is not irrelevant to the whole picture, and it is fair to say

that the politics of Francophonie valorizes and unifies the French-speaking world (from New Caledonia to Québec) partly at the expense of insights that might be culled from the work of its regional Anglophone, Spanish, Portuguese, and Dutch neighbors, to name but the most relevant for the Caribbean” (p.31).







Peggy Gould and Pat Hoffbauer. Photo: Julie Lemberger.

from the daily dance practice of prior years, I started to teach. I was reading, interested in figuring out a way to make things out of theoretical/philosophical ideas, but more than anything I was trying to find another way to create dances. I was trying to make theatre out of theory. I experimented with it in my classes. At times the classes were rocking, alive, with great people saying and making great things. At other times, students would refuse to participate by saying “I don’t do no crazy, Professor!” Like a long time ago when that kid slowly walked to the front of the studio, and I watched her through the mirror walk slowly towards me with her fancy hairdo and long fingernails get closer and closer. This happened in that 103 degree summer of 1994, when hired by Aspira to cross borders, I was teaching modern dance to young Latina teens in the Bronx. The kid tapped me on the shoulder and uttered calmly in my face, “Your dance is Dead”, before walking out of the room. I thought to resuscitate my

love for dance and dance making I would complicate what that dancing was. I would look into what the history of my dancing had been here in the States since those first days at the Cunningham Studio. I chose the university classroom to figure it out. I went back to graduate school and started teaching. The classroom became the second best place to dialogue and experiment. My classes were large, especially at Hunter College, and I learned that most students disliked what I liked. And I learned that what most of my students liked I hated. Was I surprised to experience that large gaping abyss opening up in front of me? I had become isolated. My years at Dance Theater Workshop, Movement Research, committees, panels, traveling, NPN meetings, performing, meant little once I went home as mom. Had I always been this isolated? Was I nostalgic for community, for that stupid idea of homeland, for paradise? Once I chose to work on *Para-dice* and use Rocha’s films I started watching *Entranced Earth* over

and over and read his *Hunger Manifesto*. I was performing with Yvonne Rainer throughout these years and every trip we took I spent hours late at night researching those texts. It was interesting to discover again the idea of Latin America, the idea of a particular culture generated in a particular historical condition, maybe conditions of resistance. Glauber made those films in the early '60s, a time of great commotion in Brazil and the world. Although I have been here for so long, notwithstanding my yearly trips to Rio, and I know I have become Americanized, perhaps the same way that Carmen Miranda accuses her Brazilian audience of criticizing her when she sings "Disseram que eu voltei Americanizada." (They say I have returned Americanized with lots of money, that I am very rich and that I no longer tolerate the rhythm of the "pandeiro), my life in Brazil is my life growing up. Brazil to me is the paradise of my youth, the nostalgic golden colored end of afternoon hot summer days with the skin taut from the hot sun pounding on it. Those days are gone. Now my kids don't like the beach for so many hours and they prefer to hang out with grandma. My paradise is still enigmatic, something I can only touch in performance.

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GRETEL TAYLOR / DANCING COUNTRY TWO WAYS



Coral Napangardi and Gretel Taylor. Photo: Jenine McKay







Suddenly Napangardi was starting the goanna dreaming dance, and everyone was yelling at me: 'Just copy Napangardi!' I had just witnessed about fifteen women with skin names Nampijimpa and Nangala perform the fire dreaming dance, the dance of the country we were camped upon – a place called Wayililinyapa southwest of Yuendumu. So I had been waiting for a crowd of Napangardis and Napanangkas to get up for the goanna dreaming dance from Mt Theo country further west. But no, it was just Napangardi and me! As I awkwardly rose to my feet and tried to catch up with the older lady I noticed that this dance had more choreographic stages to it than I had perceived in the fire dance. It had started from sitting on the ground, which was why I had not realised Napangardi had begun. She kneeled with a long stick beside her on the ground. (Someone hurriedly found me a stick and put it in my hand). I tried to follow her as she came to standing raising the stick, doing some hunting actions with the stick and then a series of searching gestures, peering into the distance in all directions, turning around as she travelled gradually forward. I recognised this part of the dance from a visit I had done with some of these women to Mt Theo country in 2006. They had then done only the abbreviated sitting-down-with-hand-actions version of the goanna dance. I recalled the story they had told me then of 'wrong skin' lovers – the woman searching longingly for her forbidden lover (they also call this dance the 'loverboy' dance, with a bawdy giggle).

Napangardi went down to the ground, placing her stick down at one stage, then up again and some shunting forward movements bouncing with bent knees, feet pounding the orange earth whilst her arms performed hunting gestures with the stick. She had a soft yet powerful presence – her muscles were not held tightly; her strength was more in her poise, groundedness and clarity. I could feel her awareness of me – the clueless novice – through her back, showing me the movements, trying to bring me along with her, guide me through the dance. At the same time she was absolutely immersed in her own embodiment

of the story: she was not just representing but *being* the archetypal, ancestral Napangardi, travelling through her country. One of the oldest women in the community, Napangardi was ever-steady on her feet, sure of her gaze, an engaging dancer.

I felt incredibly privileged to be dancing with Napangardi but overwhelmingly ill-prepared and self-conscious. I had had no instruction prior to the dance; what I was expected to do was absolutely unknown to me until the moment of its occurrence. But it was not treated as a 'rehearsal', a trial-run or a 'practice' – this was the performance! Teenage girls who knew me from my work at Yuendumu School were guffawing with laughter at my white body painted up in the ochre design, trying to emulate the elder lady's movements. Older *kurdungulu* or 'managers' for this dance (women with skin names Nangala, Nampijimpa and Nakamarra) yelled at me from the sidelines: 'Copy her', 'Look out into the distance!', 'Closer!', 'Put your stick down...' etc.

It took me most of the dance to recover from the shock that it was just a dance of two and to find my focus in spite of the girls' laughter (my initial reaction to this had been to laugh with them but this did nothing to lessen my awkwardness!). By the very end of the dance I had just begun to locate a fragment of my corporeal intelligence and was more accurately emulating Napangardi's rhythm and movements – I had finally 'tuned in' to the perceptual moment. But then that was it: there was no chance to repeat the dance, to have another attempt now that I had slightly more idea of what to expect. Alas, I would have to wait until the next camp in a few months time.

The *kurdungulu* were all very complimentary afterwards despite my sense of humiliation: "Ngurrju, ngurrju!" (Good!), they grinned at me with 'thumbs up' gestures. I later thought that my experience of embarrassment was somewhat similar to that 'shame' feeling of which the Warlpiri teenage girls complain in the situation of dance and cultural transference

— of pride to be involved in this community spirit and ceremony, but at the same time being exposed as extremely inexperienced and lacking in knowledge compared to the more senior women present.

After the dancing there were murmurs among the women that they could hear babies crying in the bush nearby, which meant that the ancestor spirits had been stirred by the performance of the dances and songs. Everyone was uplifted by the experience of dancing together; there was an overwhelmingly positive atmosphere at the camp as the day was drawing to a close.

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BACKGROUND

The dance camps project was seeded as a response to a conversation in Yuendumu community in the Northern Territory in 2008 between a few of the senior Warlpiri women, youth worker Natalie O'Connor and myself, when the women voiced their concern that young women did not know the cultural dances. Women's ceremonies were taking place less often than they once did and the elders were fearful that cultural knowledge would be lost as the people possessing that knowledge passed away. Natalie and myself had then undertaken a process of consultation with these women, sought funding and formed partnerships with Mt Theo organisation, InCite Youth Arts and Victoria University to conduct a series of intergenerational dance workshops at different locations on Warlpiri country out of Yuendumu. The women created a name for the project: 'Karnta Warlu Jintangka Partu-Kurlangu Manya', which roughly translates as 'Women Dancing Young and Old All One' and 'This belongs to all of us women together'. (The women later changed this title to simply the Southern Ngalia Dance Camps, referring to the geographical area.) There have now been four camps, all very successful in terms of the women's attendance, enthusiasm and participation. Some of the women performed at Dance Site Indigenous Dance Festival at Tennant Creek in September 2011, for many their first public performance.

PROCESSES OF TEACHING AND LEARNING: THE KIRDA-KURDUNGULU RELATIONSHIP

The dance is always prefaced by lengthy preparations of singing and body-painting. As they sit in a group under the shade of trees painting each other's upper bodies in bold ochre designs according to skin group (moiety), the women sing the *Jukurrpa* (Dreaming) songs and sometimes do hand gestures, as a sort of abbreviated, sitting-down version of the dances. Through the songs and painting, the older ladies tell the girls (in the words of a young woman we interviewed): 'This is your country, this is your dreaming, this is who you are.'² I doubt I have ever felt a stronger sense of humility than I did whilst two senior women painted my white skin in the Napangardi/ Mt Theo/ goanna dreaming design for the first time at Wayililinyapa.

Having been given the skin-name Napangardi (thereby a 'sister' to all other Napangardis), I am a *kirda* or 'owner' of the goanna dreaming (*Wardapi Jukurrpa*), thus allowed to participate in this dance. I had imagined that we would all get the opportunity to learn the dance of the place in which we were camped, Wayililinyapa: the *Warlukurlangu* (fire dreaming) dance, but only the owners of the country, women with skin names Nangala and Nampijimpa, are allowed to do the fire dreaming dance. The women dancing are the *kirda*: the owners/ custodians for the dreaming and country of the particular dance. As indicated in the anecdote of my experience of dancing with Napangardi senior (who calls herself my 'big sister'), there is no instruction or demonstration beforehand. The young *kirda* follow the more experienced older *kirda* from within the dance, whilst the dance is under way, and the *kurdungulu* issue corrections from the sidelines. Women with skin-names Napangardi, Napanangka and Napaljarri are *kurdungulu* for the fire dreaming. The *kurdungulu* or 'managers' of the country and dreaming sing

1. Older women are usually referred to as 'ladies' in Warlpiri and other Central desert communities. It is considered a more respectful term than 'women'.

2. Interview with Nangala, 19 year-old Warlpiri-Anmatyerre woman, October 2010, conducted by Gretel Taylor and Natalie O'Connor.





the song that tells the story of that dreaming and also instruct and correct the *kirda* dancers. The *kurdungulu* sometimes dance at the side of the space on a perpendicular angle to the *kirda* who are dancing. Particularly for dances like the fire dreaming dance, in which the dancers travel forwards following a leader at the front of their lines, it is challenging for dancers further back to gather details about the movement, so having *kurdungulu* demonstrating from the sidelines is very helpful. (Napangardis are also *kurdungulu* for snake dreaming, *Warna Jukurrpa*, so at a later camp I was allowed to stand at the side to try to learn the *Warna* dance.)

Anthropologist Françoise Dussart in her study of Yuendumu women's ritual life, *The Politics of Ritual in an Aboriginal Settlement*, describes the *kurdungulu* role as managing 'the fidelity of the performance.'³ Dussart explains that both *kirda* and *kurdungulu* for the place/ Dreaming must be present for an enactment of any medium of that Dreaming (*Jukurrpa*) – singing, sand painting, painting of ritual objects or dance. The Warlpiri women often refer to *kurdungulu* as the 'policemen' or 'policewomen' for this country, this dreaming and this dance. I could only compare them to a gang of bossy yet jovial rehearsal masters.

A 'GOOD DANCER'

One of the senior Napanangkas I have known for several years was dancing as *kurdungulu* beside the *kirda* for the fire dreaming dance. As about fifteen women rhythmically shunted forward with both feet at once, a sprig of eucalypt leaves in each hand, led by two of the more senior women, Napanangka clapped the rhythm and demonstrated the 'correct' form of the dance at the side. 'She's a very good dancer',

people told me. I wondered what constituted 'good' dancing in their eyes. Napanangka's dancing had not stood out to me; it did not appear virtuosic to me in a western dance sense. I realised my eye was totally untrained in viewing this dance. On closer observation I could see that Napanangka, like senior Napangardi, had a confidence in her rhythm, the way her bare feet pounded the orange earth as if they knew exactly what they were doing – (I want to write they were doing a job they had always done). Napanangka also appeared to be very much enjoying and engaged in the movement, singing and smiling.

