

Walking in Sydney looking for dancing: an auto-ethnographic mapping of the place of independent dance

Author:

Long, Julie-Anne

Publication Date:

2010

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/23477>

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**Walking in Sydney
Looking for Dancing
An Auto-ethnographic Mapping
of the Place of Independent Dance**

Julie-Anne Long

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

School of English, Media and Performing Arts
The University of New South Wales

May, 2010

Abstract

Walking in Sydney Looking for Dancing applies a self-reflexive auto-ethnographic fieldwork methodology to the previously uncharted world of the independent dance sector in Sydney. At my own historical point, I map the places and spaces where independent dance-making and presentation occurs, while also remembering the sites where dancers used to work. The starting-point for this research was a concern, shared by many in the performing arts, that the small-to-medium dance sector in Australia had been in a state of crisis for at least a decade. This thesis applies and demonstrates the relevance of complexity theory to an understanding of the way in which the independent dance sector as a unique self-organizing system, adapts, survives and repositions itself in times of crisis.

This thesis examines the decreasing number of independent dance studios in Sydney over the past two decades and argues for the importance of these places for supporting innovative dance practices and the community networks that support them. It analyses the way in which the construction of arts precincts has altered independent artists' perceptions of their identity and their sense of belonging within the community, and in which these precincts dictate certain kinds of interaction between artists and institutions. Underpinning my view of material places and animated spaces where dance is made and presented are the conceptual tools of Michel de Certeau's notions of place and space, and of *strategy* and *tactics*, together with Michel Foucault's idea of *heterotopia*. Drawing on these theories and ideas of complexity, place and space, this thesis argues for urgent need to maintain a range of places 'to see dance' and spaces 'to make dance'.

This project contributes to an examination of the status and dynamics of the independent dance sector in Sydney and to the discussion which is necessary if innovative dance practice is not only to survive, but also to contribute to the maintenance of a vibrantly diverse culture. Through a blending of written voices and genres, reflecting a particular time and place, this thesis aims to contribute to an ongoing dialogue about the way in which the processes of artistic work—especially those of the independent dance sector in Sydney—are managed and fostered in Australia.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the University of New South Wales for providing me with an Australian Postgraduate Award, which supported my research for the first part of this project.

A number of people have been generous enough to assist me with various aspects of the work at different stages of the research. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge my supervisors: Dr. Moe Meyer for his support at the outset, Clare Grant for her sustained attention and intuitive responses throughout the entire project, and Dr. Meg Mumford who, as supervisor during the second half of my candidature, persevered with questioning and challenging my often stubborn assumptions, reminding me to be precise and suppose nothing. I wish to thank staff and students of the School of English, Media and Performing Arts who over the time it took to complete this thesis offered fellowship, support and research opportunities. Conversations with Dr. Yuji Sone, and detailed reading of early drafts by Dr. Bryoni Trezise, provided much appreciated advice. It was the camaraderie of fellow postgraduate students especially Rayma Watkinson, Caroline Wake and Dan Angeloro, which sustained me on a day-to-day basis. I am grateful to my proof-readers Dr. John Golder and Dr. Garry Lester for their invaluable observations about my writing tendencies and for helping me to realise the submission of this thesis. I value my exchanges with Dr. Erin Brannigan who read parts of the thesis in the final stage of the project and provided pertinent feedback and the encouragement I needed to complete. Thanks also to my friends Jan Idle, Su Goldfish and Susan Gibb for assisting me with technical support in the production of the thesis, and to Heidrun Löhr for her luminous photographs. The research was made possible by the kind assistance of Performance Space staff, One Extra staff and Critical Path staff, particularly Amanda Card who in many capacities as friend, peer and mentor stirred me to undertake this endeavour, whether she was aware of it or not.

A special thank you to the artists I discuss in this thesis who generously granted me interviews. My inspiration for this thesis originates in the work of these artists and also the work of many dance artists who do not appear on these pages. Without their genuine interest and continuing enthusiasm for the project, it would not have been sustained. Thanks to anyone who ever asked ‘How’s it going?’ or ‘Are you still doing that?’ and in doing so spurred me on in small often-infuriating ways—you know who you are.

My warmest thanks goes to my family, who supported me over the lengthy journey of this thesis—especially my parents Pam and Kevin Long who have made frequent visits to assist with whatever was needed, and to my brothers Greg and Mark for their genuinely concerned inquiries from afar. Above all my gratitude and love goes to my son Buster Wilson for his good humour, patience and ‘you can do it’ attitude. Without his understanding I could not have done this.

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Introduction

Where Have All the Dancers Gone?

In the mid-1980s I was a dancer in a full-time dance company in Sydney.¹ The One Extra Company (One Extra), operated like a family group, with interdependent, often intimate, sometimes abusive, professional and social relationships. These relationships were a central part of my life and some have continued to this day. During my time with One Extra I experienced the most potent sense of belonging to a community I have ever felt, a community that comprised not only the close group of company members, but also the clusters of artists and associated organizations that gathered in and around the company's studios. The company's physical home incorporated two dance studios and an office on the third floor of a run-down building on George Street in the heart of Sydney's Central Business District (CBD). Although a physically non-descript place with its suite of featureless rooms, these dance studios were home to a vibrant hub of intersecting networks of artists who played an important role in generating and facilitating a diverse dance community in Sydney.

Dancers' bodies moving, sweating, talking, looking, laughing and resting animated the studios. It was here that training classes were held for dancers each morning.² Throughout the day, after the morning training, the company created new dance work and rehearsed existing repertoire. In the evenings and on weekends the studios were available to independent dance artists for rehearsals and development of their

¹ From 1985-87 I was a dancer with The One Extra Company. The studio I write about here was located at 363 George Street, Sydney. For an extended discussion of One Extra and its studios, see Chapter Three pp. 106-14.

² These classes provided a professional training opportunity and importantly served as a social meeting-point for professional dancers who were working freelance in Sydney, as well as for dancers visiting Sydney. Active word-of-mouth communication enabled information about the classes to be easily circulated. Open invitations and nominal costs made these classes accessible to all.

practice, and for regular informal studio performances by these artists and company members. The One Extra home was important as both a physical place and symbolic centre. Crucially the concept of ‘home’ is tied to the idea of community and connotations of belonging.

Throughout this thesis the term ‘home’ is used to refer to notions of place and as a metaphor. I relate home to the physical aspects of studio and theatre buildings, of various spatial scales, where artists form attachments. I also use home to refer to the organization and structures of these places that facilitate familiar and comfortable co-operative working relationships between artists and organization. The dance home provides a haven or ‘shelter’ (on this, see Chapter Five) for artistic experimentation and a place of relative safety for artists to take risks. Overall, the home of One Extra endorsed the development and sustenance of a supportive creative environment and community and provided a vital place to meet and make face-to-face connections within the dance community, for both independent artists and for the small-to-medium dance companies in Sydney.

A sense of belonging to this local dance community was generated by the interplay of both the formal organization of the company on the one hand, and informal networking between individuals on the other.³ In addition, this dance community emerged in great part through the interactions between a number of dance studios, scattered around the inner city at the time, all of which were managed in similar ways to that of the One Extra home.⁴ These dance studios supported and challenged the active processes of new dance making, accommodating the diversity and intensity of connections and networks formed by dance artists in Sydney.

Since the early 1990s funding cuts have decimated small-to-medium dance companies: some previously full-time companies have been unable to continue and have closed down, and others have been reduced to project-based schedules, employing dancers on a part-time basis. Subsequently, the studio homes these

³ Alison Gilchrist, ‘Design for Living: The Challenge of Sustainable Communities’, in *Sustainable Communities: The Potential of Eco-Neighbourhoods*, ed. by Hugh Barton (London: Earthscan, 2000), pp. 147-86 (p. 151).

⁴ For a list of these studios see Chapter Three p. 106.

companies were previously able to maintain have disappeared.⁵ In more recent times finding and sustaining dance places, like the One Extra studio described above, has become a constant challenge for the small-to-medium and independent dance sector in Sydney despite the recognised value of such studios. The current lack of places where independent dance practice and community can be supported is constantly discussed in both everyday conversations and more formal forums within the independent dance sector and broader arts community. This thesis is, in part, based on my own experiences and observations regarding the place of, and the possibilities for, dance practice and community identification for independent dance artists in Sydney over the past twenty-five years, from 1985 to 2010. Through an analysis of the places most suited to the dance processes and organization of this independent dance community, it argues for the need to support such places and processes, if a richly diverse dance sector is to be maintained and developed.

Dancing in the City

Throughout the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s in Sydney, most small-to-medium dance ensembles worked in an *ad hoc* selection of places-for-hire, studios scattered around the city, located above shops, in buildings beside construction sites, alongside offices and adjacent to restaurants. In some situations dancers found themselves having to turn their music down so as to not disturb the doctor's surgery next door, or turning it up in order to compete with the karate class upstairs. These small-scale studios were essential to the functioning of the entire sector, not only because they operated in an interconnected way, as dancers moved from one in which to train, to another in which to see a performance, but also because of the shifting spatial patterns these dance studios created in the city, so that the activities of dance intersected with the activities of the city.

⁵ This refers to small-to-medium companies such as One Extra, Founder/Artistic Director Kai Tai Chan (1985-1991), Entr'acte Theatre (1985-1993) Founders/Artistic Directors: Elizabeth Burke and Pierre Thibaudeau; D'arc Swan (1982-1997) Founder/Artistic Director Chris Jannides; and Dance Exchange, Founder /Artistic Director Russell Dumas (1976-1996). These dates refer to the periods when each company was in receipt of ongoing funding, enabling them to maintain studios. By the late 1990s none of these companies were able to maintain their once thriving studio homes. Entr'acte and D'arc Swan had closed for business, One Extra had restructured from a choreographer-led company to a producer-led organization that hired studio space when needed, and Dance Exchange hired local halls on a casual basis.

I should declare here my personal preference for locating my artistic practice in work places situated amongst other activities in the city. For me, there are numerous benefits to the city as a place of heterogeneity, where unrelated things occur in close proximity—although not in the same room—as one another. Diversity in a city setting inspires and energises my artistic practice; the possibility of encounters with people who have different concerns from mine challenges me to meet, to mix and to change. An openness to change can break down the fixedness of an artistic identity, and prompt a more nuanced engagement with the everyday world and hence with one's artistic practice. I argue that this location of artists working amongst the activities of the city is quite unlike the experience of making artistic work in a separated arts precinct, which is most likely where people close in on themselves and exclude others.

In the 1980s many dancers went about the processes and practices of making and presenting dance in studios, while coming and going through the public spaces of the city where their work was located. They brushed up against others—lawyers, shop assistants, labourers, secretaries and tourists—all of whom were involved in different types of conduct.⁶ Roland Barthes' description of a city as a 'place of our meeting with the other' resonates with my memory of these interactions.⁷ There was a certain tolerance and understanding on the streets of the city, and acceptance of different pursuits occurring side-by-side, which resulted in a type of support for and celebration of such diversity. Similarly sociologist Richard Sennett suggests that urban dwellers are always 'people in the presence of otherness'.⁸ My recollection is that I felt *in place* in this milieu of difference, which was such a feature of the city of Sydney in the 1980s. It stands in striking contrast to my experience as an artist in the same city two decades later.

Significant government funding in NSW has gone into the development of well-resourced arts precincts in which to house Sydney-based flagship companies and key

⁶ For a description and examples of these types of encounters see Chapter Three pp. 106-13.

⁷ Roland Barthes, 'Semiology and the Urban', in *The City and the Sign: An Introduction to Urban Semiotics*, ed. by M. Gottdiener and A. P. Lagopoulos (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), pp. 87-98 (p. 96).

⁸ Richard Sennett, *The Conscience of the Eye: The Design and Social Life of Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1990), p. 123.

arts organizations. This pattern began in the late 1950s with the Sydney Opera House, continued in the 1980s with the Wharf Precinct and can be seen in the recent development of the CarriageWorks Contemporary Arts Precinct.⁹ Subsidised artists are encouraged to work in relation to these arts precincts, as public funding becomes increasingly dependent on producing and presenting in these heavily subsidised places.

Since the loss of a significant number of small to medium dance companies from the early 1990s onwards there has been a proliferation of dance artists who identify themselves as independent—that is independent of the major companies. Some of these independent artists were previously employed in the companies that were forced to close as a result of funding cuts. Other independent artists are recently graduated tertiary dance students who, having completed undergraduate study find themselves looking for opportunities in a dance profession with few employment prospects. While some dance artists are independent as a result of circumstances, however, many, especially those with considerable previous experiences in different dance settings, are independent through choice.¹⁰

Increasingly, independent dance artists find themselves working in dance places that are aligned with institutions and organizations, most commonly in institutions such as universities and purpose-built arts venues and precincts. These precincts are often located, intentionally, in places that are detached from the day-to-day business activities of the city. In 1970 Richard Sennett coined the term ‘purified communities’, expressing his concern for these groups who build ‘walls’ both literally and metaphorically around themselves.¹¹ Through spatial segregation these communities seek to maintain their status quo and protect their advantage. They display intolerance against people and activities that are different from their own community. In this thesis I develop Sennett’s idea of purified communities to

⁹ In the mid-1980s the top floor of Pier 4, The Wharf was refurbished for the Sydney Theatre Company, initiated and paid for by the NSW State Government. This was followed in 1987 by a refurbishment of the lower half of The Wharf for the Sydney Dance Company. See Chapter Four for discussion of The Wharf. For discussion of CarriageWorks see Chapter Five.

¹⁰ I discuss this issue in Chapter Two with an analysis of the context for this increase in independent artists.

¹¹ Richard Sennett, *The Uses of Disorder: Personal Identity and City Life* (London: Allen Lane, 1971).

support my concerns that the artistic communities resident in art precincts in Sydney are what I call ‘closed communities’. Whilst there is a certain comfort in places where people are involved in similar and complementary types of activity, there are occasions when the identity of the independent artist and their work are not compatible with the identity and practices of these institutions. Government’s emphasis on precincts has led to a fracturing of identity for an increasing number of independent dance artists.

Precincts promote and support certain ways of developing and producing polished work with a recognisable form and aesthetic, but are often not able to do the same for investigative practices of many independent dance artists. Chapters Four and Five will show that certain precincts have in fact contributed to disabling independent dance artists’ opportunities and their sense of belonging to an artistic community, through overbearing infrastructures and prescriptive marketing profiles, as well as through high costs. In addition to these restrictive factors, relocating independent dance artists to these precincts dislocates them physically and sets them apart from the everyday activities of the city. I will investigate how the construction and organization of arts precincts in Sydney has affected independent dance artists’ practices and their experiences of a productive arts community. This thesis proposes that the present situation, of ‘purified arts communities’ in spatially segregated arts precincts, with only a limited number of independent dance studios located throughout the city, is detrimental not only to the independent sector, but also to the state of dance in Australia.

My research into the decline of places that have supported independent dance practice in Sydney since 1985 has both generated and been guided by the following key research questions:

1. What type of places does the local independent dance community need in order to strengthen its practices and community?
2. What dance processes are unique to independent dance artists? What are the relationships between these processes and place?