This observation – of my own inability to recognise a 'good dancer' in Warlpiri terms – raises questions of cultural values and valuing. Qualities that are prized, respected and aspired to by one culture may not even be noticed by another. Napanangka's rotund figure and rounded shoulders were not my idea of a dancerly physique, and her movements were not striking, but once I was aware she was admired by the other women, I could see she was rhythmic and at one with the scene – she did not stand out, but rather absolutely fitted in – to the environment, the music, the other women dancing. Perhaps the Warlpiri women's emphasis on dancing together in their naming of the dance camp project gives a clue to their valuing of participation and cooperation. From my own dancing in relation to place or site (to be elaborated in coming paragraphs), I also appreciate the ability – and perhaps, the aesthetic – of 'fitting in'. Napanangka's dance was the epitome of belonging – to a place, a community and within her belief system and worldview: the *Jukurrpa* (Dreaming). This self-location, this sense of belonging, was evident in every pore of her skin, every muscle of her body.

3. Françoise Dussart, *The Politics of Ritual in an Aboriginal Settlement*, Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000, p76.

4. Interview conducted by Natalie O'Connor and myself, October 2010, Yuendumu.

5. Naomi Smith, 'Dance and the Ancestral Landscape', in *Writings on Dance 20*, Melbourne, 2000, p65.

6. 'Ancestors', in Naomi Smith's account of Kugu Ngancharra and my understanding

of the Warlpiri worldview, encompass both human relatives who have passed away and the Ancestral beings of the Dreaming who formed the features and stories of the country via their travels.

7. Skin names determine one's relationship to all other Warlpiri people, as well as defining responsibility to country – part of which is to enact these dances. Skin group relations are absolutely vital in Warlpiri culture – not only in ritual 'business', but

also in everyday life. Every person who visits Warlpiri country and interacts with Warlpiri people for any length of time is given a skin-name in order for other people to make sense of them and know how to behave towards them. The Warlpiri moiety system is extremely complex – I do not claim to fully understand it as yet, and much has been written about it (Dussart, Musharbash, Jackson, Bell), so I will not discuss it at length here.

DANCING AS EMBODIMENT OF IDENTITY

Nineteen-year-old Nangala in an interview in 2010 stated: "Doing the dances tells you who you are and where you are from". Then she added matter-of-factly, "Like you've got nothing inside you if you don't know."⁴

Such a statement gives us outsiders a sense of the momentous significance the carrying out of these dances holds for the Warlpiri women in terms of their cultural and locational identity. Anthropologist Naomi Smith in her article, 'Dance and the Ancestral Landscape', reports that the Kugu Ngancharra people (traditional occupants of the Kendall and Holroyd Rivers area, Cape York Peninsula) believe dance is the integrating element in re-connecting with the ancestors, who are inextricably bound to the land itself.⁵ The act of dancing is thus vital for the wellbeing of these clans, in that it enables a continuing, reconstituting relationship with the land and their ancestors.⁶ My experience of the Warlpiri women's dance suggests that it plays a similarly critical role in community wellbeing, linking present individual corporeality to country and collective worldview. In Napangardi's performing the goanna dreaming dance I realised that she was not simply dancing 'as herself', but as an ancestral and perhaps we could say 'archetypal' Napangardi. She was embodying the story of her skin group, re-enacting the way her father's country came into being, becoming the ancestor whose wrong skin (*wadarra*) coupling had turned the earth to yellow and white ochre and brought the goannas to this place.⁷ This is the story she believes is her role to perform in order to maintain and reconstitute the *Jukurra* (Dreaming) – the complex and all pervasive system of belief upon which Warlpiri everyday life is structured.

Witnessing the women's dances as the ultimate embodiment of their identity – personal and collective, what might *my* participation as a Napangardi in the *Wardapi Jukurra* (goanna dreaming) dance of Mt Theo country connote in terms of my identity as a non-Indigenous Australian?

MY DANCE OF 'LOCATING'

I need to backtrack to explain my own practice and past research in order to consider how my involvement in the Warlpiri dances might resonate with my sense of cultural identity. On my prior-mentioned trip to Warlpiri country in 2006 I shot a video at Mt Theo, or *Puturlu*, which was my original connection with some of the Warlpiri women with whom I later collaborated on the dance camps project. It was also my first dancing encounter with Warlpiri country. The video work became a three-screen installation entitled *Still Landing*. The work comprises a collage of images, which draws upon my practice of moving in relation to place, which I call 'locating'. I have spent several years (as my PhD project) evolving this improvisational dance in relation to environment initiated via sensory perception. It is a dance of seeking relationship and exploring the physical dialogue between my body and a given place.

The initial intention of my locating dance is to become as physically present as possible in the site or place I have chosen. I work towards becoming present via a multi-sensory listening. Using perception tasks – some derived from Japanese dancer Min Tanaka's 'Body Weather' and some tasks of my own invention – my sensory awareness is heightened. These tasks include following environmental sounds and rhythms with particular body parts, moving extremely slowly (for example, at a continuous rate of one millimetre per second), embodying specific features or qualities of that place or space via invented 'imagery' and working blindfolded with focus upon the haptic experience of sensations. As I undertake these introductory exercises, my body unravels its tensions and releases any cognitive or emotional surface layers – like topsoil, the residue of other places – until I am present to this moment, this place: to listen to it, let it affect me, to respond. Observing my surroundings visually, aurally, kinesthetically and texturally, my body awakens to the place I am in; we begin to merge. This gathering of sensory information





leads into an improvisation, whereby I combine or loosen the tasks, using them as tools or ways-in and develop an exchange of perception and response. Gradually the gap between my perception of an aspect of the place and my response to it reduces, until eventually these seem to fold into each other. I let go of cerebral decision-making and I am simply moved by the surrounding elements, or feel that we are moving together.

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WHITENESS (OR CORPOREALLY
INCORPORATING A HISTORY OF
DISPOSSESSION AND GENOCIDE)

My locating dance is also an acknowledgement of my identity as a 'white' Australian. On my first trip in the Northern Territory in 2005 I observed that my skin appeared white to me more emphatically than ever before. Against the red earth and among Aboriginal people, my white skin made me feel like a foreigner – in the country I had presumed was 'mine'. With this feeling came the realisation that in my Melbourne life I can (and do) usually assume my inclusion in the category of 'normal' – with all the privileges this entails. In performance works thereafter my acknowledgement of and attention to the particularity of my whiteness sought to redress its 'normality', which Richard Dyer explains is so ingrained that:

...Whiteness is felt to be the human condition ... it alone both defines normality and fully inhabits it... white people, unable to see their particularity, cannot take account of other people's; white people create the dominant images of the world and don't quite see that they thus construct the world in their own image... White power ... reproduces itself regardless of intention, power differences and goodwill, and overwhelmingly because it is not seen as whiteness, but as normal.⁸

Moreover, inhabiting a 'white' body not only implies the privileged position of presumed 'normality' with all its accompanying socio-economic benefits, but also, in Australia and other colonised nations, it infers violent conquest. Whilst to white people white bodies are so normal as to be seen as almost lacking ethnicity, to many Aboriginal Australians the presence of white bodies is a very visible and constant reminder that, as Indigenous academic Aileen Moreton-Robinson notes, '[their] lands were invaded and stolen, [their] ancestors massacred and enslaved, [their] children taken away and [their] rights denied, and these acts of terror forged white identity in this country.'⁹ White corporeality, Moreton-Robinson continues, 'is thus one of the myriad ways in which relations between the colonising past and present are omnipresent.' Similarly, Reina Lewis and Sara Mills in *Feminist Postcolonial Theory* state that 'the link between past exploitation and present affluence, and indeed the deeds of past colonialists and oneself, is one which white people have found difficult to deal with in constructive ways...'¹⁰ My insistence on my own whiteness is part of my concern to create site-specific performance works that remind audiences of the continuing impingement of colonial history upon our present places and bodies.

Ken Gelder and Jane M. Jacobs use the word 'unsettlement' to describe a condition of being in postcolonial Australia comparable to the one I evoke through my practice of 'locating'. Gelder and Jacobs suggest that 'reconciliation is never a fully realisable category; it can never be completely settled', and thus they seek to give this prevailing condition of unsettlement 'an activating function', proposing 'unsettlement' as a 'productive feature of the postcolonial landscape.'¹¹ The desire that intrinsic polarities within Australian society – united nation/ divided nation, innocence/

8. Richard Dyer, *White*, 1997, pp9-10
9. Aileen Moreton-Robinson, 'Tiddas talkin' up to the White Woman: When Higgins et al. took on Bell', in Michelle Grossman (ed.), 2003, *Blacklines*, p67

10. Reina Lewis and Sara Mills (eds.), *Feminist Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, 2003, p7
11. Ken Gelder and Jane M Jacobs, 1998, *Uncanny Australia: Sacredness and Identity in a Postcolonial Nation*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, Intro. p xvi

12. Anne Thompson, 2001-02, 'DIY? Ecologies of Practice', in *Writings on Dance* 21, Melbourne, p32

guilt, modern/ sacred, in place/ out of place, etc. – will somehow simplify or integrate into peaceful, synthesised, stable rest is, according to Gelder and Jacobs, a fantasy. The contradictory forces implicit within each coupling keep them ever moving. It is the movement between – this soliciting, folding, unpredictable, perpetual motion between features of the postcolonial socio-political-spatial landscape that is highlighted by Gelder and Jacobs as the pertinent, ‘most activated’ zone to dwell within.

My notion and practice of locating inhabits an endless (or very long) process that involves engaging with the intrinsic tensions and contradictions of post-colonialism. I believe that consciously co-existing with the mobile, uncomfortable, irresolvable forces that are inherent in this nation and our Australian identities is appropriate and of value to our times. Non-Indigenous Australian theatre maker and academic Anne Thompson states, ‘at this time I consider it strategic that whites identify themselves as part of a colonial history which devastated and continues to impact upon indigenous Australians.’¹²

My presence in Australia is on some level unsettled, guilty, yet yearning for belonging: seeking embodied location but not expecting to ever attain it. My conflictual, oscillating dance of on the one hand, attempting to fit in, and on the other hand highlighting my disassociation from Australian place, seems to represent and embody my position, my sense of identity in relation to Australian country (and perhaps the sense of unease shared by others of my generation and similar ‘white’ Australian background). In this way my locating dance parallels the women’s *Jukurrpa* dances: we are both embodying our sense of locational identity. In the Warlpiri case there is a pre-existing, culturally endorsed, formulaic method for this embodiment, whereas my process is self-invented and ever changing.

STILL LANDING

The video work *Still Landing* explored these notions of white Australian identity and my ‘locating’ dance practice in relation to Mt Theo country, before I had witnessed or participated in the *Jukurrpa* dances. Wishing to propose the white body’s alterity or relative newness in relation to Australian place, I chose to work on what was officially ‘Aboriginal land’ (and in 2006, pre-Intervention, much Warlpiri country had restricted access: the permit system then in place has since been abolished).

When I asked a senior Warlpiri man, a Japangardi whom I had met on my first visit to Yuendumu, for permission to film my dance on his country, Mt Theo, *Puturlu*, he granted me permission but suggested I also ask the women custodians of this country. Several of these ‘ladies’ then travelled out with me to show me the ‘good spots’, to clarify permissible sites for filming. This was a wonderful introduction to the country. The women emphasised that *Puturlu* is Goanna Dreaming country and Napangardi and Napanangka country, encouraging me, as a Napangardi, to feel personally enveloped in the *Jukurrpa* of this place. As we approached Mt Theo the women began chanting songs of the country and wailing in mourning for their recently deceased sister. We made a fire and cooked lunch: five goannas that the women had hunted down with their crow-bars on the way, as the women continued to sing the story of this country of the wrong skin lovers searching for each other. Anthropologist Georgia Curran also accompanied us that day. Her own study involved documenting the women’s songs and she had brought her recording equipment. To my delight the women were more than obliging in allowing me to record their singing for use in the film. They even offered to paint me in ochres for my dancing in the film. (I declined their kind offer; I was not attempting to represent myself as Warlpiri.) Later that week I returned to *Purtulu* with my friend, artist and filmmaker James Geurts, for a week-long film-shoot. Whilst acquainting with *Puturlu* via my perceptual process and improvisations that week, I often thought I ‘heard’ the women’s singing voices emanating from the dusty orange earth itself.





DANCING FROM A DIFFERENT CULTURAL BODY

I am hereby attempting to consider my 'locating' practice in relation to my experience of participation in the Warlpiri women's dances. Does my involvement in *Jukurrpa* dances 'solve' the rift I feel between my body and place in Australia? Does it challenge, delegitimize or trivialise my own locating practice in comparison with this ancient, ultimately site-specific art? I have no conclusions to these provocations, but throw them around for contemplation.

Participating in the *Jukurrpa* dances might seem to be 'the answer' to my quest for embodied location, but thus far I still feel rather disembodied performing these dances – the movements are foreign to me, danced from and by a different cultural body. Although I do feel welcome, I am also always blaringly an outsider, and as many years as I spend dancing with the Warlpiri women I will always be dancing from a different cultural body. My body's knowledge, experience and physicality may become more empathetic with the Warlpiri women's, but it will never be the same. (Nor is that my aim... I do not wish to 'indigenise', even if it were possible!) I do however wish to practice the dances over and over to become familiar with the movements, the way of holding my body in relation to gravity and the earth, the rhythms, etc. But the women do each dance once, lasting less than ten minutes, then not again for several months, so I have little chance to become fluent in my execution of the movements, and even less chance to go beyond the rudimentary movements to glean any more nuanced kinaesthetic understandings. (Incidentally, at the camp following my first experience of *Jukurrpa* dance at Wayililinyapa, just when I was feeling a little more confident to perform the goanna dreaming dance again, Napangardi decided to do a totally different goanna dance! So I was once again left guessing, flailing through the movements feeling utterly disembodied.)

NO NEED TO PRACTISE

That the women do not seem to feel a need for rehearsal or repetition of their dances may indicate a different valuing and notion of performance. At the camp in April 2010 at Mission Creek they also only performed each dance once and the actual dancing was very brief compared to the body-painting preparations. At the camp I recently attended at a place called Beantree, the women spent more time dancing, but that was because they did a greater quantity of dances; they still only performed each dance once. The system of *kurdungulu* correction (yelling and sometimes demonstrating from the sidelines) ensures that the dance remains the same; that it does not mutate with time, but I do not think it aims to aesthetically 'perfect' the dance from an audience perspective. Indeed the Warlpiri women have rarely if ever performed their dance for an audience other than themselves. This lack of need for rehearsal, and perhaps even the absence of necessity for the dances to be 'seen' by an external audience, may indicate that the point of executing the dance is not primarily its aesthetic – kinaesthetic effect. The main motivation for the women seems to be that in executing the dance they are enacting their relationship with country, and (simultaneously, almost synonymously) with the ancestors. The rumour following the dances at Wayililinyapa that the ancestors had heard us (by the babies crying) indicates that the women believe the dances quite tangibly 'do something'. The act of performing the Warlpiri dances creates not only movements and a visual, kinaesthetic experience for anyone who happens to bear witness, but the definite, solid 'thing' of a connection with country, an embodiment of one's place within *Jukurrpa* (the Dreaming), which is for the Warlpiri women the ultimate embodiment of their own identity. Thus we begin to understand the older women's urgency to transfer their knowledge to younger generations: if the dances became extinct, so would Warlpiri connections to country and ancestry. Future generations would feel that they had 'nothing inside' them (to return to 19-year-old Nangala's words).

To draw again on Naomi Smith's account of performance by Kugu Ngancharra clans, Smith notes that the dancers are seen as the reincarnation or manifestation of the Ancestral beings themselves, and suggests that the ceremonial performance space or place is, for the performative moment, transformed into what she terms 'the Ancestral landscape', or the landscape that was in the process of being formed by the travels and experiences of ancestral beings.¹³ According to Smith, the dancers do not merely represent but *become* the ancestral beings whose story they enact. Each ritual performance is a 'recreation of the Ancestral journeys where dancers portray Ancestral characters moving through the Kugu Ngancharra landscape', yet she suggests the dance performance also creates a 'world of Ancestral presence'.¹⁴ A similar presence is also evidenced in the Warlpiri example I experienced, by the women's pronouncement that they heard 'babies crying' in the bush after the enactment of the dances. This claim was expanded upon in a later conversation with Warlpiri women who stated that by communicating with country via the songs and dances they then would sometimes see and/or sense guardian spirits of the country 'just standing around nearby'. Clearly, tidying up the line of dancers or unifying the timing of arm movements is secondary to creating a space in which ancestral beings or spirits of the *Jukurrpa* may be manifested and contacted.

NO NEED FOR AN AUDIENCE

Arguably then, the intention of the *Jukurrpa* dances is the relationship it engenders for the dancers with country and ancestors, more than its aesthetic/ kinaesthetic affect for a live audience. The dance exists well and truly without ever being seen by an audience other than the *kurdungulu*. In this sense it could be called a 'practice' rather than necessarily a

performance technique or form. My locating dance is also a 'practice' that does not require a witness. It exists when I am dancing alone in relation to a place. In fact, performing it to an audience holds many challenges in terms of retaining its (my) sensitivity to the place. It is a mode of articulating my relationship to a place, more than it is a performance form. I then might evolve or transcribe material *from* the practice of locating into a choreography or structure for performance.

BELONGING?

By the women's inclusion of me in their community, their friendship and welcoming of my participation in their cultural ritual, my 'anxiety to belong' (using Peter Read's wording and notion) in Australia is perhaps assuaged.¹⁵ As a Napangardi I am included as part of the Warlpiri 'family', sharing knowledge and joining in the enactment of the Dreaming via dance and gradually learning details of the associated stories, history, mythology. That I am not only permitted by the Indigenous custodians to be present on their country, but also encouraged to engage with country in *their way*, *with* them, does, (or should?) give me license to feel I can 'settle in' to the place. (I think...) As you can tell, I am still hesitant to embrace this, or to easily accept the Warlpiri generosity as absolving me of the colonial legacy I feel I drag around with me as a white Australian. There are many nagging problematic elements in the fundamental situation of being an outsider attempting to facilitate a camp as platform for the transference of cultural knowledge that once occurred on a daily basis as an almost instinctual part of Warlpiri life.¹⁶ Other *Kardiya* (white, non-Indigenous) staff and I are confronted constantly with incommensurable moral dilemmas, such as: How will *Yapa* (Aboriginal, Warlpiri people) ever reclaim their

13. 'Dance and the Ancestral Landscape', *Writings on Dance* 20, 2000, p65

14. *Ibid.* p65

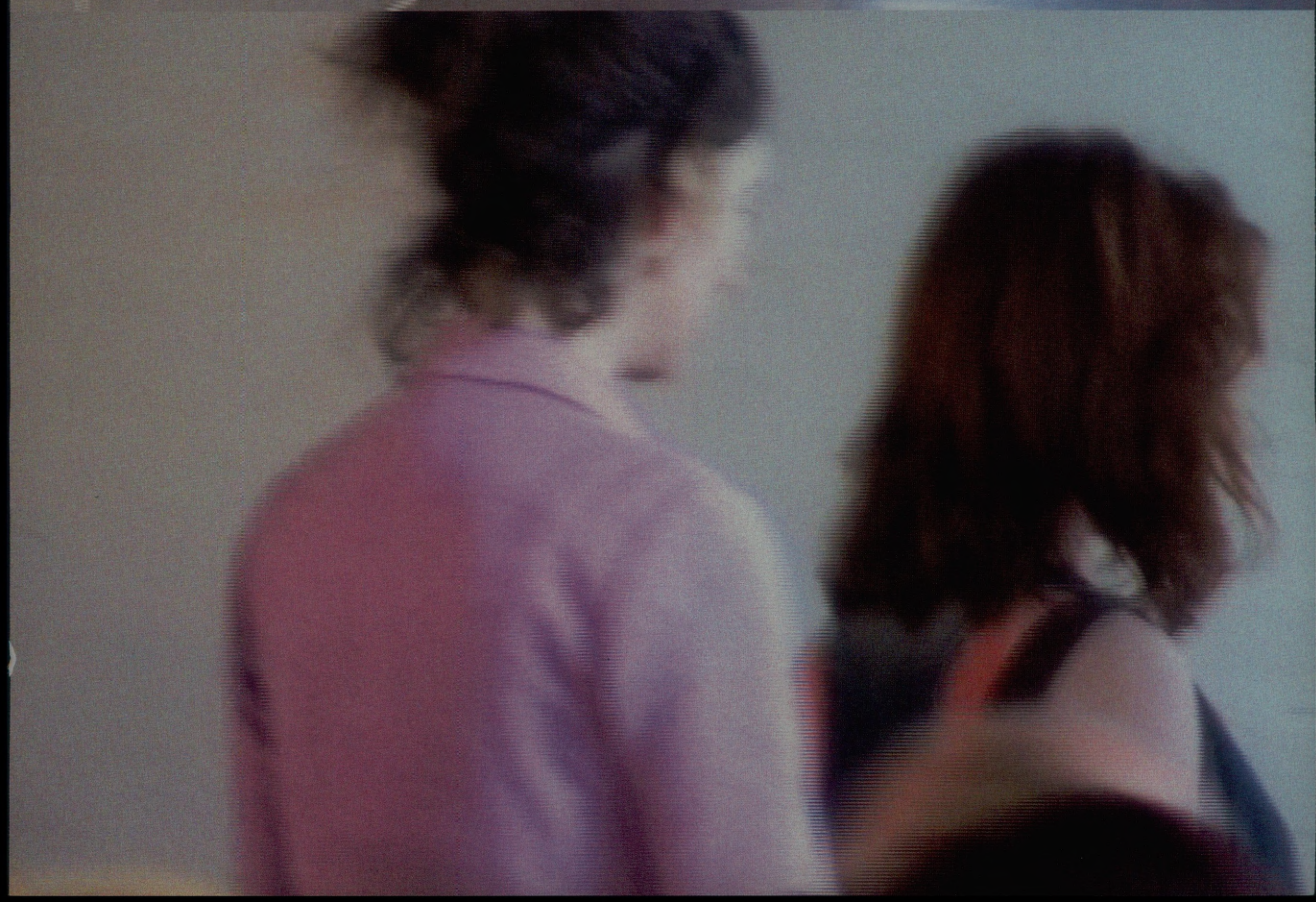
15. Peter Read, *Belonging: Australians, Place*

and *Aboriginal Ownership*, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2000 and *Haunted Earth*. Sydney: UNSW Press, 2003.

16. During an interview middle-aged

women from Yuendumu recalled their mothers and grandmothers dancing every afternoon. (October 2010 by Natalie O'Connor and Gretel Taylor).





power to galvanise positive and productive activities if we keep doing it for them? Even in creating a space for the transmission of Warlpiri culture, *Kardiya* are perpetuating colonising power dynamics: we are the ones with the keys to the sheds with the food and camping gear, we have access to the vehicles, we are the ones with the money to distribute as payment... it goes on and on. (But if we do not assist making events like this happen, they may not happen at all, which is why the senior women asked for our assistance.) And that 'old chestnut': Am I by my involvement in this project on some level attempting to assuage my own inherited guilt, trying to rectify what my people have made awry?