3. What are the resources, particularly places, which these dance processes require for optimal support?
4. How can independent dance artists promote and make explicit for policy makers the value of ‘invisible’ dance processes and independent dance places?¹²

Overall, my aim is to analyse the causes and implications of the diminution of independent dance place resources in Sydney and to posit some solutions to the ensuing problems. Importantly for my investigation, I argue for developing and supporting appropriate, alternative dance places in addition to the arts precincts: dance studios that can provide a home for investigative dance processes and reflect the unique identity of this diverse dance community in Sydney.

Defining the Dancing: Scope of the Study

The OED defines the verb ‘to dance’ as ‘[to] move rhythmically to music, typically following a set sequence of steps; perform (a particular dance or a role in a ballet)’ and the noun ‘dance’ as:

a series of steps and movements that match the speed and rhythm of a piece of music; an act of dancing; a particular sequence of steps and movements constituting a particular form of dancing; steps and movements of this type considered as an activity or art form.¹³

Understandings of what can be defined as dance are widely divergent and most often dependent on the spectator’s or participant’s exposure to and experience of particular styles. In Australian culture dance encompasses a variety of types, and participation in dance activity is generated and supported by a rich array of privately run dance schools and community groups offering diverse dance experiences. These include, among many others, ballet, ballroom, disco, hip hop, bollywood, flamenco, salsa, belly dancing, social dancing, folkloric dancing, and pole dancing. All contribute to

¹² For a definition of the term ‘invisible’, see Chapter Three, pp. 98-99.

¹³ Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of English* rev. edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); *Oxford Reference Online* available at <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t140.e18967> [accessed 4 November 2009].

the vibrant dance culture that can also be found elsewhere in Australia. Dancing can be found in Sydney on the weekends, in backyard suburban dance studios, after hours in school halls, church halls and gymnasiums, late at night in clubs and rented warehouse spaces and even in parks, when the weather permits. However, it is not social, leisure and folk dance or dance featured in popular culture that I propose to concentrate on in this thesis. My concern here is dance that is framed by the performing arts and referred to in phrases such as ‘the dance profession’, ‘the dance industry’, ‘dance as a performance art’, ‘concert dance’, ‘dance as an art form’, and ‘the subsidised dance sector’. In addition to individual independent choreographers and dancers and independent project-based initiatives, the subsidised dance sector in Australia includes consistently funded major performing arts companies, key organizations, small-to-medium companies, a small number of producers and presenters, and Ausdance, Australia’s professional dance advocacy organization.¹⁴ As this study will reveal, the dictionary definition of dance offers limited assistance to someone seeking to define the dance of Sydney’s independent practitioners.

The case studies and interviews discussed and cited in this thesis represent the thoughts and experiences of a diverse mix of practising, professional dance/movement artists who identify themselves as being independent of the mainstream companies. I define ‘practising’ as currently active and/or as having had a significant period of activity and public outcomes in the last twenty years. The term ‘professional’ is difficult to define in a profession such as dance where making a living out of your art practice, is not necessarily a reflection of your ‘expert’ status. By ‘professional’ I mean that according to the dancer, their dance practice is a substantial part of their working life and significant in terms of ‘seriousness’¹⁵ and is not related to the level of their income. Although they may be professional artists

¹⁴ In 1999-2000 the total employment in subsidised dance organizations in Australia was 530, and in the non-subsidised organizations 90 (i.e. 85 per cent of employment occurred in the subsidised organizations). Positive Solutions, *Resourcing Dance: An Analysis of the Subsidised Dance Sector* (Surry Hills: Australia Council, February, 2004), p. 9.

¹⁵ In a 2003 Report for the Australia Council for the Arts, David Throsby and Virginia Hollister’s discussion of what constitutes professional arts practice used the criteria of ‘seriousness’: ‘Seriousness is judged in terms of a self-assessed commitment to artistic work as a major aspect of the artists working life, even if arts-related work is not the main source of income.’ David Throsby and Virginia Hollister, *Don’t Give up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia* (Strawberry Hills: Australia Council, 2003), pp. 13-14.

according to my definition, they may have unstable working conditions and wages, and erratic professional development. This is not necessarily a reflection on them or their work but rather an indication of the values of their environment. To satisfy my criterion of ‘professional’, the artist must also have a degree of training and experience, a history of professional engagements, and public funding support. They must operate ‘at a level and standard of work with a degree of commitment appropriate to the norms of professional practice within their art form’.¹⁶

I choose to define the artists selected for inclusion in my study as ‘independent dance/movement artists’ and will refer to them in abbreviated form as dance artists. They represent the diversity of practices and styles found in the independent sector, often embedded in interdisciplinary and hybrid physical practices. Alongside the more traditional influences of classical ballet, American modern and post-modern dance techniques and European dance-theatre influences, Sydney-based artists also work with Indigenous dance forms, flamenco, martial arts and hip hop, acrobatic and circus skills, Japanese Butoh, and a number of other Asian dance traditions, as well as movement/sport activities such as bmx riding and skateboarding. As well as undergoing influences exerted by these physical regimes, independent dance artists collaborate with, and are therefore influenced in the development of their practices by, composers, scenic and costume designers, and a range of new media, sound and visual artists whose diverse identities and inputs are integral to the collaborative practice and performance product of these ‘dance/movement’ artists.

The independent dance that is the focus of this thesis in many respects challenges normative and popular definitions of dance. To explain why this might be the case, I start with a personal anecdote, one that highlights a common tendency to regard dance as an extraordinary activity removed from daily life and performed by peculiarly physical people from an unfamiliar world in a high profile public context. The anecdote, which demonstrates what a challenge it is for an independent dancer to find the words to describe what they do to someone outside the field, is framed by an *italicised* text. This is employed throughout the thesis to indicate a switch to auto-

¹⁶ David Throsby and Virginia Hollister, *Don't Give up Your Day Job: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia*, pp. 13-14.

ethnographic writing. (For more detailed explanation, see the Chapter Outline of this Introduction and the methodology section of Chapter One).

Somewhere in-between

In the days when I was employed full-time as a dancer, the days when I often travelled in taxis, I was frequently asked by big burly tattooed guys and small elderly grandfathers with accents I barely understood: 'What do you do?' From the back seat of the taxi I would answer 'I'm a dancer.' A flash of interest 'Really? What sort of dancing?' That's when it got tricky, a slight hesitation and I would launch into my regularly rehearsed reply 'Well it's not ballet... and it's not jazz dancing, you know like Hot Gossip and the Solid Gold dancers... (It was the 1980s, remember)... it's somewhere in between.' That killed the conversation. What often followed was an embarrassed silence. He couldn't imagine what was "in between" and I didn't know how to describe it.¹⁷

Occasionally during my taxi rides there would be a further line of enquiry from the taxi driver: 'Do you get paid?' Something easy to answer, a response to give me an identity, 'Yes, I work full-time. I'm in a dance company.' 'Oh, the Sydney Dance Company?' There went my identity. 'No, not the Sydney Dance Company, another one... So you've seen the Sydney Dance Company?' 'No, I've heard of them.' Another awkward silence and the conversation would end along the lines of the driver saying, 'Well, anyway, you're lucky to be doing something you love and getting paid for it.' I would pay my fare and anxiously extricate myself from the situation. It seemed to me at the time that, unless you were in the public eye, you were not really a proper, legitimate dancer. For many people there isn't any dancing 'somewhere in-between'.

In the last twenty years the emergence of a wide range of multidisciplinary collaborative approaches, often referred to by the generic term 'contemporary dance', has revolutionised the nature of dance processes and product. In an essay for a 2003 overview of Dance in Australia, 'In Repertoire: A Guide to Australian Contemporary Dance', dance critic and Curator of Dance at the National Library of Australia, Lee Christofis argues that the term 'contemporary dance' may no longer be needed: 'To many, the very multiplicity of genres makes the term 'contemporary

¹⁷ Given the abundance of dance shows on television in the past five years, I would probably have a rather different conversation with a taxi driver today. In February 2008, almost a million Australian viewers tuned in to the television premiere of the dance competition *So You Think You Can Dance Australia*. This reality television show is successful, both internationally and now in Australia. The contestants, dancing for the title of 'Australia's most popular dancer', demonstrate their versatility by performing a new style of dance every week; ballroom, hip-hop, ballet, contemporary, Latin, disco, and street dance. Many people observe this dancing from their armchairs at a comfortable distance, admiring the virtuosity and spunkiness of the young dancers. Given the way such shows have greatly increased the tendency to regard dance as pelvis thrusts, split jumps and burn-baby-burn smiles, explaining what I do could arguably be even more difficult today.

dance' redundant, suggesting a maturing field where anything seems possible and orthodoxies, even recent ones, need no longer constrain creativity.'¹⁸ Increasingly, many dancers, especially independent practitioners, are not interested in asserting an absolute division between 'dance' and 'movement' or between artistic disciplines. Accordingly, the present study discusses practising professional artists who, one, identify themselves as movement artists and engage with a diverse range of physical disciplines; two, have a significant physical training base in their historical or current practice; and, three, who have been recognised through formal dance funding categories as having a movement-based practice.

Independence: Defining an Alternative

As used in this thesis—and in the dance profession—the descriptive 'independent dance artist' label refers to those dancers, choreographers and movement artists who work outside large company structures and are generally not aligned with only one organization. The term 'independent' refers to dance artists who are not employed full-time with one particular company, and/or are not in receipt of ongoing funding support. For example, some independent artists have created small company structures to support their work, while others adjust to a variety of artistic structures from project to project.¹⁹ Many independent dance artists in Sydney regularly make competitive grant applications for funds, giving them intermittent income for the creation of new dance work. The majority of independent dance artists make their living from an assortment of freelance dance-related activities, including: professional dance engagements as performers and choreographers across the performing arts; commercial dance and musical theatre; teaching and educational roles; administrative and curatorial positions, as well as jobs outside the dance field.

Many of those who work in the independent sector perceive what they do to be alternative or oppositional to mainstream arts activities, where there is a greater emphasis on economic imperatives. Their notion of 'alternative' derives from the

¹⁸ *In Repertoire: A Guide to Australian Contemporary Dance* ed. by Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch (Sydney: RealTime for the Australia Council, 2003), p. 3.

¹⁹ See Chapter Two for discussion of the artists who set-up small company structures, notably choreographers such as Tess de Quincey, Sue Healey, Kate Champion and Shaun Parker.

importance they place on innovation, autonomy at work and a general anti-mainstream attitude in the independent dance sector. For many independent dance artists the choice to work outside the major structures or ‘mainstream’ is a conscious one: it gives them greater freedom with regard to how and where they work and ultimately what they produce, albeit within a less secure existence.

In a 2002 Performing Arts Report on the small-to-medium arts sector in Australia the independent sector is described as being ‘characterised by great diversity, a focus on new creative endeavor, a slim administrative structure, a large volunteer workforce and a commitment to artistic production’.²⁰ Differences and diversities in practice are a feature of the independent dance community in Sydney. This thesis focuses on how this ‘other’ dance community, for the most part working in alternative aesthetic and practical modes that are quite different from those of the mainstream, is constituted—in its increasingly uncertain world of lost places and endangered spaces—of a broad variety of spatial practices. Characterised by its unique identity, the independent dance sector not only dances *difference* as a community by means of the dance practices represented, but also performs difference in the content and interests of the work, by means of the individual identities of the artists.²¹ It is a community with a multiplicity of differences, one rich in identity markers—white, gay, male, indigenous, straight, lesbian, Asian, female and so on—that are often highly prominent in the content of the work itself.

This multiplicity of alternative identity markers can be a strength, but, the elusive points of identification can also give the identity of the community a vulnerability and an instability. Not having a consistent identity makes it difficult for a cohesive collective characterization of the independent dance sector to be presented to the public and to the wider dance sector. In the commodified world of the major arts organizations, a clear articulation of who you are and what you are selling is vital for marketing and promotion. This is a challenge for the collective identity of the independent dance community. This thesis suggests a means of strengthening the

²⁰ *Report to Ministers on an Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector* (Prepared by a working party of Cultural Ministers Council Standing Committee, March 2002), p. 21.

²¹ Judith Hamera, *Dancing Communities: Performance, Difference and Connection in the Global City* (Houndsmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

profile and collective identity of the independent dance sector by supporting these independent artists in a network of interconnecting spatialized frameworks and hubs within the city. That means these artists are not fully determined by the dominant structures of the power and privilege of the major companies and precincts, nor completely outside these places and processes, but are a connected counterpoint with the potential to transform the landscape.

Crisis: A Located Politics of Difference

Crises are situations in the lives of individuals, corporate groups, or societies in which performance of established routines is rendered more difficult than ordinarily by the heightening of such tribulations, or situations in which anticipations of what is regarded as appropriate and legitimate are more frustrated or rendered more improbable than usual.²²

The biggest challenge to the independent dance sector in Sydney, over the past decade has been the rapid diminution of affordable and appropriate places for independent dance-making—nothing less than a *crisis of place and space*. This reduction in the number of places operating outside the mainstream precincts has hindered the opportunities for independent dance practice. In order to find a place to present work to an audience on a small-to-medium scale—and in order to obtain funding—independent artists must increasingly make business partnerships with other artists and institutions. Doing so often results in them finding themselves in settings and within models that do not service their needs. This can be attributed to both the diminution of independent dance places and funding policy changes that favour institutional infrastructures. Artists and arts workers often respond to the crisis of the independent dance community by calls to funding bodies to address the lack of funding for development and production of independent projects. Much of the discussion focuses on economics and the narrowing control over the way in which funds are spread, involving the politics of ‘institutionalisation’. For example, in this model with funding tending to favour collaborative partnerships between independent artists and institutions, it is becoming increasingly difficult to support independent dance practice that is not in partnership with gate-keepers or

²² Edward Shils, *Centre and Periphery: Essays in Microbiology* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1975), p. 154.

programmers, such as major organizations, venues, festivals. The result is a loss of freedom and of other attributes of independence.

Currently in the city of Sydney there is limited understanding of and little recognition given to the unique processes and requirements for the sustainability of the independent dance sector. City regulations, which once accepted or at least tolerated a diversity of purposes in the urban space, have become increasingly restrictive and prohibitive of usage. In addition, the boom in Sydney's property market since the early 1990s has seen widespread gentrification of many areas of the city and surrounding suburbs, with conversions of inner-city buildings and warehouses into a mixture of top-of-the-market luxurious residential property, and high-density apartment living in many places. These are the very places and spaces that dance once occupied. Visual artists are also losing their studio spaces to the same property-development imperatives in Sydney.²³ However, this crisis of space is a particular challenge for dancers.