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'TWO WAYS'

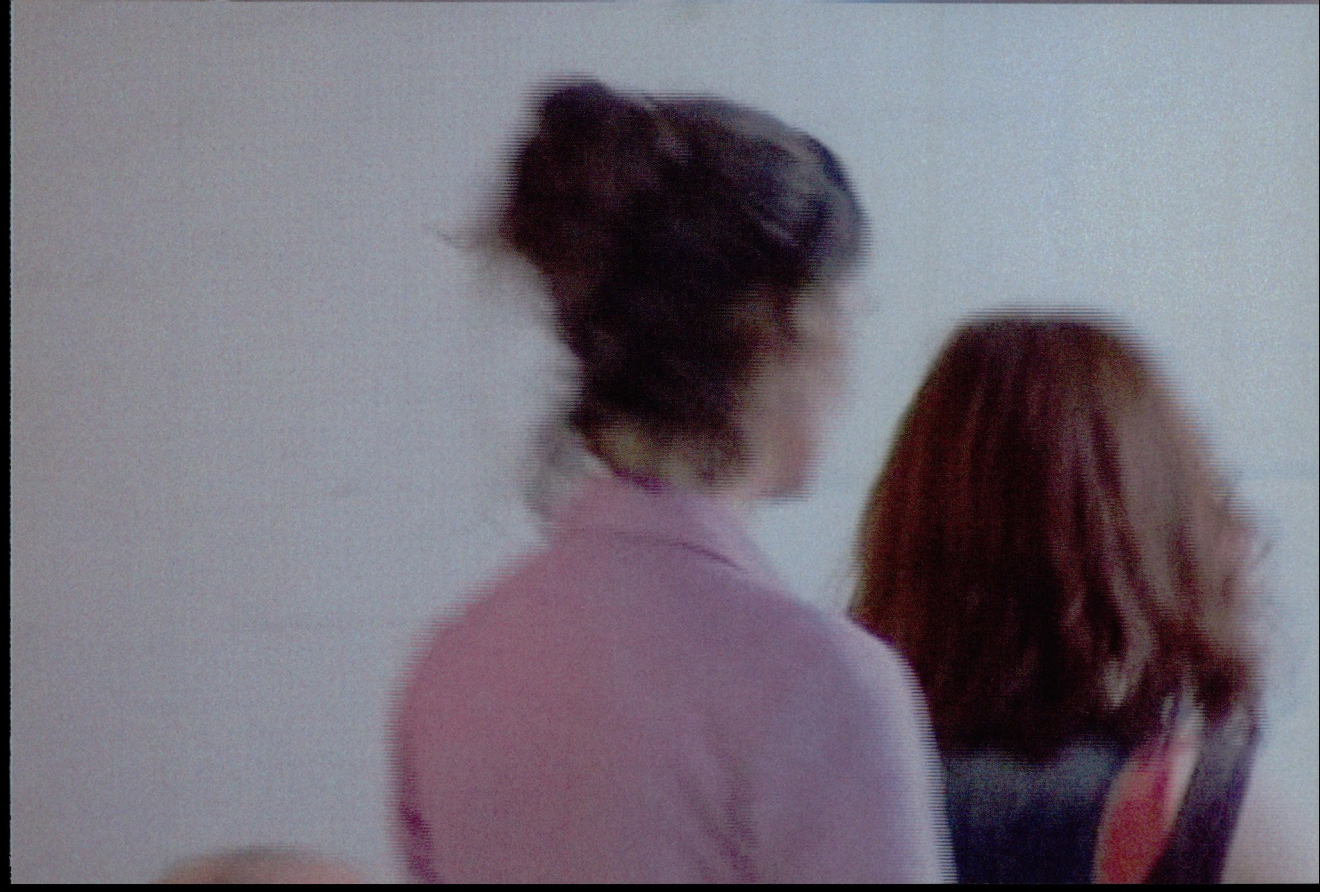
From the Warlpiri women's perspective however, I have not experienced any indication that they find my presence as problematic as I do. I have never encountered any resentment or anything other than generous inclusiveness from Warlpiri people. The women are adamant that the involvement of *Kardiya* or outsiders in no way changes their experience of performing the dances; in interviews I conducted with Natalie O'Connor in 2010, interviewees repeatedly advocated 'learning both ways'. I think in this they refer to the girls and young women learning cultural knowledge from their mothers and grandmothers – 'Yapa way', as well as learning whitefella 'knowledge' from us *Kardiya* mob. Indeed there is some regard for the fact that we *Kardiya* possess some useful skills that few *Yapa* do, chiefly fluency in whitefella systems and practices, such as money, writing and access to technology. Yuendumu School claims in its mission statements to operate along the lines of 'two-way' education: 'Yapa way and *Kardiya* way'. The senior women consider that the dance camps provide the girls with some 'Yapa way' education to complement the regular, mainstream Australian education they receive from the mainly *Kardiya* teachers at school. They also consider *Kardiya* learning from the *Yapa* elders to be a sort of complementary exchange of knowledge.

Participating in the Warlpiri women's dances does make me feel that my own dance of locating is somewhat trivial, yet it does not dispose of it. As a dancer and artist, I still need to physically articulate my relationship with place in my own way, as well as being ever appreciative of the privilege of participating in the *Jukurrpa* dances. Perhaps in growing to know Australian place and country – a journey I do not expect to ever complete – these two practices are or could, for me, become complementary. Indeed I have always felt that a foremost part of my locating process of acquainting with a place is to research its significance to its local Indigenous people (ideally by listening directly to them), to try to get a sense of the place from their perspective, as well as representing my own perspective as a descendent of colonisers. It is my wonderfully good fortune in the Southern Ngalia dance camp project to be permitted to participate in the ritual dance of country, actively engaging with country *with* its Aboriginal custodians, in their mode of engagement. My participation in the *Jukurrpa* dance could thereby even be considered to be *part of* my locating practice, a step towards lessening the physical rift I feel between my self and the country – towards landing.

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SALLY GARDNER / TRIO A, RANUP LAMPUAN AND SOVEREIGNTY

INTRODUCTION

The concept of sovereignty usually circulates in the field of the political, narrowly understood. Appadurai (1994) cites sovereignty as one of a chain of Enlightenment ideas that also includes 'freedom', 'welfare' and 'rights'. Sovereignty relates to legally inviolable political units such as medieval monarchies (sovereignty here referring to the King's body), modern nation states (understood as representing the unity of a 'people'), and now what Hardt and Negri (2000) call 'Empire' or the rule of global capital. In this essay, I use the idea of sovereignty to raise questions about dance discourses, dance authorship, and the possibility or otherwise of maintaining the integrity of dances through time – or put in political terms, how and whether a dance is constituted as an inviolable, 'proper' entity and who rules or maintains the integrity of that entity, and to what ends. I discuss these issues in relation to two dances, *Trio A* and *Ranup Lampuan*, through consideration of two essays: 'Trio A: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation' (2009) by Yvonne Rainer about the transmission of her seminal post-modern dance; and 'A dance of Aceh: Yuslizar and his creation that became traditional' (2009) by Murtala Murtala about the transmission of the dance created by choreographer, Yuslizar, in 1959 as a dance to welcome guests.¹

These two articles when taken together provoke questions about the assumed division between so-called 'art' and 'traditional culture'. They have helped me to think about what kind of object it is that the proper names *Trio A* and *Ranup Lampuan* refer to, and how these dances might be classified or indexed. My discussion below goes on to question the politics (narrowly understood) of the (Western) art/ (non-Western) traditional culture distinction and what is at stake in representations and discourses that seek to maintain it.²

TRIO A

In her essay 'Trio A: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation' (2009) Rainer recounts the life so far of her seminal dance *Trio A* – a dance renowned as embodying Rainer's refusal of all that had defined Western concert dance up to that point. Rainer goes back over the innumerable ways the dance has been taught and performed, noting and discussing the many to whom it has been transmitted over the years since its creation in 1965. Rainer herself has taught *Trio A* in different solo, duo, trio and group versions for different kinds of occasions in different venues to many individuals, and they in turn have, with varying degrees of formal agreement from Rainer, gone on to teach it to yet others. Even others, it might be presumed, have learned and performed it without formal permission since there is a published DVD of the work.³ Rainer mentions at a certain point encountering a version that she didn't recognise: *Well, I finally met a Trio A I didn't like. It was 4th or 5th generation and I couldn't believe my eyes* (16).

'Trio A: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation' suggests how a dance called by its maker, *Trio A*, having been taught by and to so many, verges on becoming public property.⁴ Indeed, Pat Catterson, one of the now official 'custodians' of the dance – custodianship itself suggesting communal ownership rather than individual authorship – remembers that the dance was astounding to her when she first saw it because *we saw ourselves in it. I dubbed it the people's dance* (Catterson 2009, p.4). Rainer herself writes that: *For the first decade of Trio A's existence I was teaching it to anyone who wanted to learn it – skilled and unskilled, trained and untrained, professional and amateur – and gave tacit permission to anyone*

who wanted to teach it to do so ... I envisioned myself as a post-modern dance evangelist bringing movement to the masses...(16)

One might imagine that, with so many individuals, so-called 'dancers' and 'non-dancers' alike, having performed *Trio A*, some will have been or will be teaching parts of it in their classes, as dancers do, so the material of the dance will have been handed down as though it were traditional. In fact, this once iconoclastic dance has, by continuing to be performed and *used*, become canonical.⁵ But, in dance, this means that it is also constantly being updated as contemporary bodies learn and perform it. Thus while *Trio A* is archived, or at least indexed as an iconoclastic integral avant-garde work, a seminal moment in avant-garde dance, it has nevertheless remained in or as 'repertoire', to use Taylor's (2003) distinction: *Trio A* is in a state of ongoing deformation/transformation or indeed process of making. According to Taylor, archival knowledge and memory exist in the form of *documents, maps, literary texts, letters.....videos, films, CDS, all those items supposedly resistant to change* (19). 'The repertoire' on the other hand includes, *performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing ... The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there', being part of the transmission* (20). The concepts of 'archive' and 'repertoire' are not oppositional or mutually exclusive, however: performances can both re-iterate distinct values (necessary to maintaining the status of a work), but also, because no performance is ever the same as another, their very performance – that by which they exist – renders those so-called works non-identical with themselves.⁶

1. First published as *Tari Aceh: Yusizar dan Kreasi yang Mentradiasi*. Banda Aceh: No Government Individual. I am quoting from an as yet unpublished translation by Cucu Juwita.

2. Suzanne Hardt writes that 'while the "avant garde" in Western stage dance was once perceived as embodying the "new" and was believed to be different from dance forms marked by tradition, these demarcations are now being challenged

by both dance historians and artists' (2011, p.27). The whole field of performance studies questions the division but it is still often assumed – such as when Judith Ryan, Senior Curator Indigenous Art at the National Gallery of Victoria writes: 'The period 1971–72 was a critical turning point when the ancient visual language shared by many Aboriginal peoples of the Central and Western deserts was rendered permanent on sheets of composition board

and thereby transformed into a generative and powerful new art form: artefact became art.' (2011, p.36)

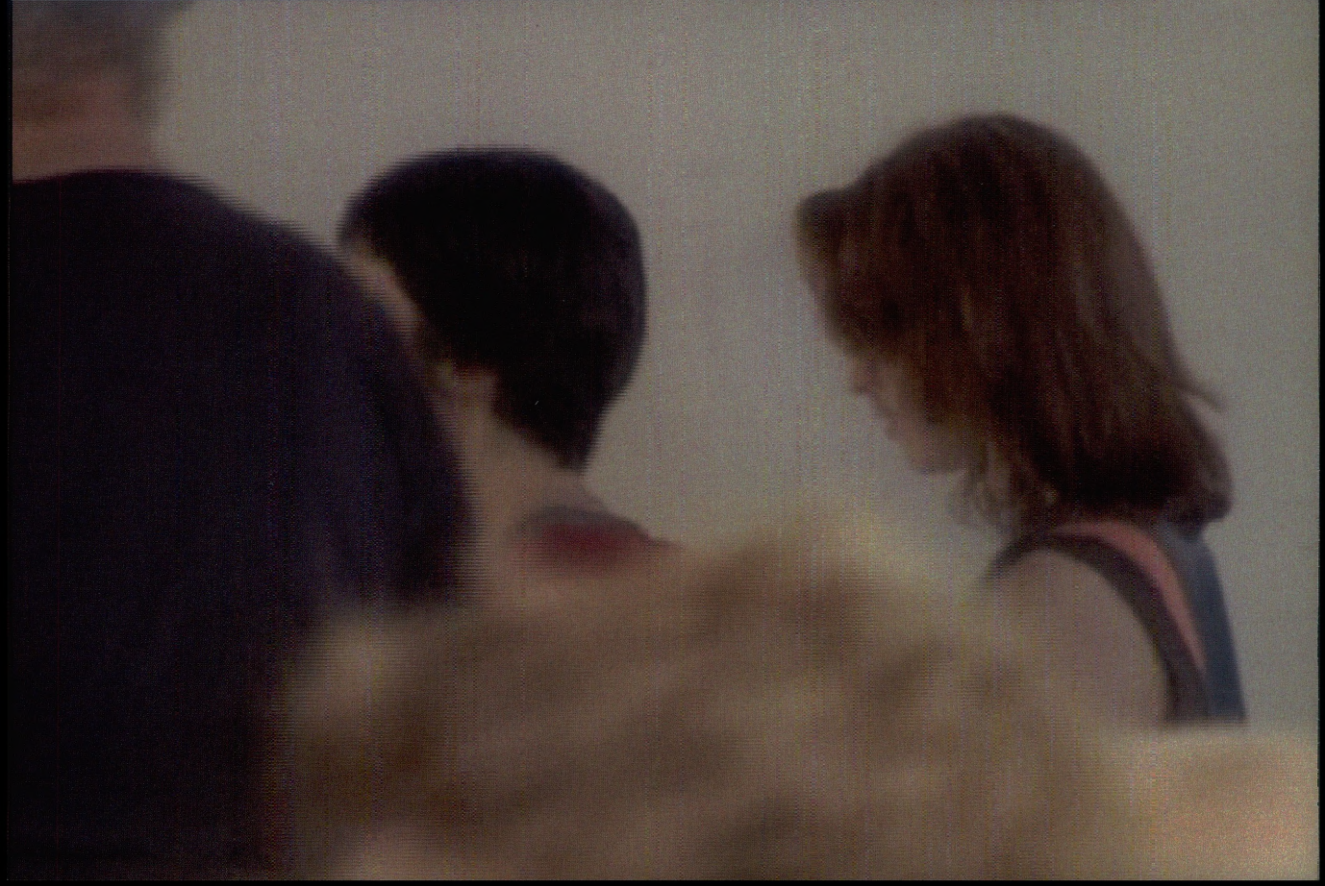
3. In *A Woman Who: Selected Works of Yvonne Rainer*, Chicago, Illinois: Video Data Bank [1966–2002].

4. See Hoffbauer in this issue for mention of her own 'appropriation' of *Trio A*.

5. See Giersdorf (2009).

6. Similar to Barthes distinction between 'work' and 'text'.





In addition, performances of dances are also uses of those dances and the meaning or force of any performance is a function of its contingent reception. Works are *always in situ: intelligible in the framework of the immediate environment and issues surrounding them* – just as my present readings of two dances are ‘in situ’ here (Taylor 2003 p.3).⁷

To return to *Trio A*, at a certain point, as Rainer recounts, she becomes concerned about the identity and integrity of her creation and she reins it in. She opts, as author and authority, for trying to retain the stability or ‘sovereignty’ of *Trio A* as a discrete work of art and its status as an archive of particular corporeal values – values through which, at its creation, the dance broke with the accepted norms for Western dance:

When I hear rumours of people learning Trio A from the video, I know that they have achieved only a faint approximation of the dance with little understanding of its subtleties. Precision has always been an important component of Trio A. Its geometric floor patterns, governing direction of feet and facing of hips, is exacting and not to be trifled with. For example, the final diagonal with all its twisting perambulations, though not literally drawn, constitutes a directive as rigorous as any issued by Balanchine, Cunningham, or Lucinda Childs (2009, p.16).

The essay ‘*Trio A: Documentation, Genealogy, Notation*’ lends its intrinsic rhetoric to the idea that, despite Rainer’s initial intention of taking dance to the masses, *Trio A* is a uniquely authored object that is more or less *deformed* in the overall process of transmission and existence through time. The essay takes part in a debate about the ephemerality or instability of dances and hence the (im)possibility of their being regarded as discrete, integral original works of art amongst the more stable works of other art forms. In modern dance, it has been particularly important to claim for dances the status of authored works (even at a time when the work has been thrown into question) because, as Louppe points out, this was denied dance for so long.⁸ In order to endure through time, however, a dance must be transmitted to other performers or ‘interpreters’ and in that process the supposed hermetic seal of its

being a discrete work is broken open to new situations, enunciations, bodies, realities.

What the essay ‘*Trio A: Genealogy, Documentation, Notation*’ doesn’t explicitly do is to acknowledge how dances act as different enunciations each time, according to different, unstable corporeal, material and social-historical circumstances they are performed (even though this idea is implicit in Rainer’s enumeration of the different circumstances in which *Trio A* has been performed.) While having a particular archival status, meaning or force, *Trio A* is also what it means or does in each re-iteration.⁹ It cannot be confined to its status as uniquely authored seminal avant garde work. The name *Trio A*, then, is both ‘proper’ and refers to a whole class of performances and many bodies. In fact, the *name* of a dance operates at a different level to that of its actual performances. The name, like that of the artist, can circulate independently of danced events – it can have exchange value or can act as a kind of brand. As far as the poetic *values* of a dance work are concerned, supposing its integrity or identity reside there, these are only ever approached asymptotically, or perhaps exceeded, through each performance and each reception.¹⁰

RANUP LAMPUAN

The story of *Trio A* has deep correspondences with that of an Acehnese dance, *Ranup Lampuan*, a dance I learned of when in 2010 we invited a group of Indonesian university students resident in Melbourne to perform a welcome dance to open our ‘Falling Behind’ series at the Institute of Postcolonial Studies. The following discussion, which draws extensively on an essay about *Ranup Lampuan*, ‘An Acehnese dance: Yuslizar and his creation that became traditional’ by Murtala Murtala, an Acehnese-born dancer living in Sydney, reflects on the conventional and problematic art vs culture, modern vs traditional distinctions. While it may be imagined that the two dances, *Trio A* and *Ranup Lampuan* (see below), might be archived differently – the one as avant garde iconoclasm, the other as a community dance thought of by that community (mistakenly, according to

Murtala) as 'traditional' – in fact, 'in repertoire' both act as sets of continually varying enunciations within diverse and multiple civic forums. Seen from this perspective, they are far from seeming like mutually exclusive kinds of dance entities.

Before discussing Murtala's account of *Ranup Lampuan* I need to digress briefly to give some background to the problem of identifying Acehese dances – a problem that parallels the one whereby Rainer saw a *Trio A* that she didn't recognise. We had seen a dance, billed as *saman* and as a 'dance to welcome honoured guests' at a 'Music from the World of Islam' concert at the Northcote Town Hall, Melbourne (2007) and had tracked down one of the longer-standing members of Rentak Nusantari, the performing group of Indonesian students whose personnel was continually changing according to the ongoing arrivals from and returns to Indonesia. This dance had begun to be performed more frequently in Melbourne following the 2004 tsunami when it became an item at fund-raising events, Aceh having been the region hardest hit by the catastrophic events.¹¹ We understood the dance to be called *saman* – and later *ratoh duek*, but initially could not ascertain exactly what was correct.¹²

A quick search on the internet demonstrated some issues with the dance's identity. One Internet site under the heading 'Indonesian Dance Club' had "*saman*" to be *the most popular dance in Aceh and the dance that has become well-known abroad with the name "Thousand Hands"*. *It has its origin from the Alas ethnic group and is normally performed to celebrate the birthday of Mohammad and other important occasions.* <http://>

narisaman.blogspot.com/2006/01/history-of-saman-dance.html (posted on January 7, 2006).

But a rejoinder from 'Sudirman' went as follows: *I have just read your article about saman, but I think you should conduct a new research again. I will give you a bit of information about saman. Saman is not from Alas, it is from Gayo. Achenese also perform saman but it is different, none of Alas people can perform saman. You are right how the way to perform, but again it is not performed during the birthday of Mohammad, no exactly no. It is usually performed for party, festival or special occasion where one village visit another village to perform saman.* (posted on Thursday May 7, 2009 at the same site).¹³

So-called 'saman' as we had seen it was a dynamic, joyful, kneeling, body-percussion dance performed by young women, accompanied by men singing and playing the frame drum (*rapa'i*).¹⁴ Nevertheless, the identity of *saman*, even in Indonesia or in fact Aceh, was not a straightforward issue. Subsequently, continuing to follow the thread of an Acehese dance of welcome, I met Murtala and Alfira O'Sullivan during a 'Refugee Week' event at the Fitzroy Town Hall (2009) and learned that there was indeed an Acehese dance of welcome but it was not *saman*. *Saman* itself was not strictly from Aceh but from Gayo – a distinct highland region within Aceh province;¹⁵ and the dance of welcome known as *Ranup Lampuan* was not 'traditional'. In his essay about *Ranup Lampuan*, Murtala documents how the dance (which is not a body-percussion dance) was created expressly as a welcome dance by the Acehese dancer-choreographer, Yuslizar:¹⁶ *Ranup Lampuan in Acehese means 'betel in puan'.*

7. Giersdorf (2009) writes that '*Trio A* accumulated different meanings through the context of each new re-enactment.' (22)

8. See Louppe's (2010) chapter 'Memory and Identity' in *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*. Dance Books, UK.

9. Taylor (2003) writes that repertoire 'both keeps and transforms choreographies of meaning'. (20)

10. Manning writes that, 'To identify a body as such would be to tame movement'. (xv)

11. Kartomi notes that in Aceh itself that when many musical instruments were lost in the 2004 tsunami, bereft troupes substituted body

percussion for their instruments in rehearsals and performances. 'On the cusp of music

and dance: body percussion genres in Aceh and Gayo, with special reference to *Seudati*.' Paper for the First International Conference on Aceh and Indian Ocean Studies, Banda Aceh February 2007.

12. *Ratoh Duek* in Acehese literally means 'sitting chattering'. (Alfira O'Sullivan, personal communication)

13. Kartomi writes: *The dance genres that feature body percussion in Aceh, such the standing dances seudati and pho, and the sitting dances ratoh duek or meuseukat, and the saman in*

the mountainous Gayo area of the province, are among the most intricate, demanding on the performer, and beautiful in the world.