Dance studios have some basic requirements that make them distinct from other artists' studios. Compared to the much smaller and less specific requirements of the average office space or painter's studio, a dance studio requires a relatively large floor space unimpeded by walls and structural pillars. The cost of rental per square metre of floor space is becoming increasingly expensive. While it was common for dance artists to both live and work in warehouses in the city in the 1980s, the expense of doing this today is prohibitive. Added to this are the restrictions of city council requirements such as fire escape and building regulations that are more stringent and tightly policed than during the 1980s. The expense and restrictions placed on even derelict buildings by council make setting up a dance studio an unacceptable option, even though many of the spaces have potential as dance studios. Other considerations, of particular concern to dance are the health and safety aspects of a dance studio. Specifically these relate to the type of floor, which should ideally

²³ Sharon Zukin's urban study and analysis of the relationship between culture and economy, artists, real estate and property developers in the SoHo district of New York during the 1960s and 1970s provides insight into the difficult relationship of the artist within an urban economy. Sharon Zukin, *Loft Living: Culture and Capital in Urban Change* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982).

be made of wood with a degree of spring: dancing on concrete floors has serious consequences for a dancer's body. Ventilation and heating are also important factors to take into account when working in an intense way with the body. These requirements are necessary, and they make finding appropriate spaces a challenging enterprise for the independent dance artist with limited resources.²⁴

As a result of inner-city real-estate development, it is currently more difficult for an independent dance artist, not only to find a work base that suits their physical needs, but also one that suits their identification as an independent dance artist. Cultural geographer Mike Crang observes '[Crucially] people do not simply locate themselves, they define themselves through a sense of place.'²⁵ The place says something about *who* you are. The contrast between working in a purpose-built studio overlooking Sydney Harbour and working in a community hall adjacent to an inner-city housing estate contributes to the creation and expression of the dancers' identity. For those artists who wish to work independently and not be affiliated with mainstream institutions, places to work that reflect an alternative sense of place to the mainstream institutions are few and far between in Sydney.

Indeed, the loss of a number of heterogeneous places and spaces in the past two decades has forced a renegotiation of independent dance practice itself, especially when combined with the trend towards homogenised arts precincts. This trend has seen significant resources and funding channeled into buildings at the expense of budgets for funding artists' processes and productions. Having no *appropriate* place to work and limited ability to find *any* place to develop and produce that work constitutes a serious threat to the already-marginalised independent dancer's ability to make their own work. Furthermore, it impacts on their sense of their identity and creates not only a crisis of identity but also a hierarchical politics of location.

Feminist Adrienne Rich has coined the term 'a politics of location', by which she means the spatialized context of the female subject and how she is implicated in social difference. The term has been widely employed by geographers concerned

²⁴ Dance artists are often adept at 'making do' with less than ideal studio conditions. Some forms of dance have thrived with less than ideal conditions. See Chapter Three (Omeo Dance Studio) and Chapter Five (Performance Space at Cleveland Street).

²⁵ Mike Crang, *Cultural Geography* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 102.

with rethinking identity politics and relational differences away from universal generalizations to a focus on the marginal, the ‘other’ and the ‘local’.²⁶ In this thesis the interlinking of power and identity and place can be conceptualised not simply as difference between the mainstream precincts and the independent dance places, but as a ‘located politics of difference’.²⁷

It is the contention of this thesis that changes to Sydney’s architecture and urban design, together with changes to government funding policy, have resulted in not only a change in, and, indeed loss of, identity and a sense of belonging within the dance community, but also reduced circumstances for independent dance practice. Due to the disappearance of many idiosyncratic physical places in Sydney, the members of this independent dance community have been obliged increasingly to contend with lack of continuity of access to space, inhibiting their ability to sustain and extend their practice, and an increased disconnection from each other and the life of the city. This impairment of workplace conditions—which has occurred in other Australian cities, but less intensively than in Sydney—has impacted in numerous ways on the practice of dancers, contributing to a reduction in the scale of individual projects, the quantity of work produced and decline in the profile, identity and well-being of the dance artist. This thesis will argue that for dance artists the experience and animation of space persists as a vital consideration in sustaining a viable and vibrantly diverse dance culture. And it will propose that an appropriate way of looking at the crisis in the independent dance sector is by means of an understanding of the nuances of practices of the independent dance community and an analysis of the existing dance places in the city.

²⁶ Adrienne Rich, ‘Notes Towards a Politics of Location’, in *Blood, Bread and Poetry* (New York: Norton, 1986), pp. 210-31. Rich’s term ‘a politics of location’ has been widely taken up by others for example: Jacob’s and Fincher, *Cities of Difference* (1998), Pile and Thrift, *Mapping the Subject: Geographies of Cultural Transformation* (1995), Gillian Rose, *Feminism and Geography: The Limits of Geographical Knowledge* (1993).

²⁷ Jane M. Jacobs and Ruth Fincher, ‘Introduction’, in *Cities of Difference*, ed. by Jane M. Jacobs and Ruth Fincher (New York and London: The Guilford Press, 1998), pp. 1-25 (p. 19).

Choreographies amidst Complexity

This thesis will explore the capacity of the independent dance sector to adapt in response to the ongoing conditions of the crisis outlined above. In the last twenty years complexity theory has been developed and applied to ecological, social and economic systems and the networks of interaction within and between the organisms and agents of these systems. Complexity theory, as will be shown, offers valuable tools for understanding and analysing independent dance practices and dance networks. It provides a lens through which to analyse the conditions in which dance is made in Sydney and answer the following questions:

1. What does the independent dance sector in Sydney look like in terms of its structures, networks and diverse practices?
2. How does it function as a complex adaptive system (CAS)?
3. To what degree is this CAS capable of self-organization in times of crisis?
4. How does/can the sector cope with an environment that is changing rapidly, in terms of places and possibilities for community and collaboration?
5. How does complexity emerge from independent dance practices?
6. How does/can the sector build and increase its capacity for innovation and a sustainable practice in times of crisis?

Complexity theory is useful for analysing the characteristics, behaviours and processes of the independent dance sector. Understanding the sector as a complex adaptive system will deepen both artists' and policy makers' existing understandings of how to negotiate unpredictable conditions, as well as the all-to-predictable continuation of diminished funding and an emphasis on precincts.

My personal motivation for this is, in part, a desire to make the alternative forms of dance and often opaque dance processes of the independent sector more accessible and understandable, to both practitioners as well as those outside the art form. Through a discussion of the independent dance sector as a type of complex system and networks, I propose to take a multi-layered view of the real, practical, everyday dance topography with which I am personally very familiar, one that in terms of

dance style and form is situated in that difficult-to-define area ‘somewhere in-between’ ballet and jazz.

Chapter Two will introduce the characteristics of the dance system and its behavioural traits and, use Paul Cilliers’ complexity framework as a means to heighten awareness of the fluid processes of interaction, and sustainable self-organisation, which are integral to the sustainability of the independent dance community.²⁸ My purpose here is to provide evidence of the sector’s ability to adapt, survive and reposition itself in times of crisis, and to explore the strategic usefulness for the sector of re-thinking itself as a complex adaptive system. By applying complexity theory to concrete examples of dance processes, I shall look at evidence of complex interactions in the sites of dance practice and performance and I shall highlight the ways the practical processes might be harnessed and improved to generate the most favourable conditions of growth and sustainability in the future. Issues concerning the way in which independent dance networks might organise themselves in the future, make progress, and achieve sustainability in the absence of economic wealth will be taken up more fully in Chapter Two and the Conclusion.

Looking for Dancing in Place and Space

Notions of place and space are central to the theoretical framework of this thesis. ‘Place’ here will describe a defined location, that is the city of Sydney and its physical buildings, the theatres, arts precincts and artists’ studios where dance artists work and where audiences *see* dance. What interests me about these theatres, precincts and studios is their identity and function, and the way in which the cultural and relational meanings of these places, ‘characterised by specific social activities with a culturally given identity (name) and image’ contribute to the identity and value of independent dance in Sydney.²⁹

²⁸ Paul Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp. 3-7.

²⁹ Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 30.

Michel de Certeau describes a place as ‘an instantaneous configuration of positions’ that ‘implies an indication of stability’.³⁰ He states that ‘[t]he law of the “proper” rules in the place: the elements taken into consideration are *beside* one another, each situated in its own “proper” and distinct location, a location it defines’.³¹ The places that are defined in this study as arts precincts are the Sydney Opera House, the Wharf Walsh Bay, and CarriageWorks. All are located close to the Central Business District of Sydney. An arts precinct is a distinctive geographical area characterised by a concentration of arts-related uses, activities and visitation with fairly definable boundaries. Arts precincts have a public presence and distinctive media profiles. In public parlance they are referred to and recognised as ‘arts precincts’. They are highly subsidised with a focus on and responsibility toward flagship cultural organizations and institutions. Arts precincts in Sydney support display and enable consumption of the performing arts by an audience who want a highly polished, recognisable artistic product.

Michel de Certeau develops an understanding of place and space that is connected to linguistic practice. Drawing on Ferdinand de Saussure’s notions of language and *parole*, in which language is the complex of rules and conventions that constitute a language and *parole* the practice of speech, de Certeau regards ‘space [as] a practiced place’: ‘In relation to place, space is like the word when it is spoken.’³² Phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty also considers that ‘the space could be to the place what the word becomes when it is spoken’.³³ I want to develop this linguistic interpretation of place and space as it relates to independent dance practice in Sydney and to explore the ways in which, through their practices, dance artists animate the spaces of dance places.

The term ‘space’ is used in my analysis of dance artists’ inhabitation of places and the way in which they produce space. What interests me here are the ways in which embodied dance practices animate place and bring space into being—specifically the

³⁰ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. by Steven Rendall (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p. 117.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. by Colin Smith (London: Routledge & Keagan Paul, 1962), p. 173.

training, rehearsing, practicing, dancing, in the studio and the theatre, which can also include moving, touching, talking, listening, thinking and bodies simply being in the space. How do the independent and mainstream dance sectors, with different degrees and types of social power, use, control and operate within space? I argue that the processes and outcomes of mainstream dance-making, and the processes and outcomes of independent dance-making are distinct in their uses of place and space, and are ‘unavoidably caught up in power relations’.³⁴

Visible Places and Invisible Spaces

For Camiel van Winkel, value in the art world is based on visibility as currency: ‘[S]uccess equals visibility and visibility equals success.’ That, he says, ‘is the regime of visibility’.³⁵ If representational visibility equals power, then productions in these visible places have prestige. The visible places discussed here are the theatres and arts precincts that are energised predominantly by dance rehearsals and performances, and have specific time frames and a clear focus on creating an artistic product for consumption. I shall map the topography of ‘visible places’ and ‘invisible spaces’. ‘Visible places’ are those theatres and arts precincts where dance is presented and performed to a public audience. These are implicated in the political and aesthetic hierarchy in the dance field in Australia with their strategic central locations contributing to a spatial organization that ensures a hierarchy.

By contrast, ‘invisible spaces’ are studios, rehearsal rooms and informal performance places that often have a low public profile outside the dance community. While it might be accurate to refer to all studios as ‘invisible spaces’, my focus will be on the invisible spaces where embodied, investigative dance processes occur that have only an occasional relation to presentation and thus limited need for public profile. Excluded from my definition of invisible spaces are the studios of those precincts and mainstream companies that are located within visible places where there is an emphasis on rehearsal and public presentation. The ‘invisible spaces’ discussed here

³⁴ *Key Thinkers on Space and Place*, ed. by Phil Hubbard, Rob Kitchen and Gill Valentine (London; Thousand Oaks; New Delhi: Sage, 2004), p. 10.

³⁵ Camiel van Winkel, *The Regime of Visibility* (Rotterdam, NAi Publishers, 2005), p. 15.

are theatres and studios that operate as shelters and homes, inhabited by the independent dance sector and where it is possible for innovation and new forms to grow. This thesis argues that invisible spaces, and the investigative practices and independent networks they foster, contribute significantly to the health of the larger subsidised dance system. In these invisible spaces processes are usually less bureaucratic than within the mainstream visible places. This enables artists and artists' networks to respond to the situation as they see fit and flourish by means of many different practices. What is at issue politically for the diversity of dance that makes up the independent sector is not only whether the spaces are, in the centre of or on the periphery of the city, but importantly what kinds of spaces they are. I will show that these independent dance studios enable practices, innovation and communities that are not possible in the visible places.

Communities and identities can be defined by boundaries between 'us' and 'them' in the same way that a binary oppositional relationship can be established between the mainstream and the independent dance sectors. At first glance, so-called 'mainstream dance', predominantly seen in highly visible places, and the lower-profile 'independent dance' appear to function separately, each having its own circuit of production, promotion and reception. In this thesis I want to re-align, re-characterise and re-evaluate positions in this binary relation, as lived and perceived by the artists and in public perception, one in which the mainstream is dominant and located in central places with a high public profile, while the independent sector is marginalised and secondary with a less visible public profile.

Iris Marion Young argues that there is a need for 'a political vision different from both the assimilationist and separatist ideas' and she derives such a vision from the relational conception of group difference: 'A politics that treats difference as variation and specificity, rather than an exclusive opposition.'³⁶ Using the mainstream/independent polarity as a starting-point, my investigation explores the space in-between this hierarchy, a space that is productively accessed and manipulated by the independent artist through networks of complex interactions.

³⁶ Iris Marion Young, 'Together in Difference: Transforming the Logic of Group Political Conflict', in *Principled Positions: Postmodernism and the Rediscovery of Value*, ed. by Judith Squires (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993), pp. 121-50 (p. 121).

Like Young, I argue that there is a need for these groups to have a differentiated place in public, with mutual recognition of the specificity that each of them has.

A considerable number of independent dance artists are highly proficient at moving between the spheres of subsidised mainstream cultural activity, and the often under-resourced art-making of the independent sector, with the result that the effect of this polarity is weakened. The distinctions between mainstream dance places and processes on the one hand and independent dance places and processes on the other, and their differentiated places in public, are my starting-point for the mapping of the experience of independent dance artists in Sydney's dance sector. The crucial point is not the difference between the hybridised aesthetics of the independent artists and those of the more aesthetically coherent mainstream, but rather the differences in the importance placed on the processes of the mainstream companies and those of the independent artists. The mainstream sector is largely geared toward production and public outcomes, while the processes of independent artists are largely geared toward private practices, research and development. The different emphasis on particular processes is reflected in mainstream and independent dance places. However, independent artists predominantly enact the flow and interactions in-between. Part of my intention in positioning the independent sector as an alternative to the mainstream is both to decentre the mainstream from its position as the perceived core of the dance sector and to explore how and why independent dance practices are central to the development of the art form.

Analysing Local and Located Dance: Chapter Outline

As a researcher and artist studying a community of which I have been a recognised part and in which I have played a significant role for over twenty-five years, I use auto-ethnography as my principal research tool. It is with a reflexive ethnographic voice that I propose to interrogate and interpret the 'crisis' faced by Sydney's independent dance sector, and to produce a thesis that will be strongly informed by 'embodied knowledge and politics of location.'³⁷ In Chapter One, I argue for

³⁷ Bill Nichols, *Blurred Boundaries: Questions of Meaning in Contemporary Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 1-16.

methodological plurality as most appropriate to this discussion and intend to employ three main strategies: use of ethnography: performative writing approaches, (including auto-ethnography and Mystory) and mapping of places and spaces. This thesis connects my professional embodied experience with the cultural circumstances of Sydney's independent dance sector through multiple layers of written voices that represent my writer, dancer and ethnographer selves.

Chapter Two provides an overview of the landscape of the dance sector in Sydney. It analyses the complex behavioural characteristics of the independent dance sector, and describes the environment and conditions under which dance is produced. I frame this chapter from three viewpoints. The first offers a 'wide-shot' view of the local and national dance landscape, in which a hierarchical schema proposed by Hilary Crampton for the Melbourne dance scene is adapted and critiqued.³⁸ In the course of my discussion of the limitations of Crampton's model, which adheres to a familiar linear top-to-bottom view of the sector, I argue that it is important to supplement the 'top down' approach with a view from what in her schema is the base. Second, a 'mid-shot' of the arts policy and funding environment in Australia over the last twenty years reveals the way in which the subsidised arts sector has been supported and/or inhibited by the political backdrop. It is here that I identify the 'crisis' of the small-to-medium sector (and hence the independent dance subculture) acknowledged by many in the arts in relation to funding policies and outcomes. Finally, through a 'close-up' view of the independent dance sector, I engage with notions of complexity and complex systems to develop an analysis of the independent system and show evidence of the sector as a self-organising network, one with the ability to adapt, survive and reposition itself at a time of crisis.³⁹ My own map showing the interconnected artist clusters of the independent sector is provided in support of my argument for viewing this layer of independent dance activity as a complex adaptive system.

³⁸ Hilary Crampton, 'Redefining the Field – Expanding the Field', Conference Proceedings: *Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid* (ACT: Ausdance National, 2005).

³⁹ See, for example, Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernism: Understanding Complex Systems*.

Continuing the auto-ethnographic trajectory, Chapters Three to Five chart my own personal view of the development of Sydney over the past twenty-five years, and explore the production of different dance practices there through an analysis of place and space. These chapters examine the ways in which the dance processes of training, practice, rehearsal and production are imagined, created, embodied and exploited in the various precincts and dance spaces of the city. I use the distinction drawn by theatre director Antoine Vitez's distinction between *theatre-as-shelter* and *theatre-as-edifice* to distinguish what I call 'invisible spaces' of practice from 'visible places' of production.⁴⁰ Despite the benefits of the edifice for increasing the public profile and accessibility of independent work to a broader audience, evidence will be presented that demonstrates the extent to which the loss of dance studio shelters and company homes over the past twenty years has restricted and inhibited independent dance practice and production in Sydney.

Chapter Three is the first step in my argument about the importance of having a range of places in which to *see* dance and spaces in which to *make* dance. It builds on questions of visibility and invisibility with a focus here on the importance of community for the dance sector and how it is generated through the agency of the dancing body and private dance practices. I refer to Omeo Dance Studio, an artist-run-initiative where much practice was conducted in the shelter mode, without the necessity for a public outcome. This chapter also provides an in-depth discussion of dance artists, Rosalind Crisp, Martin del Amo and The Fondue Set (Jane McKernan, Elizabeth Ryan and Emma Saunders), each of whom are committed to investigative practices which value methodology, research and development and only occasionally present their work publicly. The validity of keeping a low public profile for independent practice in these dance *heterotopias* is discussed and questions are raised about the excessive emphasis placed on public profile and production in mainstream arts practice. In a second case study, I trace a map of the Sydney dance studio sites that are no longer in use, by providing a description of walking through the streets of the city and recalling the dance studios used by the One Extra Company in the 1980s.

⁴⁰ Antoine Vitez, *Le Theatre des idées* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 90, cited in *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* by Gay McAuley (Michigan, USA: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 38.

The discussion in Chapter Four—of two dominant, high-profile arts facilities, the monumental landmark that is the Sydney Opera House, and the arts precinct at the Wharf—examines the significance of the location and identity of these two buildings. Using de Certeau’s theory of strategies to frame my investigation of the organizational structures and dance activities, I shall explore the ways in which meaning is created for both the public and the dance sector in both buildings. Chapter Four explores the benefits and the failings of the ‘arts precinct’ as a model. The spaces of the visible places discussed in Chapter Four are predominantly energised by rehearsals, with specific time frames and a clear focus on creating an artistic product for consumption. I present a case study of the work of independent choreographer Narelle Benjamin, with special reference to two pieces of work choreographed for and presented in these high-profile precinct venues. The discussion deals with Benjamin’s approaches to, and experience of, working with the Sydney Dance Company and the Australian Ballet, and with the extent to which these mainstream companies both enabled and hampered her independent practice.

Chapter Five builds on the argument in previous chapters, by way of an account of Performance Space, the Sydney-based national contemporary arts organization. My central concern here is the impact on Sydney’s independent dance community of Performance Space’s relocation in January 2007 from its original home of twenty-three years in an old railway dance hall, to the arts precinct, CarriageWorks. I argue the case for the virtues of Performance Space as a *theatre-shelter*, vital not only for the making of, and encouragement of innovations in, dance, but also the great support it offered to the networks that constitute the dance system. I address issues the dance community had with regard to the relocation of the shelter of Performance Space to within the edifice of CarriageWorks. I challenge the importantly different symbolic and functional roles that precincts play and the mutually sustaining relations that independent dance and mainstream dance have *vis-a-vis* each other. Over the past decade a number of independent dance artists such as Dean Walsh and Tess de Quincey have transferred their work from alternative to mainstream spaces, stepping across the frequently large divide between the two. Through an examination of the interactions between Walsh and Performance Space and de Quincey at CarriageWorks, I argue the urgent need for a re-evaluation of the

collaborative partnership between artist and institution. I undertake this through an analysis of the artists' navigation between alternative performance context (Performance Space as both arts organization and former place) and mainstream setting (CarriageWorks as both arts organization and current place).

Throughout this thesis there are a number of what I have called 'Intersections'; these are printed in italics (see, for example, the first of these on p. 10). These Intersections encompass personal observations and a performative approach to my discussion informed by dance-practice methods, lived experience and embodied knowledge. Put another way, they forge an auto-ethnographic link between my personal interests, idiosyncratic observations and anecdotes, and the research questions raised in each chapter.

In addition to the various voices of the Intersections I have also compiled a Mystory—in seven segments and placed in the Appendix—that contains personal history, archival material, and sources of lay knowledge. Whilst academic practice is part of the Mystory, importantly, my identification with the object of the study is at the centre of the research. Each segment focuses on a different practice-based artistic project that I have been involved in, whilst researching and writing the (more conventional) thesis. The Mystory segments include: a recollection of dance studios from my early years of dance training (Mystory #1: Myspacestory); the ficto-critical voice of the artist critiquing her own artistic process and performance work (Mystory #2: Meeting MissXL); a grant application requesting funding support for studio space (Mystory #3: Project WORKSPACE); an account of the collaborative networking of an established inner-city dance cluster (Mystory #4: THE PROjECT); a process and presentation established outside the city representing an alternative way of making dance in the face of the 'crisis of place' (Mystory #5: Picnic at Hill End); a program launch speech that I wrote and delivered while Director of the dance research organization Critical Path, which exemplifies the complex networks of local, national and international dance artists working in Sydney in 2007 (Mystory #6: Critical Path); and a final Mystory segment that negotiates the inter-relationship between theory and practice through a hypothetical description of my current work-in-progress *Now You See Her: Private Performance Parties and Public*

Interventions, that is yet to be realised (Mystory #7: Invisibility of the Long Distance Dancer). The final segment of Mystory evokes my performing, dancing body relocated outside the confines of the relative safety of the theatre shelter and positioned strategically in highly visible public places, utilising the tactics of subterfuge. This dislocation of a middle-aged dancing woman, ‘lost in space’ in public places, is, if you will, a performative metaphor for the ‘crisis of place’, the issue that lies at the heart of this thesis. The various segments of Mystory juxtapose the dancing body of my past, present and future with the chapters of the thesis.

In my conclusion, which looks to prospects for the future of the form of Sydney’s independent dance sector and of the role it might play, I summarise the implications I see for the dance sector in re-thinking itself as a complex adaptive system, a fluid community of networks supporting diverse dance practices. Here my intention is to highlight the ways in which the practical processes, and interactions of dance-making have been, and continue to be, harnessed and how they might be improved, so as to generate the most favourable conditions for development and sustainability in the future. If I have one over arching hope, it is that this thesis will generate further discussion, and lead ultimately to the discovery of solutions to the way in which the dance sector in Sydney, and elsewhere, might operate in the future.

Chapter One

From Choreography to Chorography: Research and Writing Strategies

This chapter proposes a combined methodology, one influenced by my experience as a practising choreographer and dance artist intimately involved in many of the layers of the sector (as dancer, choreographer, administrator), that I have developed as the most effective design for this research project. The three methodologies I combine are: one, an ethnographic methodology which includes an auto-ethnographic perspective that facilitates the communication and analytical processing of my own close experience of the sector from which this study arises; two, mapping methods which include the embodied practice of walking, a chorographic approach, and visual maps to attempt not only to make ‘concrete’ for myself as well as the reader a clearer sense of the interlocking webs of dance practitioners and their places of work in Sydney, but also to test the propositions that have arisen as a result of these observations; and three, performative writing strategies, especially the establishment of a montage text ‘Mystory’, to establish and consolidate an experiential field across which the range of propositions I raise can be read. The Mystory writing may be read as samples at any point of the thesis and to accommodate such an approach to reading, I have made this material available in the Appendix.

Not the least significant aim of this is to engage with new ways of asking questions, thinking about, and writing about dance. In order to explore and analyse the world of the independent dance sector I engage in an ethnographic fieldwork practice. In the section Methodological Strategy One, a hybrid ethnographic approach is justified as one of my primary research methods. Here I discuss how I collected data from my position as insider and, where appropriate, I do this auto-ethnographically. I

outline specific ethnographic procedures used for this study. These include an examination of the fieldwork, the interviews undertaken and analysis of archival materials. The fact that I am a choreographer and dance artist is of central importance to this study. My personal and professional connections gave me privileged access to a wealth of material including critical reviews, successful and unsuccessful grant applications, budgets and meeting minutes, programs and other artistic ephemera such as artists' diaries and notebooks.

The second section outlines the writing strategies used in this thesis in order to represent my lived, embodied experience as a dance artist in relation to the research questions I want to raise. My three performative writing approaches are: auto-ethnographic text, Mystory, a montage text, and chorographic descriptive writing. Each of these draws on my own embodied performance experiences and includes autobiographical details and reflexive narratives. To these three 'voices' I have added that of the academic thesis writer, in order to produce a more permanent record of the nuances and complexity of the dance-making practices and professional circumstances of the dance sector in Sydney.

My methodological choices have been made in response to two major developments in cultural studies: debates about representation (by, for and about whom) and the increasing trend toward self-reflexivity in all realms of writing. In the third section of this chapter I take up Hubert Goddard's proposition of the dancer as geographer, and discuss the value of subjective, embodied ways of knowing and doing in this thesis. Methodological Strategy Three gives an account of the mapping methods and chorographic writing that utilise my 'embodied knowledge and politics of location',¹ for a unique understanding of the local Sydney dance scene and of place in relation to memory, as seen in Chapter Three. Significantly, in addition to this, my ethnographic role as insider enables me to map and identify the places that are not familiar to those outside the dance community; i.e. the less visible places of practice, the studios and places where performances are presented mainly within the community. These places contribute significantly to an understanding of the

¹ Nichols, p. 1.

networks of the independent dance sector. Knowledge and analysis of them provides an original insight into the way the independent sector works and identifies itself.

Methodological Strategy One: Ethnographic Inquiry

The methodological approaches and research design selected for this thesis positions my work within the field of contemporary ethnographic inquiry. In the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln identify seven historical moments of ethnographic inquiry: the traditional (1900 to World War Two), modernist (World War Two to the mid-1970s), blurred genres (1970-1986), crisis of representation (1986 to 1997), postmodern experimental ethnographic writing (end of the twentieth century), the sixth moment, postexperimental and the seventh moment, the future.²

The sixth and seventh moments of ethnographic inquiry are ‘grounded in the lived experiences of previously excluded groups in the global, postmodern world’.³ The ‘otherness’ of independent dance refers to an arts community with an often-marginalised and little-represented voice that engages with practices different from mainstream dance. My research, therefore, is located in the sixth and seventh moments of ethnographic inquiry.⁴ Denzin argues for an acceptance of the transformation of ethnography in the twenty-first century that includes willingness to adopt changes in forms of ethnographic, interpretive writing.⁵ These writing approaches include the use of interpretive practices such as dialogical ethnographic texts, auto-ethnographic texts based on personal experiences, as well as Mystory

² *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, 2nd edn (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2000), pp. 12-18.

³ Ibid., p. 53.

⁴ ‘Otherness’ is identified and named in the Introduction of this thesis in two ways as difference and diversity. Dance ethnography has often been conducted in the context of intercultural studies, making dance from other ‘exotic’ cultures the object of study. Following general trends in anthropology, this has shifted over the past two decades to include numerous dance ethnographers who, as dance ethnographer Joan D. Frosch puts it ‘have demonstrated that the Other is us’. ‘Dance Ethnography: Tracing the Weave of Dance in the Fabric of Culture’, in *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry*, ed. by Sondra Horton Fraleigh and Penelope Hanstein (Pittsburgh, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), pp. 249-80. Similarly, Gay McAuley advocates that an ethnographic approach is equally valid of one’s ‘own’ as well as an ‘other’ culture.

⁵ Denzin and Lincoln, pp. xvi-xvii.

constructions based on autobiography, which I explain in detail in the following section.

An Auto-ethnographic Perspective

Deborah Reed-Danahay's introduction to her edited volume *Auto/Ethnography* provides a comprehensive outline of the multiple perspectives and interpretations of the term auto-ethnography that have emerged in response to 'a changing conception of both the self and society in the late twentieth century.'⁶ As Reed-Danahay points out, the plethora of labels for experimental ethnographic work that have been coined by literary critics, anthropologists and sociologists over the past three decades, are sometimes contentious. The naming within, and connections between, the terms include: ethno-biographer, ethnographic realism, a self-reflexive field account, a self-ethnographic text, ethnographic autobiography, anthropological autobiography, native autobiography, confessional ethnography, dramatic ethnography, critical ethnography, auto-anthropology and last, but not least, auto-ethnography.

Ethnographer Carolyn Ellis is committed to ethnography in the form of auto-ethnography. She sees this as a way of doing social science research, through both ethnographic method and creative non-fiction writing. Ellis defines auto-ethnography as:

the process as well as the product of writing about the personal and its relationship to culture. It is an autobiographical genre of writing and research that displays multiple layers of consciousness. Usually written in the first person voice, autoethnographic texts appear in a variety of forms – short stories, poetry, fiction, novels, photographic essays, journals, fragmented and layered writing, and social science prose. Autoethnographers showcase concrete action, dialogue, emotion, embodiment, spirituality, and self-consciousness. These features appear as relational and institutional stories affected by histories and social structures that are dialectically revealed through actions, feelings, thoughts and language.⁷

⁶ Deborah Reed-Danahay, *Auto/Ethnography: Rewriting the Self and the Social* (New York: Berg, 1997), p. 2.