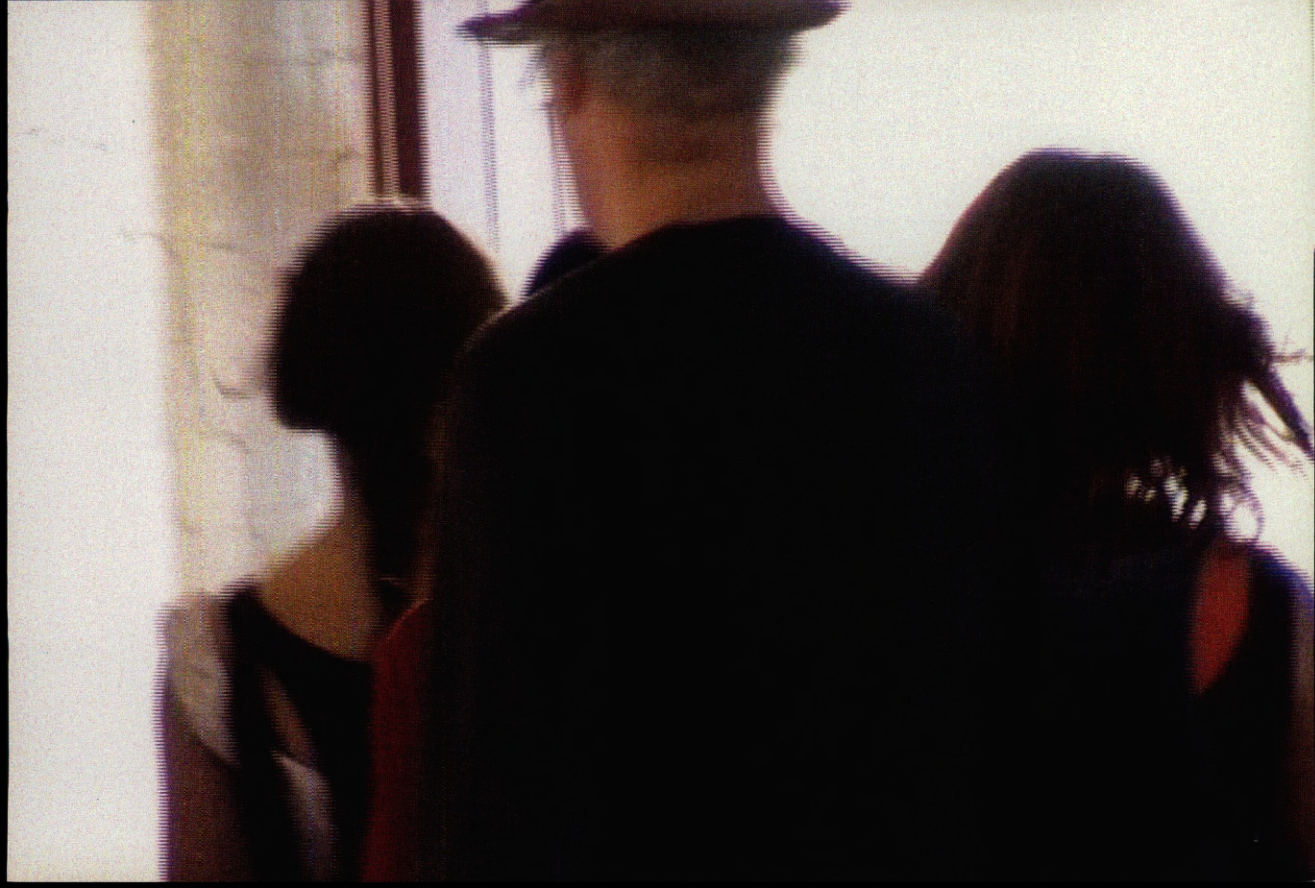
(2007) op.cit.

14. In this case the dance may well have been *meuseukat* rather than *saman*. See Kartomi (2004).

15. See Bowen, J.R. 1991.

16. In fact, strictly speaking, Yuslizar was not Acehese. He was a descendent of immigrants from Minangkabau. (Murtala personal communication).







Murtala with students, Melbourne 2012. Photo: Sahbi Shili/Frida Komesaroff.

The term was used by Yuslizar to name one of his dance creations reflecting the customs of Acehnese people in welcoming their guests. (19) Yuslizar created the dance in 1959 at the request of A.K. Abdullah, a soldier serving in Kodam (the Indonesian army) who had noted that other regions had their sirih dances.¹⁷ Abdullah, Murtala writes, had served in nearly all regions in Sumatra and noticed that most of these regions had a tradition to welcome guests by serving betel leaves and cerana.¹⁸ He asked, 'why doesn't Aceh have one?' Based on that question A.K. Abdullah called some dance artists together to discuss the idea. Out of that meeting, Yuslizar was asked to create the dance.

Yuslizar consulted community leaders and asked them for feedback on his new creation.

Out of this process of consultation support was found to set up studios, find dancers, enlist patrons.¹⁹ Murtala goes on to discuss *Ranup Lampuan* as a dance undergoing continual change from the moment of its initial creation. During his life, Yuslizar himself constantly made changes to the dance. For example, when an Acehnese group was to perform in Malaysia in the gift exchange program between Malaysia and the Acehnese Regional

Government, Yuslizar revised *Ranup Lampuan*, adding three male dancers: two as sword holders and another as a vandal holder.

*Then, around 1966, Yuslizar followed the advice of community leaders in removing the male dancers, since serving betel leaves is the duty of females. The duration of the dance was also an issue as some found it too long. So, a shorter *Ranup Lampuan* danced by female dancers was formed. This form of the dance lasted approximately 8 years.*

Undergoing change is part of *Ranup Lampuan*'s identity, as Murtala notes. Kartomi has also written of Acehnese dances, more broadly, that they, like many other non-Western dances, have been adapted in presentation and style to the needs of their patrons; the Indonesian government, commercial corporations, the media, and diaspora communities living in Jakarta and other cities in Indonesia and overseas. Though some traditional techniques have been preserved, artists were urged to achieve an international or global niveau of entertainment value and marketability (2004).²⁰

Each new performance presents a new occasion to make specific changes: *Ranup Lampuan* has undergone an extraordinary development,

especially in relation to its musical accompaniment. In the beginning the dance was accompanied by an orchestra or band from URILL KODAM, but later it was accompanied by traditional music ... to fulfil the requirements of the committee of 1974 National Dance Festival, that traditional dance has to be accompanied by traditional music.²¹

Ranup Lampuan was performed on a stage for the first time to welcome President Soeharto. When the Aceh Cultural Institution (KLA) began promoting Acehese indigenous customs, Ranup Lampuan started to be performed outside. Later the dance became more dynamic, in terms of its movement, use of space, and the use of props. The changes were unstoppable: Ranup Lampuan was danced everywhere: to welcome guests, brides, government officials. It was accompanied by live or recorded music. It became very popular and familiar. It could be said that Ranup Lampuan was a creation that became a tradition. It was performed en masse at the 12th Qur'an reading festival in 1981 when Yuslizar added the wearing of shawls. At the current time, Ranup Lampuan dancers wear hijabs. This accords with the Islamic laws of Aceh province.

As the dance comes increasingly to be performed far from Aceh it comes metonymically to represent Aceh in terms of cultural identity, or even Indonesia in terms of its 'unity in diversity' (more of this below). Murtala finishes this account of *Ranup Lampuan* in repertoire with the statement that, *Ranup Lampuan* is currently performed both outside and inside but, ironically, the community does not know who the creator of the dance was. In other words, *Ranup Lampuan* has come to be regarded locally and further afield as 'traditional', even though it was a rather recent creation (six years before Rainer created *Trio A*) of choreographer, Yuslizar.²² But what is the broader status, value and role of an individual creator in the case of *Ranup Lampuan* and especially since it has been

taken to be traditional? Murtala stresses the role of artists in closely observing community life and returning these observations to the community in poetic form:

Yuslizar's role in the development of Acehese dance is that of a creative artist working within community social life; and his was a journey of rejuvenation. As a creative individual he created art works through a long process of observing realities in the community. Art is a language of expression for the benefit of the community itself. Art is one of the means for the community to construct its own social and cultural identities and enabling it to adapt to the times and prevailing social conditions.

Murtala sees an important social role not only for artists but for the activity of dancing. The arts can transmit and transform social knowledge and identities. Murtala writes as a kind of custodian of *Ranup Lampuan*, as Pat Catterson is a custodian of *Trio A*. He is concerned about maintaining values that, for him, define *Ranup Lampuan* in the way that Catterson also feels that responsibility when she writes of *Trio A*, *I promised myself I would never let it leave my body's memory* (2009, p.3).

For Murtala, *changes that occurred in Yuslizar's creations while he was alive, changes that he himself made, improved the dances, both in terms of movements, meaning and overall performance. But now Yuslizar has gone and his dance works are still often subjected to changes. Changes are made by people who may not understand the history and the meanings contained in Yuslizar's works, in turn making their meanings unclear for the community.*

Even though *Ranup Lampuan* is undergoing 'unstoppable' development and change, Murtala insists – like Rainer with *Trio A* – that it was also created according to specific dance values. These, he argues, deserve to be recognised and protected through the

17. A sirih is 'a quid consisting of betel leaf, areca nut, gambier and lime.' It is also the root of the verb to offer. (Echols and Shadily Indonesian English Dictionary. Jakarta 1972, published by Cornell UP.)

18. *Ranup* means betel, *Lam* means 'in', *puan* is the Acehese betel container.

19. Anthea Kraut (2009) notes that, 'As

conventionally conceived, these dance traditions are created and maintained by communities of anonymous producers'... She goes on to quote Kealiinohomoku saying, 'Let it be noted once and for all, that within the various "ethnologic" dance worlds there are also patrons, dancing masters, choreographers and performers

with names woven into the historical fabric.' (77) In 'Race-ing Choreographic Copyright' in *Worlding Dance* edited by Susan Foster.

20. Kartomi: 2004

21. Interview by Murtala with Mursalam Ardy





intellectual property and copyrights that are enshrined in the laws of the Republic of Indonesia such that copyright, *is the exclusive right of creators or the rights holders to announce or reproduce their creations...*(2002)

Murtala, himself, has lived dramatic changes to Acehese dances at close quarters. He took a group of fishermen to perform one of their dances (not *Ranup Lampuan*) at an official event in Jakarta. The men were astonished that the dance which they knew and performed as one that would go on for many hours would only be shown for a couple of minutes. But on return to their home village Murtala noted that they became unwilling to dance for as long as previously. After the tsunami he went to their village to find out if they and their dance might have survived – but was observed asking questions and was taken prisoner by the Free Aceh Movement (GAM) for questioning on suspicion of being an Indonesian government spy and held for 6 hours.²³

For Murtala, the recognition of individual artists is important because the latter provide models for younger generations of ways of actively helping to change or shape community values through observation and creation. Observing realities can be critical as well as affirmative, realities themselves can be violent. He himself plans a dance which will use the legs and feet rather than the hands and arms normally used in the body percussion dances, as an observation of and comment on the Acehese tendency, historically, according to him, to ‘put the boot in’.

SOVEREIGNTY

Many interesting parallels between *Trio A* and *Ranup Lampuan* are suggested in the discussions that take place in ‘*Trio A*, Documentation, Genealogy, Notation’ and ‘Yuslizar and his

creation that became traditional’. The two essays tackle the question of what I have suggested could be called a dance’s ‘sovereignty’, but provide different perspectives upon what is at stake in that question. Both dances, these articles maintain, were authored by individuals, Yuslizar and Yvonne Rainer; both have been transmitted and undergone continual transformation through time and become ‘owned’ by communities at large. Indeed dances play a significant role in forging and binding communities. Catterson’s comment that she and others dubbed *Trio A* ‘the people’s dance’ suggests this was potentially the case with *Trio A*.

How are the dances different? Yuslizar worked as an artist for his community but, according to Murtala, has been forgotten. Rainer contested the status quo with her dance and is remembered as a key figure of the avant garde. But how are distinctions made between different dances at the level of discourses which are used to represent them, and how is what is at stake in maintaining a dance’s identity implied within such discourses? In ‘*Trio A* Documentation, Genealogy, Notation’, the identity of the dance is a function of its singular artistic ownership and the dance’s inherent values as dance (or ‘non-dance’) – the sovereignty of the author and of the work. This sovereignty, Rainer’s essay shows us, is challenged as long as the dance remains in repertoire.²⁴ For *Ranup Lampuan*, even though Murtala argues for Yuslizar’s rights as creator within the framework of artists’ copyright and for the value of generations of artists holding a mirror up to their community, the dance’s identity comes to be understood as traditional and communal. As time passes or as the dance travels far from the capital, Banda Aceh, it remains linked not to the name of Yuslizar,

22. See Buckland 2006: ‘The Tradition is usually accorded a mythic past, as the origins of most customary practices are deemed to lie beyond living memory and written and iconographic records. (200)

23. See Kartomi (2010) on music after the tsunami and ‘the conflict’.

24. Giersdorf writes ‘...I always ask myself, How could a choreography that questioned

everything about dance that preceded it still find its way into the Western dance canon?’ (19) Writing of *Satisfyin Lover*, which she re-visited for the ‘Falling Behind’ series (see ‘How we walk, sit and stand’ this issue) Elizabeth Dempster has written: ‘In reading accounts of *Satisfyin Lover* one might assume that its significance was primarily strategic; this, that is was an

iconoclastic action destined principally to shock and provoke a complacent dance audience, with little relevance beyond the particular time and place of its creation (the late sixties, New York). *Satisfyin Lover* endures, however, as a work of considerable richness, simplicity and grace, founded on a profound respect for and curiosity about the human body’. ‘Watching Dancing:

but to Aceh Province or to 'Indonesia'; and, significantly, changes in (the) dance can seem to threaten the sovereignty of the states, or the identities of the communities or 'nations' within them, to which the dance is intimately and politically linked.

Thus, in a recent article in *The Age* newspaper (15/08/11) entitled 'Thais lay claim to lord of the dance gesture', Lindsay Murdoch recounts how *ownership of a graceful hand position that is part of traditional (sic) dance and shadow plays* has become a source of nationalist sentiment and conflict feeding into territorial conflict between Thailand and Cambodia. The Cambodians, Murdoch writes, have laid claim to the 'jeeb' and have had their Khmer Classical Dance listed with the UNESCO intangible cultural heritage register. Now, *Thailand's new culture minister Sukumol Kunplome has made ownership of the jeeb a priority. "They are part of the Thai cultural heritage, so if another country has registered them, we have to find a solution", she said.*²⁵

Amartya Sen (2006) has argued that *a major source of conflict in the contemporary world is the presumption that people can be uniquely categorized based on religion or culture* and that *this unique divisiveness is much more confrontational than the universe of plural and diverse classifications that shape the world in which we actually live.* (2007 p.xv–xvi). Sen argues that human beings might be better thought as being able to decide which affiliation from a plurality of identities might be most relevant to them in any situation. His perspective enjoins us to question those discourses that almost exclusively tie so-called traditional dances, gestures or movements to national or ethnic identities. Does a valid and important concern to maintain what are perceived to be a dance's values in the face of its ongoing transformation have to fuel discrimination or support ethnic

conflict? As Sen argues, there are many other axes upon which an individual or indeed a sequence of body movements might be categorised and differentiated from or related to other individuals or movement sequences. The axis of ethnicity is only one of many: take *Trio A*, for example. The dance clearly has many 'identities' – it is a work of *avant garde* iconoclasm, 'the people's dance', and a canonical or iconic North American dance.²⁶

Caught in a cultural identity politics are not only some dances more than others but those who happen to perform them. A *Trio A* dancer is not regarded as identical with the dance – even though, as noted, Catterson identifies with *Trio A* to the extent of saying that she would never let it leave her body. But dancers of so-called traditional dances are seen to be identical with their dance. The non-Western performer's identity and the dance's identity are both collapsed into ethnicity, an identification underpinned by an essentialised ethnic body.²⁷

Murtala's insistence on remembering Yuslizar, however, helps to bring forward the fact that *Ranup Lampuan* is learned by individuals from teachers in studios (or *sanggars*) – and is not identical with or 'natural' to the people who dance it, people who themselves may identify variously as dancers, as city or country dwellers, as men, as women, as young or old, as much as they might identify as Acehnese.

Going further, Murtala's insistence on recognising Yuslizar as an individual creator in the context of apparent community ownership of *Ranup Lampuan* may speak as much as of a concern for the dance's founding values – a reining in in the way that Rainer sought to take back her dance – as it might represent a claim for the dance not to have to become what Sen calls a 'martial art', that is, a dance implicated

Kinaesthetic Perception', *Study Guide: Introduction to the Performing Arts*. Deakin University 1989.

25. Diana Taylor (2003) has noted the urgency of acknowledging 'the specific characteristics of performance' as unstable where international organisations (such as UNESCO) and funding organisations make decisions about "world" cultural

rights and "intangible heritage".' (2) 26. Giersdorf notes that the canon is an important vehicle 'for the establishment of national cultures and, therefore, national identities' (20) When an *avant garde* work becomes canonical it establishes the culture as being characterised by dynamism and 'the new' rather than by stasis and tradition.

27. Susan Reed writes that "The equation of dance with "culture" has become so commonplace that dance performances are often viewed as exhibiting the essential "character" or "spirit" of an ethnic group or nation.' (2010, p.5)





inevitably in a communal identity and potential armed conflict. Murtala's concern that individual authorship of *Ranup Lampuan* be recognised may be a concern manifested in a situation where the dance was created and is continually transformed within the dynamics, discourses and events of the struggle for Acehese autonomy from or within Indonesia, of calls for Acehese partition on the part of non-Acehese minorities, and of post-colonial processes of maintaining Indonesian 'unity in diversity'.²⁸ Understood as an Acehese rather than as Yuslizar's dance, *Ranup Lampuan* comes to be identified with provincial as well as potentially dominant ethnic Acehese or alternatively national Indonesian culture where these dominant axes of identity are all grounds of conflict throughout the post-colonial era. Such conflicts, Hardt and Negri argue in their discussion of the new global form of sovereignty, *make the fabric of global relations more fluid and present more malleable material for control* (2000, p.37). In other words, if *Ranup Lampuan* has come to be viewed as a traditional culture dance, how much does this have to do with dominant discourses of ethnic identity, (de-)territoriality and legality as anything inherent to the dance itself? And this question would apply also to *Trio A* if it were seen primarily as a United States dance.

Both *Trio A* and *Ranup Lampuan* exist as 'sovereign' dances that are nevertheless in continual transformation/deformation or becoming. But within enduring representations of a division between 'art' and 'artefact', the sovereignty of the former is tied to an author and its own internal consistency, the other to blood (ethnicity) and territory. It is the luxury perhaps of *Trio A* – despite the disturbance it caused in assumptions about the nature of

dance, and despite having become potentially canonical (i.e. part of the West's 'tradition') – not to have become connected to territorial or ethnic conflict.²⁹ The assumed individual authorship of Western works of art and the ideology that they are *not* 'ethnic' suggests that artists themselves can create conditions for maintaining the sovereignty of their works – rather than these being subject to the wider identity politics that a dance like *Ranup Lampuan* or *saman* or of a hand gesture like the *jeeb* currently cannot escape – even though, of course, so-called art dance in the West 'answers to government priorities' expressed in terms of promoting national identity.³⁰

But in neither authored works nor traditional dances can the political dream of an absolute cultural or individual identity come true. It is well-documented, for example that, throughout the development of American modern dance understood as a series of avant gardes, non-Western borrowings and influences have been many; and Kartomi (2007) writes of the body percussion dances of the Aceh region that they are 'believed to have developed in rituals practised in pre-Muslim time, when ancestral and nature-spirit veneration combined with Hindu-Buddhist beliefs were strong'.³¹

I am not trying to elide real differences in intention that may have existed in the creation of *Trio A* and *Ranup Lampuan*. The two essays I have been discussing, however, help to clarify that their difference is not simply the function of a tradition/modernity or culture/art opposition. Both dances have complex, multiple identities and multiple and criss-crossing similarities and differences along numerous axes; and the name of each

28. On calls for partition from within Aceh see 'Dividing Aceh? Minorities, Partition Movements and State Reform in Aceh Province' by Stefan Ehrentraut. May 2010. <http://www.ari.nus.edu.sg/publications.asp?pubtypeid=21>. Viewed August 12, 2011.

29. Giersdorf op.cit. writes that 'Despite Yvonne Rainer's subversive refusal to stage *Trio A* as a spectacle, to have it represent or narrate social structures, or to engage with

the audience in a traditional manner, the landmarks of canonization have all been put upon it.' (19)

30. See Grau and Jordan eds. 2000.

31. See Allen, M. H. (1997) and Kartomi (2007).

32. Sivasiampai, S. 'Guru Editor's note: Give the Lady a Hand' 25/08/11 at <http://www.bangkokpost.com/print/253426/>. Viewed 5/11/11.

33. In *Hitler's Dancers* (2004) Lilian Karina and Marion Kant discuss how during the Third Reich Hitler and his various bureaucracies attempted unsuccessfully to eliminate social and other dance movements deemed not to be 'German'. See also Grau and Jordan (2000) on processes and discourses that nationalise contemporary dance.

dance denotes an ongoing practice whose performances are specific but unstable gestures made and apprehended by social actors in specific local situations.

Back to the Internet to find a last word. It comes from Sumati Sivasiampai, 'Guru Editor' at the *Bangkok Post* who joined the online debate about ownership of the jeeb: *Can't people just accept that we share history with lots of countries, so obviously there's bound to be commonalities in our cultures? That would make life a lot easier instead of wasting time claiming ownership to something so silly.*³²

But there's the familiar slippage again... as surely it is not the fascinating jeeb itself that is 'silly' but the discourses that invest it with nationalistic fervour?³³

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ATLANTA EKE / CULTURAL TERROR

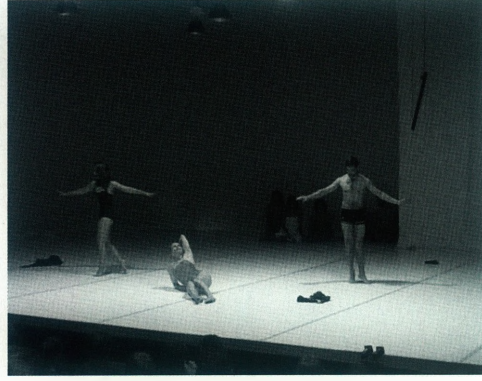
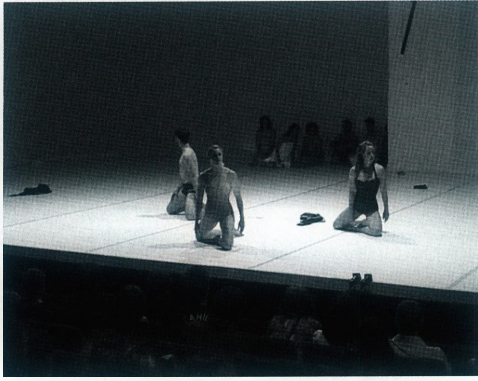
During the 2011 Dance Massive Festival I invited Tim Darbyshire and Amelia McQueen to work with me to create and perform a short dance work, uninvited, onstage at the Malthouse Theatre following a performance of Amplification by BalletLab. Until now there has been little information provided about this event, so that people who saw or heard about it could have their own imaginings about the function of such an action. Following is a text we have written to inform our community, and we hope that this will stimulate dialogue and even further action! This was not an act of self-promotion, or an attack on BalletLab's performance, but a provocation to stimulate artists to think about cultural production and context.

Please read the following text for a detailed description of the event. If these ideas stimulate anything in you, we would like to hear about it! Please send responses to culturalterror@gmail.com

Please feel free to circulate this text amongst your contacts.

On 22nd March 2011, three Melbourne artists, myself, Tim Darbyshire and Amelia McQueen stepped up, uninvited, onto the stage at the conclusion of the renowned company BalletLab's preview performance of *Amplification* during the Dance Massive Festival. We shared with the surprised audience a performance built around specific aspects of Australian dance: its history, its current jargon, and the unknown potential that is The Future. We offered the performance, wanting to redefine the theatre from a 'sacred' or docile space into a public platform for art to be shared.

The three and a half minute performance was a contemporary adaptation of Ballets Russes's *Beach Drama* (1939). The original footage of *Beach Drama* can be found on YouTube and shows some scenes of early Russian ballerinas dancing on Bondi Beach, including a controversial depiction of Australian Indigenous culture.



Interested in this bizarre moment in Australian dance history, we recreated the original choreography with a contemporary spin, using common industry terms to describe the path of the performing artist in the current times including: *emerging, diverging, mid-career, established, dance company, first-stage creative development* and *cultural-awareness*.