⁷ Carolyn Ellis and Karen Scott-Hoy, 'Wording Pictures: Discovering Hearful Autoethnography' in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, ed. by Gary J. Knowles and Ardra L. Cole (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), pp. 127-40 (p. 130).

Like Ellis's definition of auto-ethnography, Reed-Danahay posits that it is 'a form of self narrative that places the self within a social context' and also refers to auto-ethnography as both ethnographic method and text.⁸ This thesis is 'not just [a] subjective account of experience' but recognises that my personal history, embodied knowledge and artistic experiences are implicated in the larger history and cultural and social patterns of the often-marginalised independent dance sector in Sydney. I connect the personal to the cultural by means of multiple layers of consciousness⁹ that are the voices of: (1) dance-artist; (2) dance-artist-as-researcher of independent dance; (3) participant ethnographic researcher; (4) dance-artist-as-writer of the thesis; (5) guide to a map of the places of dance in the city. It is the arrangement of these voices, in conversation with other dance artists, arts workers, critics, dance and performance scholars and theorists not usually brought into discussions of dance, that makes the contribution of this thesis distinctive.

'[G]rounded in the body and the body's experience rather than in texts, artefacts or abstractions,' dance ethnography has also played a part in relation to my responses to, and bodily experience of, the crisis with which this thesis is centrally concerned.¹⁰ In addition, my long-time, active involvement in this sector has served to inform my role as an ethnographic insider. The perceptions discerned through my interpretive ethnographic process are to a large extent informed by the intensity and breadth of my professional and personal relationships with many of the participants and subjects over more than twenty-five years. My first-hand experience as an artist and ethnographer makes it possible for me to reveal intimately how this independent dance community is constituted in their increasingly uncertain, changing world.

I have chosen methods that assist close reflection on independent dance practice and enable me to provide intimate details of the places and the specificities of the dance practices that occur within them. These are underpinned by my motivation to understand the nature and implications of the local dance map's absences and its

⁸ Reed-Danahay, p. 9.

⁹ Carolyn Ellis and Arthur P. Bochner, 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research* 2nd edn, pp. 733-68 (p. 739).

¹⁰ Deirdre Sklar, 'On Dance Ethnography', *Dance Research Journal*, Vol 23, No. 1 (Spring, 1991) (University of Illinois Press on behalf of the Congress on Research in Dance), pp. 6-10 (p. 6).

uprooted dance places, which provides a starting point for remedying the insecure, rootless state that the independent dance sector in Sydney currently experiences. These places and practices often go unnoticed by those not involved in dance-making. This invisibility, while sometimes of the artist's own choosing, may be attributed to the precarious itinerant existence of this sector, the part-time flow of artists in and out of their dance practice, the low public profile of independent dance and the often-challenging nature of the work itself. These factors combine to make life difficult for an ethnographer without previous contact in the field, with only a limited period of time in which to study the independent dance sector (for a dissertation, for example).

The melding of personal, professional and scholarly-investigator roles has gradually become an acceptable approach to ethnographic fieldwork over the past two decades, even though some still view it as a highly suspect, 'messy, qualitative experience'.¹¹ 'Messy' texts have been criticised as indulging the whims and prejudices of the writer and their disorderliness has been attributed to their being many-sited, open-ended and refusing theoretical closure.¹² I believe, however, that auto-ethnographic research and more traditional ethnographic practices are not entirely incompatible. Indeed, while I have chosen to investigate and map the little-studied subject of the Sydney-based independent dance culture using self-reflexive methods embedded in an auto-ethnographic perspective, I also make use of traditional ethnographic activities, namely watching and learning from fieldwork and talking and listening with other dance artists in interviews. In addition, my analysis is supported by archival documents, video, photographs and related dance ephemera.

Fieldwork and Interviews

In the course of the fieldwork undertaken for this project I have been aware of tensions between (a) my role as a personal friend to many of the individuals involved, (b) my professional dance roles as peer, collaborator, and mentor, and (c)

¹¹ *Anthropology As Cultural Critique*, ed. by George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), p. 22.

¹² Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1996), p. xvii.

my position as dance-artist-as-thesis-writer. Anthropologist Judith Okely draws attention to factors that affect the ethnographer's experience: 'This process of construction is inescapably shaped by the conceptual, professional, financial and relational opportunities and resources accessible to the ethnographer.'¹³ On the one hand, my professional immersion in this dance community has contributed considerably to my knowledge and understanding of the research field in relation to my more recent role as ethnographer. On the other hand, however, my long-term experience in and familiarity with the sector have occasionally been a disadvantage. In particular, this has been the case with regard to assumptions I had formed of dance's 'crisis of place', based on my personal experience. At times when my artistic circumstances have been less favourable and my confidence depleted by lack of opportunities to sustain my practice and find employment, I have had to consciously monitor my attitude to 'the crisis', in order to avoid assuming that my feelings of despair were shared by others. Conversely, I am aware that my recent artistic practice—I have received funding and have good prospects for developing work, as well as a number of employment positions and membership of boards in the dance sector—has influenced my relationship to the field in a positive way.¹⁴ It is only an awareness of the impact of my personal psychosocial and material circumstances on my roles as dance-artist-as-researcher and participant ethnographic researcher that has enabled me to illustrate as fully as I have the complexity of Sydney's entire independent dance sector and to shape the research questions needed for my interviews.

Twenty face-to-face interviews were conducted mainly with dance artists and a small representation of producers and administrators, each chosen specifically to ensure that a range of diverse artists and arts workers who work in Sydney were represented. This list of interviewees was not fixed from the beginning: additions were made as opportunities arose, for example, when national and international

¹³ *Anthropology and Autobiography*, ASA Monographs 29, ed. by Judith Okely and Helen Callaway (New York: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁴ During this time I have been awarded an Australia Council Fellowship (2007-2009) to research and develop my performance work *The Invisibility Project*. Employment has included my role as Acting Director at Critical Path (2006-07), (see Appendix A: Mystory #7, p. 284-87), and my current position as Dance Curator, Campbelltown Arts Centre (2009-). I have also been an Artist Representative Member of the Performance Space Board of Directors (2003-06), and am presently a member of the Dance Board, Australia Council for the Arts (2007-).

artists visited Sydney and were invited to participate in the project. The interviews provide original oral narratives, recollections—some vivid, some hazy, many contradictory—of the role place and space play in the life of an independent dance artist. I share a subjective space with the dance artists included in this research that implicates them in my production of knowledge in this thesis.

My vantage point, as a recognised and accepted insider with both an historical, and current, relationship to the participants selected for interview, served as a direct route between myself as the researcher and my artistic peers and friends as the subjects. However, I have had to negotiate and consider the potential dangers of exploitation and intimacy and issues of trust and confidentiality. From my perspective, the artists involved are not just research subjects and I have chosen not to use ethnographic terms such as ‘native’, ‘informant’, ‘respondent’, to refer to people I know as colleagues and peers, advisors, mentors, acquaintances and friends. Donald Polkinghorne suggests that “‘subjects’ become actors in a research narrative’ and that the researcher also becomes an actor in the text.”¹⁵ Even the term ‘research subject’, though I use it occasionally, is as an uncomfortably distancing label. However, I have found Polkinghorne’s notion of the research subjects and the researcher participating as an actor in a shared narrative useful when negotiating the relationship between myself and the dance artists of my study. This encourages the potential for a more holistic process, in which all parties work together in a productive process in the fieldwork situation. This collaborative proposition is well suited to both the integrity and ethics of this thesis and is consistent with how I conduct my dance practice working with artistic peers in a collaborative relationship.

My meetings with dance artists occurred in a wide variety of different locations in Sydney and under a range of different circumstances. The interviews were conducted in rehearsal rooms and other places of work, occasionally in cafes but most often in homes, my own or that of the interviewee. I recorded the conversations on a small cassette recorder. For the interviews that took place in the early days of this project I cast myself in the role of impartial interviewer. Prior to

¹⁵ Donald E. Polkinghorne, ‘Reporting Qualitative Research as Practice’ in *Representation and the Text: Reframing the Narrative Voice*, ed. by William G. Tierney and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Albany: State University of New York, 1997) pp. 3-21.

the interview, I presented a broad set of questions and provocations to the interviewee. Initially, I structured the interviews to begin with biographical details and professional history and from there shifted to my research questions. As I waited passively for answers to be given, I realised that this was not the best approach: out of respect I was prioritising the artist's journey over my research questions. As my areas of interest began to define themselves more clearly, my role became more interactive and purposeful. The interviews then took the form of loosely structured dialogues and I participated as a peer, rather than the conductor of the interview. The artist's biographical details only emerged as appropriate in relation to my questions concerning his/her identity in relation to space and place. This approach differs from the question/answer format of other interviews with local artists,¹⁶ with my participants just as likely to be asking me questions and to lead the conversation in directions that had not occurred to me.

The interview process has been episodic and sporadic, rather than being based on a predetermined schedule. My regular professional involvement with many of the dance artists has enabled me to take advantage of opportunities for conversation as they arose. I needed a planned, formal strategy for approaching the fieldwork and interviews, but I also had to leave room for opportune encounters and unanticipated discoveries. For example, many of my ethnographic accounts are the result of unexpected casual conversations in foyers and at workshops, email exchanges and telephone calls. Subsequently this led me to listen and observe more carefully in my

¹⁶ Examples of interview methods that differ from my approach include: Michelle Potter, *A Passion for Dance* (Canberra: National Library of Australia, 1997) and Andrew R. Filmer, *Backstage Space: the Place of the Performer*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Sydney: Department of Performance Studies, 2006). *A Passion for Dance* includes ten interviews by Jennifer Gall, Shirley McKechnie and dance historian Michelle Potter. The starting point for this collection of interviews is: 'What is it like being a dancer, a choreographer, a director of a dance company working in Australia on the 1990s?' Potter's interventions in the interview are primarily in the form of questions relating to the artist's dance biography and their choreography. Using a different approach to my own Potter prompts the interviewee with succinct questions and never offers opinions of her own. Interestingly, at the conclusion of each interview Potter includes personal observations regarding the artists using descriptions such as 'likeable', 'generous', 'exuberant', 'quietly spoken', 'he overflows with humanity', 'her voice coloured with emotion', 'expressive eyes and frequent gestures'. For me, these observations tend towards a fetishization of the dancer as a peculiarly physical being, a perspective quite different to my relationship to the participants in interviews for this thesis. The second example of an interview method different to my own is *Backstage Space: the Place of the Performer* where Filmer states: 'Throughout my field work I positioned myself as a researcher; it was clear to practitioners that unlike them I had no essential role in any of the productions; I was there to observe, to learn and to write about what I experienced... my experience of backstage areas was partial... I only encountered some of what was 'going on'.' Filmer, p. 48.

everyday dance activities and adjust my approach to these occasions as the opportunities arose. I began to share my own stories and analysis with other artists, and I entered into a dialogue that is ongoing to this day.

My work methodology has often, and to great advantage, been shaped by the operations of chance. Interestingly, it parallels the way in which I work in my performance-making practice. In devising dance work, I begin with a subject, the aims for the project, a conceptual framework involving research questions and hypotheses, and tasks for generating the process. It is no less important for me to allow my process to be responsive and open to unexpected outcomes, new directions and serendipity. This applies to the ethnographic processes of this research. As an artist I value adaptability as one of my key tools. The ability to change according to evolving circumstance also became a significant characteristic of my fieldwork practice in response to the exigencies of unanticipated circumstances, such as late-night post-show conversations. At the same time I was conscious to not allow tangential interests to lead me too far off track.

It was during my first series of interviews and conversations that two themes were repeatedly highlighted: one, the difficult relationship of independent dance artists to the limited number of performance venues and studio spaces, and two, the crucial role played by place and space in shaping the identities of independent dance artists. The paucity of suitable and affordable spaces for independent dance was nothing short of—and the term was used by many of my interviewees—a ‘crisis’. This gave me the momentum I needed to sustain my research project.

Archival Materials

Existing histories of contemporary dance in Australia tend to focus on a ‘highly selective stream of professional artists, [thus] the impression is given that that’s all there is (was)’.¹⁷ However there are always multiple histories, some picked up in

¹⁷*Community and the Arts*, ed. by Vivienne Binns (Sydney: Pluto Press, 1991), pp. 13-14.

retrospect but often attracting little interest at the time they were occurring.¹⁸ This thesis focuses on Sydney dance artists who make dance work that is often labelled ‘fringe’, ‘alternative’ and ‘marginal’; those, who in recent years have been labelled ‘independent’; those who are mainly funded from project to project, often at erratic intervals, rather than in an ongoing way. These independent dance artists make a significant contribution to the development of the art form. However, I am not aware of any resource that collates available material on independent dance practices in such a way as to draw attention to it and so provide for its health and ensure that it is properly supported. The present project begins the vital task of correcting this situation.

Any history of performance—especially one that seeks to recapture performance that has very little written text, such as dance—is fragmentary. Unlike some dance studies where the dance artefact—that is the dance performances and cultural product—is central, my primary concern is the development of the art form and its dance processes and associated conditions. Nevertheless, I regularly attend live dance performances and have done so over the entire duration of this project. I have also watched many videotaped archival versions of the dances and more recently edited promotional versions of the live performances of the artists. Observations and interpretations made from experiencing this work contribute to a crucial understanding of the sensibilities of the individual artists within the sector as well as knowledge of the diversity of artists who make up the complex networks of this dance community. Crucially, attending performances provides knowledge of their making practices, i.e. products to a great extent contain traces of processes. Some analysis of these dance works has been done, based on live viewings, viewings of videoed performances and newspaper reviews of performances. This has been complemented by photographs taken by Heidrun Löhr, who since her arrival in Sydney from Germany in 1989 has been one of the foremost documenters of the Sydney live performance scene.

¹⁸See Amanda Card, *History in Motion: Dance and Australian Culture, 1920-1970*, unpublished PhD thesis (University of Sydney: Department of History, 1999).

The bodies captured on video and in photographs selected for this thesis provide a valuable additional layer of unspoken knowledge to be analysed contributing to this history of alternative dance in Sydney. Of the ten reasons given by Sandra Weber for using images in research of this kind, two are particularly relevant here: one, images capture the ineffable and give breadth and depth to things that are difficult to grasp through language alone and, two, ‘images encourage embodied knowledge’. Weber suggests that visual images (including photographs and other types of graphics such as the diagrams in Chapter Two) ‘help researchers keep their own bodies and the bodies of those they study in mind’.¹⁹

The Performance Space archives have enabled me to work on material centrally related to independent dance in Sydney since the mid-1980s. This material—press releases, programmes, media materials, choreographic notes, personal archives and artefacts—provides evidence that Performance Space, the organization, and its theatre venue and practice spaces, have played a vital role in sustaining independent dance in Sydney through numerous development projects and public presentations. In addition I have accessed archival artistic materials such as grant applications and artists’ statements, as well as business records of the One Extra Company. Significantly, individual artists have generously lent me personal ephemera, enabling the voices of individual artists to be heard in my research. In contrast to the tone of these materials, but equally important, the Australia Council Library has provided a wealth of census data and consultancy reports, most of which provide sobering statistics about the state of the small-to-medium dance sector in Australia.