The adaptation *Australian Dance – The Future*, was a performance which considered the current terrain of Australian dance, and how it is programmed, organised and presented – using the Dance Massive Festival as a clear marketable example. It served to provoke people to think about the possibilities of where and how dance can exist in the future.

As unprogrammed artists we are not against organizational structures such as curated festivals. We are interested in working within these centres of power in order to produce change. Guerrilla artists, but in a loose sense, we performed unannounced, unapproved and spontaneously in a non-violent protest. As unprogrammed artists we took a risk and offered a performance as a provocation to audiences and artists alike to consider alternative possibilities for cultural production and the development of dance in Australia. We imagine a world in which artists are developing and framing performance within their own rules and regulations, rather than following the cultural protocols that dominate the contemporary dance industry in Australia.

We are producing performance as an act of protest toward the opaque nature of curatorship and programming, endemic in the Australian cultural system. We are not waiting to be programmed. We are programming ourselves into the remarkable festivals and performance platforms cultivating the city of Melbourne. We are performing actions that create new spaces and opportunities for others to do the same.

We act with a sense of urgency, liberation and even pleasure. We feel we have a responsibility to challenge notions of preconceived production agreements and to rethink the established conventions of dance performance and production that no longer fulfill the capacity of what dance can be. Actively affirming our presence through the inscription of our own history to pave the future of art, we are encouraging others to do the same. We work to activate others to DO in order to dissolve the pacifying role of being an onlooker in one's own community.

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APPENDIX: STEVE PAXTON / SCORE FOR SATISFYIN LOVER (1967)

GROUP A

1. walk 2/5. 10 second stop. exit.
2. cue 10 steps. walk across.
3. cue 20 steps. walk across.
4. cue #1 pauses. walk across.
5. cue #1 pauses. walk 1/5.
stop 20 seconds. exit.
- 6, 7, 8. cue 5 steps. enter together.
#6 falling gradually behind
(at exit be 15 steps behind).
7 & 8 walk across.

GROUP B

9. walk across.
10. cue 20 steps. walk to 4/5.
pause 1 minute. exit
11. cue #10 passes halfway.
walk to 1/2. stop 5 seconds. exit.
12. cue #10 passes halfway.
walk to 2/3. stop 20 seconds. exit.
13. cue #10 passes halfway.
walk to chair 3. sit 30 seconds. exit.

GROUP C

14. walk across.
15. cue 15 steps. walk to 5ft of exit.
stop 30 seconds. exit
16. cue 10 steps. walk across.
17. cue 3 steps. walk across passing #16.
exit.
18. cue #10 passes halfway.
walk to chair 3. sit 30 seconds. exit.
19. cue 5 steps. walk 1/3.
stop 15 seconds. walk to chair 1.
sit 30 seconds. exit.
20. cue #19 stops. walk across.

GROUP D

21. walk across.
22. cue 20 steps. walk to 1/2.
pause 5 seconds. walk 4/5.
pause 15 seconds. exit.
23. cue #22 stops. walk across.
- 24, 25, 26, 27. cue #23 passes 3/5. walk across
casually changing relative positions.
- 28, 29. cue 20 steps. walk across.

GROUP E

30. walk across.
31. cue 15 steps. walk to 1/5.
stop and face audience. 45 seconds. exit.
32. cue 10 steps. walk to chair 3,
sit for 15 seconds. walk to 4/5.
stop 20 seconds. exit.
33. cue #32 sits. walk across.
34. cue 20 steps. walk across.
35. cue 10 steps. walk to 1/2.
stop 15 seconds. return to chair 1.
sit until final person (timekeeper) passes.
exit.
36. cue 5 steps. walk to 1/2.
stop 15 seconds. walk to 2/3.
stop 15 seconds. exit.
37. cue #36 stops. walk to 1/8.
stop 20 seconds. exit.

GROUP F

38. walk across.
39. cue #38 passes 4/5. walk across.
40. cue 15 steps. walk to 7/8. stop 5 seconds. exit.
41. cue #40 stops. walk across.
42. cue 15 steps. walk across.

NOTES TO DIRECTOR Intervals between groups is to be determined in each performance space according to your judgement. (I begin with thirty-second intervals.) A timekeeper cues the first person in each group, and is the last person to start across the stage. The last person in each group keeps the group card during rehearsals and is responsible for notifying the director of absences, for instructing the other members, et cetera. At no time in the piece should the performance space remain empty for long, and the pause between groups should not be noticeable as such. Costuming is casual clothes with some exceptions as is convenient for the performers. The walking occurs in an imaginary track ten feet wide, the length of which is considered performance space. The track goes from entrance to exit, all performers entering on one side and exiting on the other. In about the center of the space a little in front of the track, three chairs are casually arranged, oriented to face front, several feet apart. Performers leave the track to sit, return to it to continue walking, do not pass in front of chairs they will not sit on. This dance was made for forty people in a space 200 feet long. The number of people can vary from thirty to eighty-four, and the space can be as little as sixty-five feet or horizon to horizon for stationary audience.

NOTES TO PERFORMERS The pace is an easy walk, but not slow. Performance manner is serene and collected. This dance is about walking, standing, and sitting. Try to keep these elements clear and pure. The gaze is to be directed forward relative to the body, but should not be especially fixed. The mind should be at rest. Cues for the first person in each group come from the timer. Subsequently cue from the person ahead of you, unless otherwise directed in the score.

_____ MAMMAD AIDANI is an inter-disciplinary scholar. His work integrates approaches from phenomenological and hermeneutic philosophy, linguistic and existential psychology and cultural theory and theatre studies. He has researched and published on Iranian Diaspora, belonging, identity, and migration. His book *Welcoming the Stranger: Narratives of Identity and Belonging in an Iranian Diaspora* was published in 2010. Dr Aidani has taught at the University of Melbourne, La Trobe University, Victoria University, and Lancaster University, UK in disciplines ranging from Philosophy, Creative Writing, Theatre, Social Psychology, International History Since 1945, Migration and Refugee Studies, Cosmopolitanism and Multiculturalism. He is currently engaged with an ARC Discovery Research Project that investigates *Narrating trauma and displacement: historical and cultural experiences of Iran-born men in Australia*. He has been recipient of many awards and prizes including Australian Arts Council for Drama, Postdoctoral Fellowships from Williamson Scholarship.

_____ MARIE BARDET is a Ph.D. in Philosophy, University of Paris 8 and University of Buenos Aires, and has a current postdoctoral grant from MINCYT (UBA) in Argentina in cooperation (ECOS) with the Laboratoire de recherche sur les Logiques Contemporaines de la Philosophie at Paris 8. She also participates in the research group Epistemology of Somatic Practices directed by Isabelle Ginot at the Dance Department at Paris 8. Her work focuses particularly on a theoretical-practical approach of the issue of temporality in "improvisation" practices. Her *Penser et Mouvoir. Une rencontre entre danse et philosophie, (Thinking and Moving. An encounter between dance and philosophy)* Paris : L'Harmattan, was published in 2011.

_____ ELIZABETH DEMPSTER lectures in Performance Studies at Victoria University, Melbourne. A former dancer/choreographer, she was a founding member of Dance Exchange company and her choreographic work has been presented throughout Australia and at Dance Umbrella, UK. Her research and writing has been published in various journals and books including *Bodies of the Text: Dance as Theory, Literature as Dance and Imagining Australian Space: Cultural Studies and Spatial Inquiry*. She is a founding and continuing co-editor of *Writings on Dance*. _____ ATLANTA EKE is an Australian artist with interests in dance and choreography in an expanded field. Formally educated at Deakin University Melbourne, since 2003 Atlanta has been active as a performer and creator presenting her experimental work throughout Australia and Europe in a variety of formats. She has worked with artists such as Deborah Hay, Xavier Le Roy, Sally Gardner, Lucy Guerin among others. _____ SALLY GARDNER is a co-editor of *Writings on Dance* and a Lecturer in dance at Deakin University, Melbourne. She is a former dancer who contributes regularly to local and international dance and humanities' forums. She recently translated Laurence Louppe's *Poétique de la danse contemporaine* into English (*Poetics of contemporary dance*. 2010 Dance Books). She is a member of the Institute of Postcolonial Studies, an independent centre located in Melbourne.

_____ ISABELLE GINOT is a Professor in the dance department of the University of Paris 8, St Denis, where she directs a course in "Techniques of the body and the therapeutic world". She is also a Feldenkrais practitioner. Her early research, in which she analysed contemporary dance works from the point of view of their perception, led her to investigate dancers' practices, in particular 'marginal' somatic techniques. These have now become the main focus of her teaching and research, in terms of their epistemologies

and their uses in the medical and therapeutic worlds. These in turn are focused around the question of the body image – a problem which engages aesthetics, anthropology, phenomenology, neuro-science and movement analysis. Several of her articles are available at www.danse.univparis8.fr _____ REBECCA HILTON is a Melbourne based performer, teacher, choreographer and director. She has performed in and contributed to the work of a range of artists including Russell Dumas, Stephen Petronio, Mathew Barney, Michael Clark, Tere O'Connor, Jennifer Monson, John Jasperse, Margie Medlin and Lucy Guerin. Becky generates work in a variety of contexts including collaborative community events, choreographies for tertiary institutions and commissioned work for companies. She teaches in training institutions, for festivals and for dance companies locally, nationally and internationally. Some current activities include: generating HELLO, a series of biographical solos for the Hermsillo based dance company La Lagrima (Mexico Festival), facilitating Danza Para Todos a community dance project for a multi generational cast of 100 Argentines (Rosario), teaching at PARTS (Brussels) and for Sasha Waltz and Guests (Berlin) and pursuing a writing project about dance, dancers and dancing. She is the 2010/11 recipient of a Fellowship from the Dance Board of the Australia Council.

_____ PATRICIA HOFFBAUER is a Brazilian-born choreographer, director, performer, and educator. Besides creating her own work, she has developed a 15-year artistic collaboration with writer/performer George Emilio Sanchez with whom she has toured throughout the United States and Latin America. Hoffbauer has also collaborated with Guy Yarden, Nayland Blake, Sara Rudner, Jennifer Miller, Cathy Weis, Matthew Maguire, amongst others. She has taught at Wesleyan University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Miami Dade Community College, Sarah Lawrence College, New York University's Tisch School of the Arts' summer program, Pratt Institute, Marymount Manhattan College, and Yale University, and, currently, at Hunter College's Dance Program and Princeton University's Lewis Arts Center. In 2002, she was invited by Yvonne Rainer to perform Rainer's solo *Three Seascapes* at Jacob's Pillow, and since then she has been working with Rainer and the Raindears. *Para-dice* premiered at Danspace Project as part of the Platform Series in 2009. In 2010, she created "For This Reason I am Naming This Dance" for New York University's Tisch School of the Arts' Second Avenue Dance Company. Her writing appears in *Movement Research Performance Journal*, *New Visions* edited by Ella Shohat, published by the New Museum, and the New York Foundation for the Arts Journal.

_____ GRETEL TAYLOR is a dance artist whose work is often site-specific. Recent works include her solo video installation *Still Landing*, filmed on Warlpiri country near Yuendumu in Northern Territory. In 2008 she completed a practice-based PhD exploring relationships between body, place and identity in Australia. Gretel has trained extensively in movement improvisation, Butoh and Body Weather in Australia, Japan and Europe. Past collaborators include Jill Orr, Jo Lloyd and James Geurts. Over the past six years she has been employed as a lecturer/tutor in Performance Studies at Victoria University. Gretel has visited Yuendumu many times since 2005, in various creative, research and community capacities. She continues her involvement with the Warlpiri women's dance camp project as arts worker/performance facilitator.



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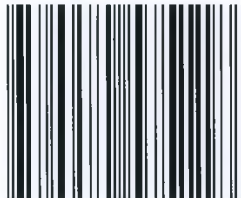
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