Methodological Strategy Two: Research Writing Methods

Having focused on ethnography as a method in the previous section, here, in the explication of the second strategy, I begin with auto-ethnography as a text. I return to the question: What is auto-ethnography? but this time in relation to auto-ethnography as research narrative and writing. As defined by Carolyn Ellis auto-ethnographic texts are usually written in the first person, but can take a variety of

¹⁹ Sandra Weber, ‘Visual Images in Research’ in *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*, pp. 41-53.

forms. Mine take two forms; one, the Intersections within the chapters, printed in *italics* are the personal essays, memoir, writings about action and embodiment, along with two, the Mystories, placed in the Appendix that include examples of grant writing, public speaking and artist statement voices. By placing these voices in dialogue on the page my aim is to provide intersections of knowledge that may generate unexpected answers to the research questions of this thesis.

This study is not an auto-ethnography. I have chosen an auto-ethnographic perspective, or maybe it chose me, as a way to make links between the artistic and the scholarly worlds of this study. This practice and written composition allow me to make visible the multiple positions I assume as participant ethnographer, the subject in the field, the audience member, and the dancer, in a highly personalised way informed by my own unique past, present and future aspirations.

A Performance-Based Approach

This thesis connects dance studies, a local dance history, theories of place and space, and auto-ethnographic texts and is thus an embodied, as well as written, production. Penelope Hanstein points out the similarities between choreography and scholarly research:

Like dance making, research is a purposeful, creative, interpretive, and intuitive process that is often circuitous and improvisational. The quintessential element of both choreography and research is discovery – we enter without knowing, in order to discover what we need to know to lead us to what there is to know.²⁰

Indeed, many authors speak of this ‘not knowing’ during parts of the research. However, what gives dance research a distinctive face is the fact that ‘we, as dancers, have long valued subjective and active, embodied ways of knowing, even while we have strived to inhabit objective forms and idioms’.²¹ There is much interest from both artists and scholars in embodied ways of knowing, in interdisciplinary boundary

²⁰ Penelope Hanstein, ‘From Idea to Research Proposal,’ in *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry*, ed. by Sondra Horton Fraleigh and Penelope Hanstein (Pittsburg, Pa: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), pp. 22-61 (p. 23).

²¹ Ibid.

crossings and hybridity, of ‘over flowing’ and fluidity, multi-dimensionality and plural practices, as ways to transform and create new understandings.

Dwight Conquergood has called for performance-based approaches to help scholars imagine new critical possibilities for communication and cultural studies. He has advocated that making and presenting performance itself is a way of knowing. I have adopted this proposal and include examples of my performance practice and processes that illuminate my research concerns, in the texts of the Mystories. Conquergood suggests that the possibilities of such an approach can ‘revitalize the connections between practical knowledge (knowing how), propositional knowledge (knowing that), and political savvy (knowing who, when and where)’.²² This performance-based approach contributes embodied knowledge to my methodological plurality and a different articulation of the research questions.

Over the past decade the crisis of place and space has obliged me to adapt and change aspects of both my artistic practice and, necessarily, its performance outcomes. I have created an idiosyncratic movement vocabulary as a result of place and space limitations. Furthermore, I have created group processes away from Sydney, as a result of restrictive working conditions in the city, and my current work is taking shape not within the confines of a conventional theatre space, but in public places and domestic spaces.²³ My aim in choosing to include this performance-based/dance-based approach is to produce a research dynamic that doesn’t just add theoretical knowledge, but also provides suggestions for change in artistic practice, and in doing so may assist in developing new ways for working with the crisis of place in the independent dance sector.

Mystory

In his book *Teletheory* Gregory Ulmer explores the challenges for new writing emerging out of the digital age.²⁴ At the core of teletheory is Ulmer’s formulation of

²² Dwight Conquergood, ‘Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research’, *TDR: The Drama Review*, 46(2), (2002), pp.145-156 (p. 153).

²³ See Appendix A: Mystory #1-7, pp. 251-87.

²⁴ Gregory Ulmer, *Teletheory: Grammatology in the Age of Video* (New York: Routledge, 1989).

the Mystory, which he refers to as a blurring of the boundary between critical and creative writing, and as a flow across the boundaries of three different types of discourse: personal, popular and expert. The Mystory incorporates autobiography and cultural history, and locates the author within a network of cultural references with the intended effect of a montage of quotations, evolving with an open-ended, unfolding quality to the composition.

In other words, the Mystory is a new form of writing history. Whilst academic practice is part of the Mystory, personal observations and sources of lay knowledge and the author's identification with the object of the study are at the centre of the research. These intersections of knowledge draw attention to affiliations and bias, and guide the researcher.²⁵ For Norman Denzin, Mystory represents personal history (autobiography), history (culture) and expert systems of knowledge (theory).²⁶ In Denzin's definition of Mystory, the personal text is grafted onto discourses from popular culture, and locates itself against and/or alongside the specialised knowledges that circulate in the broader society.

Mystory is intrinsically connected to memory, combining individual reflection and archival enquiry in its writing. Ulmer uses the evocative 'sting of memory' to locate the personal moments in the Mystory and layers it with those cultural representations and voices that define the experience in question.²⁷ Memories have propelled my thesis project, from recollections in the Introduction of the family-like ensemble of the small dance company's home studio, (in the Introduction), through to walking the streets of the city in search of lost places (in Chapter Three), remembering where I used to dance, and even to remembering my dancing body as I sit writing at my computer.

Ulmer's intention is that the Mystory is an academic genre that should not replace traditional academic writing, but rather supplement it. Similarly, my intention in

²⁵ Mike Pearson, *"In Comes I": Performance, Memory and Landscape* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 2006), p. 10.

²⁶ Norman Denzin, 'Performance Texts' in *Representation and the Text: Re-framing the Narrative Voice*, ed. by William, R. Tierney, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, (Albany: State of University of New York Press, 1997), pp. 179-217.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

Walking in Sydney Looking for Dancing is that the Mystory complements the scholarly ethnography and contains examples of past and present performances as primary sources and case studies that refer to the complexity of the independent dance sector and the crisis of place and space. I have developed an adaptation of Ulmer's Mystory for my own purposes, and chosen to introduce all six parts of the Mystory with covering notes to set-up the context and connect them to the research questions of the larger project. Conventional Mystory models do not seek to clarify connections, but leave it to the reader to make sense of what is presented. In this thesis, each part of the Mystory takes a different artistic project that I have been involved with throughout the duration of this thesis project, and by positioning them between the Chapters aims to contribute a different type of knowledge and reflection on the themes of that Chapter.

In this thesis Mystory serves as a model, or, as Lisa Gye suggests, 'a recipe',²⁸ for collecting and arranging my experiences as a dance artist and my primary source archival artefacts within the scholarly research. Whereas models aim for reproduction, this analogy of the recipe is an evocative one. I have adapted the Mystory, like an original recipe that requires 'the input of a range of ingredients, including the cook, to make them work'.²⁹ This 'recipe' is highly subjective and idiosyncratic. For the reader, the ingredients are a compilation of fragments, drawn from my own experiences, and made up of archival materials and other ephemera. This collection is an apt representation of the fragmented existence one leads as a dance artist skipping from one persona and role to the next. My intention in constructing an assemblage of a narrative of my professional story is that the accumulated knowledge contributes to my research aims. As occurs in auto-ethnography, running through the personal narrative in Mystory is the analysis that, as Carolyn Ellis puts it, 'can come through story and dialogue'.³⁰ Ellis advocates the value of story and argues for the importance of the role of the story in providing instructive ways 'to think'. The premise for engagement with Mystory in this thesis

²⁸ Lisa Gye, 'HalfLives, A Mystory: Writing Hypertext to Learn' *Fibreculture Journal* Issue 2, accessed: http://journal.fibreculture.org/issue2/issue2_gye.html [accessed 5 August, 2009].

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Carolyn Ellis and Art Bochner, 'Autoethnography, Personal Narrative, Reflexivity: Researcher as Subject', in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, pp. 733-68.

is to create a written guide for my personal history, located in the landscape of dance in Sydney and informed by the crossing of interdisciplinary boundaries that I experience regularly in my artistic practice, ‘to bring into visibility the situation of the person within the social order’.³¹

My artistic practice expressed in the Mystories shares thematic concerns with the thesis questions. *MissXL* (2000-02) is a character developed in response to the challenges of a crisis in working conditions, both in form and choreographic content. *The Nun’s Picnic* (2003-05) was an independent site-specific collaborative project shaped by location in a new place. *The Invisibility Project*, an ongoing project begun in 2007 and yet to be performed, in private domestic spaces and public places, investigates issues of visibility and invisibility as they relate to the middle-aged dancer. Each Mystory vignette offers a different perspective to the articulation of my argument, from fictitious interview and parody, to reportage, diary entries, artistic manifesto and conversational anecdotes.

Methodological Strategy Three: Walking, Looking and Mapping

The title of this thesis *Walking in Sydney, Looking for Dance* draws attention to my two key areas of inquiry: place/space and dance. I have sought to embed the relationships between my writing, dancing and ethnographer selves within the strata of the thesis and the present participles ‘walking’ and ‘looking’ propose an active metaphor suggesting an embodied investigation in the present. I make use of ‘walking’ and ‘looking’ as structural devices: they propose a narrative and propel me as both a subject and an object through physical places and the social space of the city.

In Chapter Three my memory of when I worked full-time in dance studios around the city served to initiate a schedule of walks. I began by walking around the city in search of sites where dance once took place, but no longer exist. I imagined these

³¹ Gregory L. Ulmer, ‘Review Essay: Unthinkable Writing’, Review of: Perforations 5, “Bodies, Dreams, Technologies”, in *Postmodern Culture* 4:3
http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/postmodern_culture/v004/4.3r_ulmer.html [accessed 5 August, 2009].

places of the past and then, in my mind, mapped the dance studios where I used to work. I then set out on my walks to look for what had become of them. This walking and my quest to remember these places are at the heart of my thesis. Like the *flâneur*, ‘a consumer of sights and goods’ I looked for dance places that were once there and remembered what used to be there.³² The second step in my walking project entailed looking at those places in Sydney where dance and theatre are currently made, where dancers train, rehearse, practice and perform. For this method, on a number of occasions, I set off specifically to observe the walk and the places, but mostly I recorded notes as I went about my day-to-day schedule in which these studios and theatres feature in varying degrees.

This mapping allows me to ‘write’ the unknown or unrecognised route³³ from an auto-ethnographic perspective, with the emphasis on memory, privileging subjectivity through the choice of certain locales and the specificity of these sites, and remembering the specific bodies that inhabited them. Inevitably partiality in the choice of places I visit and the precise nature of my interest are part of this method.

Dancer as Geographer

French kinesiologist and movement researcher Hubert Godard provides a useful way of thinking about the skills and inclinations of a dancer’s disposition as geographical:

If I had to point out to you a way of getting to a particular place in the city, I would have two options: I could either situate it with the help of a map and spatial orientations, or I could indicate a route to you: turn right, then after the post office turn left, and so on. The second option necessitates language, and you can’t reverse two propositions without getting lost (chronology). This kind of orientation – by means of directions, routes – is that of the theatre writer, as well as of the historian and the psychoanalyst, all of whom are looking to reconnect a thread of events. On the other hand, a dancer operates more like a geographer, accumulating maps, intra-corporeal dispositions, geographical situations which subsequently produce a history. Given that language (the route) is not the primary necessity, a quality of

³² Rob Shields, ‘Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin’s Notes on *Flânerie*’ in *The Flâneur*, ed. by Keith Tester (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 61-80 (p.78).

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

wandering is created, a nomadism which partly escape the history's determination.³⁴

The observation that the route and map-making are not essential for the dancer reflects my own engagement with an embodied practice of walking without marking the map, giving preference to my selected practice of using different voices, layered writing methods and a performance-based approach as a means of structuring knowledge and productivity. My model of accumulated methodologies uses subjective, embodied ways of knowing and doing, and it values circuitous and meandering methods of discovery. At a conference entitled 'Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid', held at Deakin University in 2005, Elizabeth Dempster called for an embracing of wanderings and vagueness.³⁵ Dempster identified and illuminated a dilemma I have sometimes struggled with in undertaking this project. I asked myself the following questions: to what extent what can the places and dance processes of the independent dance sector in Sydney be mapped? What remains abstracted and unable to be measured? And how do I occupy the factual and objective form of the thesis with my dancer's inclination that tends towards abstraction and strays from the tangible?

Many writers have draw attention to the relationship between thinking and moving. In her history of walking, Rebecca Solnit writes:

Walking allows us to be in our bodies and in the world without being made busy by them. It leaves us free to think without being wholly lost in our thoughts... Moving on foot seems to make it easier to move in time; the mind wanders from plans to recollections to observations.³⁶

Walking is a subject that is always straying.³⁷

³⁴ 'Singular, Moving Geographies' an interview with Hubert Godard by Laurence Louppe, *Writings on Dance #15 The French Issue*, ed. by Elizabeth Dempster, Sally Gardner, D. Williams, (Melbourne: Publishers Elizabeth Dempster, and Sally Gardner, 1996), pp. 12-21 (p. 15).

³⁵ Elizabeth Dempster, 'Undisciplined Subjects, Unregulated Practices: Dancing in the Academy' in Conference Proceedings: *Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid* (ACT: Ausdance National, 2005).

³⁶ Rebecca Solnit, *Wanderlust: A History of Walking* (Middlesex, England: Viking, 2000), p. 5.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

Like Solnit, I appreciate the practice of walking as part of my thinking and *doing* research processes.

Intra-corporeal dispositions

Stand - both legs are long - femur tibia fibula - soften behind the right knee - shift weight onto the supporting left leg as much as is necessary to enable you to release the right - the air is a cushion - peel the right foot off the ground softly and press down into the ball of the foot - press down to release - unfold the leg from the fleshiness of the thigh - be aware of the weight of the femur bone hanging from the hip socket - lengthen forward - touch the heel of the right foot and allow the weight to transfer through the ball of the foot spreading into and across the toes - as the weight transfers through the front foot the back foot leaves the floor at exactly the same speed and intensity - continue alternating legs - swinging through to proceed forward using the strength in the softness of the buttocks - swing the left leg through to begin the transfer forward from heel to ball to toes, shifting off the back foot off at the same time - swing the right leg - swing the left - swing the right - observe this action - don't comment - no judging whether you are doing it well - or if it feels easy - or awkward - just observe your body - walking...

I have always been conscious of keeping my toes in line with my ankles and knees as I walk, coupled with attention to each foot stepping out parallel on its own walking track, rather like narrow train tracks. The duck waddle of the trained ballet dancer has been abolished from my perambulatory repertoire...

I walk because my body is the thing I know best. I walk and feel older and walk and feel bulkier as I walk past the places where I used to work. I walk and I walk and I will go walking, in ways that best fit my body in this search...

In 2006 I couldn't walk without crutches or a limp for at least six months. I didn't feel like myself. I wasn't myself. I seemed less of myself in public and closer to my true self in private. For many years I took my body for granted. While I no longer train regularly I still carry with me every day the memories in my muscles. As Eleanor Brickhill says 'the body of my past is here today'. This physical rupture was the first ever for me. As Wainwright and Turner write, the professional dancer's sense of identity is rooted in her body. When I went to see the surgeon he said, "well what do you expect, you can't do what you used to do and you have put on weight and the body just can't do it even if your mind thinks you can." Rod Stewart sang about love: 'The first cut is the deepest', well it's the same for a dancer and injury. I had a deep sense of shame and embarrassment and an overwhelming sense of loss.

Even now three years after my accident I often hobble for the first part of my day with my left foot contracted on the inside to protect the arthritic ankle joint until it warms up and eases into the day. A delayed repair was my own fault as I stubbornly tried to keep going with my Achilles tendon hanging on by a thread. The attitude is the legacy of my dance discipline and early training. The injury was prompted by my persistent engagement with an unworthy treadmill. Solnit has a bit to say about treadmills! Then, by accident while teaching, I caught my foot on the edge of a dance

floor as I crossed the room and kapow! When I finally succumbed to a doctor I was immediately whipped into hospital for a total reconstruction. My calf now looks the same as the uninjured right one but inside it works quite differently. Two years later I am reminded daily what a stubborn fool I was. I no longer run for the bus and a deep consciousness takes over when I step off the curb on a rainy day. It doesn't sound like much but it has rocked my psyche to the core.

My current preoccupation is devising performance parties for people's homes. Haven chosen lounge rooms as sites for presenting performances I have little interest in virtuosic leaping and bounding about, tending towards refining further my interest in more detailed, nuanced minimal movement. I have adapted my physicality and have little need for a fully functioning Achilles tendon.

Many theorists have anticipated my conceptual approach to walking throughout this project. Initially I took my cue from Michel de Certeau's influential essay 'Walking in the City', with his theoretical framework for understanding the temporal and spatial operations of urban planning, his theories of consumption, and the power relations he analyses in terms of strategy and tactics.³⁸ It is this third concern of de Certeau's that I want to develop in this thesis, and his essay title serves as a jumping-off point for me, and my embodied walking practice.

I perambulate through a number of locales—theatres and studios, places and spaces—in order to identify dance activity that is accessible to the public, predominantly presentations in theatres and arts precinct venues. Specifically, my purpose is to reveal the dance activity in the private spaces of studios and rehearsal rooms that for limited periods of time house the peripatetic independent dance communities who are accustomed to travelling from place to place and working simultaneously between several places. For me, like de Certeau, 'to walk is to lack a place'.³⁹ My primary motivation with this mapping is to come to a better understanding of the mutually enabling and/or disabling relationship between place, as well as lack of place and the independent dance networks in Sydney. I use this approach in order to convey the dance sector's complexities and what is at stake for the development of the art form, if the practices and dance processes of the independent artists are 'out of place'.

³⁸ de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, see 'Walking in the City', pp. 91-110, and "'Making Do'" uses and tactics', pp. 29-42.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

As well as walking excursions and writing about walking, I am also looking for a key to creating visual approaches for mapping the spatial arrangements and political and cultural meanings of dance in the city of Sydney. The visual mappings of Guy de Bord's situationist work in the 1950s inspired me to create my own visual maps as a way of representing the mapping and the walking on the pages of this thesis. I deploy an additional mapping method with the inclusion of two original visual maps. My first map, in Chapter Two, is a map of the interconnected networks of dance artists in the independent sector. This map is a visual representation of 'who worked with whom' during 2005-06, and it makes visible my knowledge of the relations in the sector, adding another layer of interpretation, analysis and meaning to my thesis.

A Choreographer's Chorography

One of the key aims of this thesis is to create an original map of the city of Sydney, one that charts for the first time the places and spaces where dancing occurs today, while simultaneously remembering the sites where dancers used to work in the 1980s. To this end chorography proves useful for the mapping of place and memory in this thesis. Chorography is the study of the spatial distribution of organisms and the causal relations between geographical phenomena. I have adapted a model of chorography in order to understand the character of Sydney and the dance places and spaces that I am studying. This chorographic point of view is an effective means for observing the interactions of the networks of independent dance artists and arts organizations and the specificities of arts precincts and independent studios in Sydney. Chorography allows me to write about the little known or under-recognised entities, privileging subjectivity through the choice of certain locales and admitting inevitable partiality in areas of interest, such as the local histories and circumstances of the independent dance sector.⁴⁰

As Mike Pearson puts it, chorography: 'demonstrates partiality; its outcomes are partial'.⁴¹ Indeed—and this risks sounding like a statement of the obvious—I am

⁴⁰ For example, theatres that present predominantly commercial performances such as The Capitol Theatre, Haymarket and The Lyric Theatre, Star City, and, at the other end of activity I do not concern myself here with amateur non-professional studios such as ballet schools and private dance schools.

⁴¹ Mike Pearson, 'Chorography', *Performance Research* Vol 11, (3 September 2006), p. 19.

only concerned with the Sydney locations that interest me! Pearson's *In Comes I* is an engaging example of contemporary chorographic writing, in which he undertakes a series of excursions in a defined area of England where he grew up. He incorporates performances and biography, details of the land and the locality, and themes of memory and place. In examining Sydney's dance landscape, this thesis seeks to parallel the way in which Pearson's chorographic account captures a subjective dimension of spatiality within his localities in England.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to explicate my research methods: ethnography; writing strategies including auto-ethnographic texts, Mystory, and chorographic writing created through embodied practices such as walking and mapping. I understand my research design and selected strategies as a set of interdependencies within an idiosyncratic model of methodological plurality. The purpose and nature of these research methods have met what I perceive to be the ever-changing circumstances of this complex dance world. Through the layering of distinct voices, the relationships between the voices of dance artist, auto-ethnographer and thesis researcher/writer exist together and offer some conceptual and experiential intersections. I have chosen to combine and utilise these different methods of analysis and representation to work together in response to particular investigative paths, much like independent dance artists do themselves. My intention is that these approaches bring the scholarly into closer dialogue with dance practices, thereby creating an original approach to researching the local dance sector.

Chapter Two

Setting the Scene for Independent Dance

This chapter will examine the environment and conditions under which dance is produced in Sydney, in order to better understand the complex behavioural characteristics of the actions and organization of the independent dance sector. This investigation of the dance sector as a complex adaptive system helps us to understand how Sydney-based independent dance artists function in a world characterised by insecure employment opportunities, cultural imperatives that value the product over the process, and where progress tends to be measured in terms of economic success. It is my contention that complexity theory can provide dance practitioners, policy makers and theorists with new ways of comprehending the value of the independent dance sector and coping with the sector's complexity and, moreover, lead to ways in which the practical processes of dance-making might be strengthened and favourable conditions for its future growth and sustainability generated.¹

Drawing on the terminology of dance filmmakers, this chapter is organised in three parts, 'wide-shot', 'mid-shot' and 'close-up'. I set the scene with a wide-angle approach to the dance landscape, identifying the location of the clusters of independent artists who are located in the broad Australian dance landscape and specifically in Sydney. When mapping Sydney dance I both draw on and contest parts of a schema proposed by dance critic and academic Hilary Crampton for the Melbourne dance scene. Crampton's model presents a familiar, 'top down' view,

¹ 'Contemporary complexity theory provides a powerful set of analytic metaphors for comprehending the emergent properties of social phenomena and their diverse levels of order and meaning'. Paul Atkinson, Sara Delamont and William Housley, *Contours of Culture: Complex Ethnography and the Ethnography of Complexity* (Plymouth, UK: AltaMira Press, 2008), p. 48.

based on categorisation according to status, size and wealth of dance institutions, with independents located in the bottom sector. While funding and resource hierarchies are a significant reality, this ‘top down’ view needs to be supplemented with a ‘view from the base’, which emphasises the activities and the interactions of independent dance artists with each other and with other parts of the dance landscape. At the end of this chapter I mobilise complexity theory, as a means to this end.

The ‘mid-shot’ section of the chapter expands on this ‘significant reality’ with an exploration of the policy and funding environment for Australian dance. These conditions, including arts policy, government initiatives and funding outcomes, exert a fundamental influence on the structure and workings of Sydney’s professional dance sector. The small-to-medium, not-for-profit sector, including the independent professional dance sector, is almost totally reliant on public subsidy, and consequently, to a significant extent is shaped by arts policy and funding.

The third and final section is a detailed ‘close-up’ examination of the behaviour and characteristics of the independent dance sector at the bottom layer of my own proposed Sydney pyramid. Influenced by the analytic metaphors of complexity theory, this section is an adaptation of the schema proposed by Hilary Crampton for the dance scene in Melbourne. The dance sector is often seen as an ‘ecosystem’,² but I have found little evidence of complexity and systems theories being applied to any analysis of the dance landscape.³ My research of the independent dance sector in Sydney utilises complexity traits as they are outlined in Paul Cilliers’ *Complexity and Postmodernism*.⁴ My analysis of the dance sector as a complex adaptive system

² Keith Gallasch describes the arts as ‘an ecosystem: a self-organising, intricate, dynamic network of numerous agents looped together, competing for but primarily sharing resources, mutually evolving and responding to emerging organisms and innovations, and without a governing consciousness.’ *Art in a Cold Climate: Rethinking the Australia Council*, Platform Papers No. 6 (Sydney: Currency House, 2005), p. 2.

³ *Unspoken Knowledges* (1999-2001) and *Conceiving Connections* (2002-2004), Australian Research Council projects lead by dance scholar Shirley McKechnie and cognitive psychologist Cate Stevens, both employ complexity theory in order to analyse the dance ensemble as a creative and complex system. Their exploration of choreographic cognition and ways of conceptualising the choreographic process utilises complexity theory with quite a different focus to my own approach.

⁴ Paul Cilliers, pp. 3-7.

explores the role of local interactions and diversity that create the dynamics and organization of the sector. In addition, I highlight the way in which the Sydney dance sector's communications and altruistic behaviours are sustained and reconfigured during favourable circumstances as well as during difficult times.

To clarify my proposal of the dance sector as a complex adaptive system, I use and contrast four linear and web-like diagrams of the interactions within the dance landscape. The first of these, with a pyramid schema representing the structures of national and local dance, depicts the state of dance in 2005 in Melbourne. The next two pyramid-schema diagrams represent the years 2003 and 2008 in Sydney and illustrate the rapid changes in the structures and 'make-up' of this local sector over the past decade. In the final diagram I produce a contrasting mapping of intersecting professional and interpersonal networks between individuals of the independent dance sector. This map also shows connections between independent dance artists, places and organizational systems of the broader dance landscape.

This chapter sets the scene for a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of arts policy and funding institutions in terms of their impact on the independent dance sector and response to change and crisis. I shall return to these considerations and analytic metaphors of complexity in Chapters Three, Four and Five and they will be applied in the Conclusion, where I propose ways in which the sector might organise itself in the future so as to achieve sustainability and vibrancy.

Wide-Shot: The Dance Landscape

A quick glance over the terrain of the professional dance sector in Sydney reveals it to be characterised by a few large 'flagship' institutions, a modest collection of small companies and organizations, and many combinations of individual practising artists and independent ensembles. Like most cities in Australia, this hierarchical structure is defined by budgets and access to resources, with the few bigger organizations generally having more than the many smaller ones, and size often equating with public visibility and larger audience numbers.

At the 2005 ‘Dance Rebooted’ conference, Hilary Crampton presented a diagram of the dance performance scene in Melbourne, which seemed at that time an appropriate model of the dance scene in Sydney too.⁵ Crampton’s motives for devising this schema are similar to my own. We both identify the sustainability of the art form as a timely issue and seek ways to understand better how to guarantee this. Crampton uses Pierre Bourdieu’s sociological notion of ‘field’ to describe dance in the ‘sector’. Bourdieu’s work presents systems of social positions and power relationships that reiterate hierarchical power.⁶ My focus is on the more fluid activity, actions and interactions of complexity, in which the independent dance sector is engaged. I have chosen this focus to build a case for the value of tactical, ‘making do’ practices that enable independent dance artists to adapt, to change, generating sustainability.

⁵ Hilary Crampton, ‘Redefining the Field – Expanding the Field’, Conference Proceedings: *Dance Rebooted: Initializing the Grid* (ACT: Ausdance National, 2005), p. 3.

⁶ Pierre Bourdieu, *The Rules of Art: Structure and Genesis of the Literary Field*, trans by Susan Emanuel (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

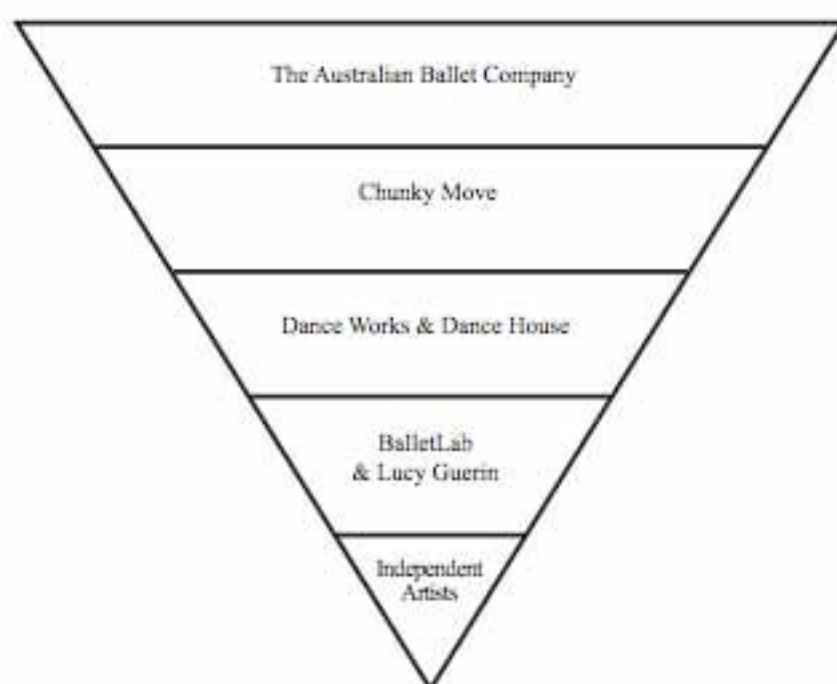


Diagram 1: Hilary Crampton, Melbourne dance performance sector, 2005

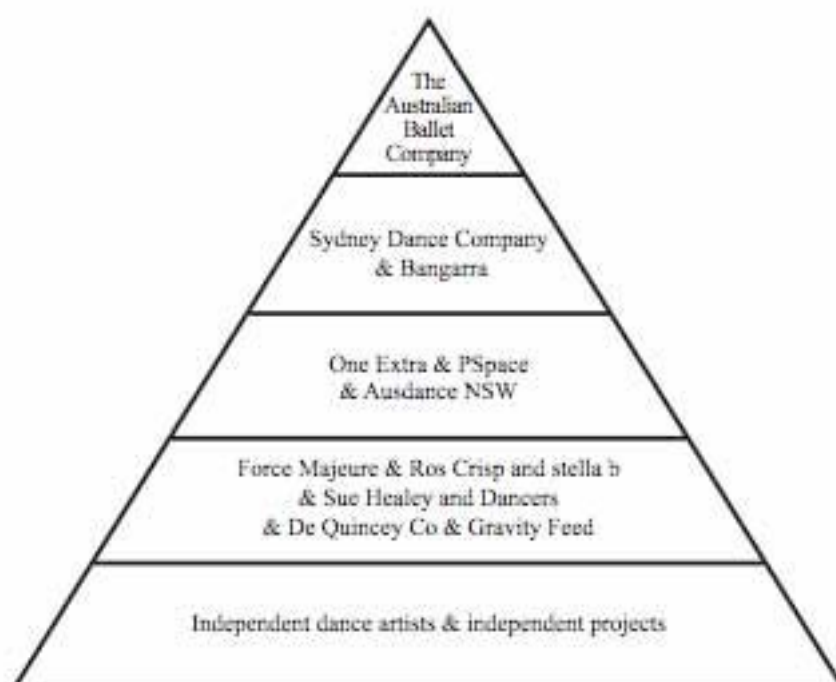


Diagram 2: Sydney dance performance sector, 2003

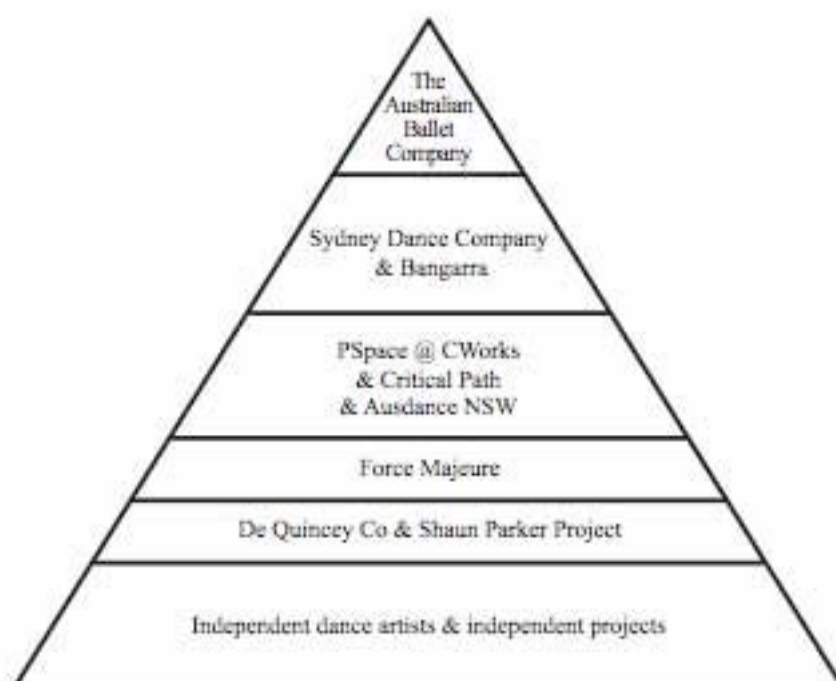


Diagram 3: Sydney dance performance sector, 2009

Crampton's schema (see Diagram 1) represents Melbourne's dance institutions and the prevailing framework within which dance is viewed and practised there, in terms of their 'relative levels of resourcing, power and public profile' in 2005.⁷ It is a structure that serves to reinforce levels of status and power relationships. The diagram is of an inverted pyramid, with the largest companies on top and the independents at the bottom. The Australian Ballet Company (ABCo) inhabits the widest part of the pyramid in the band across the top and the Victorian state-funded contemporary dance company Chunky Move occupies the second widest band. Dance Works and Dance House, organizations that both support independent choreographers, come next, with two choreographer-led companies, BalletLab and Lucy Guerin Inc, together on the fourth band. The bottom section is occupied by Melbourne's independent dance artists. This inverted pyramid suggests a precarious top-heavy structure, in which the 'poorer' independents take the weight of the 'wealthy' sector.

Unlike Crampton's, my own pyramidal diagram representing the dance scene in Sydney in 2003 is not inverted (see Diagram 2) and puts the independents at the base. While Crampton's criteria were an organization's size and public profile, my own were the contribution to innovation and development of the art form that the artists or organizations made.

In my diagram the independents occupy two layers at the base of the pyramid. For me, the base reflects the influence exerted by independent sector in and around Sydney and the state of New South Wales on new ways of thinking about and making dance. The wide base also represents the vital position of the independents in providing the breeding ground for innovation, which filters into the local and national dance sector of the other layers. On the second bottom layer there are those who have initiated company structures to enable developing new work from their personal choreographic visions, while on the very bottom layer there are those who survive individually as artists, supporting their own work through a variety of strategies and freelance situations. The interactions between the independent artists, both individuals and company structures, who occupy these two bottom layers, are

⁷ Crampton, p. 3.

more fluid than anywhere else on the pyramid. These are all artists who are obliged to cope with intermittent funding, limited infrastructure and sporadic access to restricted resources.

Over the past decade the independent artists directing companies in Sydney have been Sue Healey (Sue Healey and dancers), Kate Champion (Force Majeure), Tess de Quincey (de Quincey Co), Alan Schacher and collaborators (Gravity Feed), Shaun Parker (Shaun Parker Project) and Rosalind Crisp (stella b).⁸

On the next, and third, level of the pyramid there are four organizations: Critical Path, One Extra, Performance Space, and Ausdance NSW. Through their dance-focused activities as curators, producers, venues, and service providers, each of these supports the independent dance sector in development and presentation. Between 2005 and 2009, as a comparison between Diagrams 2 and 3 makes clear, there has been considerable change in this layer of activity. Critical Path, a dance research and development organization, was established in 2005 and is supported by an initiative of Ausdance, the national dance advocacy organization, and the NSW State Government.⁹ The One Extra Company has undergone many changes since its inception in the late seventies, shifting from artistic director/choreographer-led structures through to a producer model that emerged in 1996. It ceased operating on 31 December, 2006. The third organization in this layer, Performance Space (PSpace), is a national centre for contemporary interdisciplinary arts and hybrid performance practice, which operated out of a building on Cleveland Street, Redfern, between 1981 and 2006. PSpace moved premises at the beginning of 2007 to CarriageWorks (CWorks), a new major contemporary performance venue in Sydney, funded by the NSW State Government. This move required a reconfiguring of PSpace's company structure and necessitated a new way, for them, of dealing with artists and programming. There are detailed case studies and 'snapshots' of these organizations in Chapters Three, Four and Five below.

⁸ Rosalind Crisp founded Omeo Dance Studio, one of the few dance artist-run-initiatives in Sydney over the past decade. See Chapter Three for a case study of this important studio enterprise.

⁹ See Appendix A: Mystory #6 Critical Path, p. 277.

Moving up the pyramid structure, the bands get narrower. In the third band is the state representative company, Sydney Dance Company and the national company, Bangarra Dance Theatre, both clients of the Major Performing Arts Board of the Australia Council and state funded by Arts NSW. Sydney Dance Company currently employs seventeen full-time dancers and Bangarra maintains an ensemble of between eight and fourteen dancers on long-term contracts (depending on the company's needs at any time). For 30 years, until the middle of 2007, choreographer Graeme Murphy, an Australian household name, led the Sydney Dance Company. Like the Australian Ballet Company, which is referred to as 'The Ballet' and 'The Company', Sydney Dance Company is commonly referred to as 'The Dance Company' and 'Sydney Dance'. Bangarra Dance Theatre, the flagship national Indigenous dance company, is directed by choreographer Stephen Page, a charismatic and vocal spokesperson for Indigenous issues who received the NSW Australian of the Year 2008 Award. Both Bangarra and Sydney Dance Company have their own purpose-built studios at The Wharf, in the arts precinct of Walsh Bay, giving them secure home bases in perpetuity. They present regular seasons at the Opera House and in major commercial theatres locally, nationally and internationally. (For more on the Sydney Dance Company see Chapter Four).

At the apex of my Sydney pyramid is the Australian Ballet Company (ABCo), the country's largest in terms of employee numbers and annual budgets.¹⁰ Even though the studios of the ABCo are in Melbourne (in association with the Australian Ballet School), the Company spends more than half of its performance seasons in residence at the Sydney Opera House. The ABCo receives significant funding from the Australia Council, Arts Victoria and a small public subsidy from the Dance Fund at Arts NSW. The Australian Ballet has a large subscriber base and is dependent on box office for a significant percentage of its income. 'In the eyes of most of the potential dance audience, this is DANCE!'¹¹ The audience knows what to expect when they go to see this well-resourced national flagship company: an impressive contingent of highly trained dancers, some favourite 'stars', high production values

¹⁰ With approximately 68 full-time dancers employed the Australian Ballet Company's 2007 Annual Report listed total revenue through box office and performance fees, sponsorships and donations subsidies and government grants (\$6,102,801) and other equalling \$32,438,713 in 2007.

¹¹ Crampton, p. 3.

with elaborate sets and costumes, a classic story that they are possibly familiar with, or which they can easily read, and an impressive display of physical prowess. On occasion, well-known Australian contemporary choreographers such as Graeme Murphy and Meryl Tankard and international guests such as Jiri Kylian (Netherlands Dance Theatre) and Ohad Naharin (Batsheva, Israel) have created original work for the company. Over the past three years an annual season of short works by emerging choreographers has been commissioned.¹² However, the tight performance and rehearsal schedule of the staple program of classics and previously successful remounted works does not allow the necessary time for the regular development of new work, the staple activity of independent dance artists at the base of the pyramid.

Initially I was satisfied with my response to Crampton's schema. However, I then began thinking about the implications of my pyramid and the emphasis that was still implicit on the hierarchical ranking of economics and bureaucracy in the art world, with the large consistently funded companies on top of the small independent artists. I realised that this emphasis obscured the strengths of the open, anticipative, more democratic environment of the independent dance sector with which I was familiar. It was time for a 'view from the base, of the base', one that necessitated a view from the independent sector, of the independent sector, in relation to the broader subsidised dance sector. I explore this view in detail in the final 'close-up' section of this chapter, incorporating my ethnographic insider position and including my auto-ethnographic voice. In addition, I provide a radically different visual representation of the independent sector. But before I do that, I want to turn my attention to the conditions that provide the financial and political means of support for the dance landscape.

¹² The *Bodytorque* program was initiated by ABCo in 2004, and provides an annual platform for emerging choreographers to present new work in the classical idiom. The Company gives support in relation to provision of dancers, production resources and a marketing campaign. The aim is to expose audiences to new choreographers. Since its inaugural season one independent choreographer has been commissioned to make a new work each year, alongside emerging classical ballet choreographers. In 2007 Sydney-based independent choreographer, Narelle Benjamin was invited to choreograph a short work performed in a mixed program along with emerging choreographers from within the ABCo. (For this case study see Chapter Four). However, the 2008 and 2009 *Bodytorque* programs have consisted solely of emerging choreographers from within the ranks of dancers in the ballet company, plus one teacher from the Ballet School.

Mid-Shot: The Policy and Funding Environment

The dance landscape in Australia is to a large extent moulded by the prevailing policy conditions and variations in the funding climate. Sometimes these circumstances produce isolated environmental situations, and at other times a pervasive atmosphere that hangs over and seeps into the landscape. Through a discussion including both historical references and analysis of the present moment, this ‘mid-shot’ view focuses on the circumstances, maintenance and well-being of the dance sector by identifying influential policy and funding factors that have influenced and continue to shape the dance sector in the years since 1968.

The role of government funding for the dance sector in Australia is vital:

The dance sector is small and its activity is largely generated by subsidised organizations. Unlike some other sectors within the performing arts (music, film, publishing and occasionally theatre), there are few opportunities for dance companies and dance practitioners to exploit successful work on a commercial basis. There is no commercial ‘paradigm’ for dance as there is in popular music or film.¹³

Commercial investment, corporate sponsorship and philanthropy are difficult to achieve for dance in Australia. Generally, sponsorships are achieved when there is already significant ongoing government financial commitment. For example, state contemporary dance companies, such as SDC and the national companies ABCo and Bangarra, receive some sponsorship, being attractive to sponsors because of the dance company’s choice of high-profile venues, larger audience base and hence the visibility of the sponsoring company’s product or services. However, independent projects and individual artists, with less emphasis on high-profile venues and smaller audience numbers, find it more of a challenge to compete on this level—with the result that there is limited evidence of successful sponsorship bids for this sector: it is rare to find sponsors who are committed to the research and development of the art form. Over the past decade, philanthropic individuals and foundations have begun to

¹³ Positive Solutions, *Resourcing Dance: An Analysis of the Subsidised Dance Sector* (Sydney: Australia Council, February 2004), p. 9.

demonstrate interest in supporting dance artists.¹⁴ However, the contribution they make is usually relatively modest in the overall artists' production budgets, and is usually attached to a public outcome and rarely supports the research and development stages of the work. For these reasons the lower public profile of the independent dance sector proves a hindrance in attracting financial support outside of government funding.

The Australia Council for the Arts is the Australian Government's arts funding and advisory body. Established in 1968 by Harold Holt's Liberal Government, historically the Australia Council has been the major provider of financial support for artists and contemporary arts practice, operating at arms length and independently of the tastes or proclivities of the government of the day. From the late sixties the new Council supported the performing arts (drama, opera and ballet) and film making for television (with an educational and cultural emphasis). At the time there were already established agencies for TV and Radio (Australian Broadcasting Commission), Visual Art (Commonwealth Art Advisory Board) and Literature (Commonwealth Literary Fund) and a fund to assist Music (Commonwealth Assistance to Australian Composers).¹⁵

In the first years 1968-69, the funding for the new council was \$1,500,000, equivalent to approximately \$10 million in 2010.¹⁶ In the allocation of funds priority was given to the Australian Opera, the Australian Ballet Company, the Elizabethan Trust Orchestras who worked with the Opera and Ballet Companies, and to the state theatre companies. Ballet received \$291,000 (approximately \$2.6m today) with 87 per cent going to the Australian Ballet Company, 10 per cent to the Australian Ballet School and 3 per cent going to the state ballet companies.¹⁷ Additional grants were allocated to professional companies and groups that prioritised supporting new works and cultural exchange. Professional training for artists and administrators was also given priority alongside the support of arts service organizations.

¹⁴ In 2006 Force Majeure (Artistic Director Kate Champion), Performance Space and Tanja Liedtke received philanthropic support from the newly formed Keir Foundation.

¹⁵ Hans Hoegh Guldberg, *The Arts Economy 1968-1998* (Sydney: Australia Council, 2000).

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 87.

¹⁷ Ibid.

At the same time state governments provided the arts with funding of around \$9.6m (in today's currency).¹⁸ The states have always had a commercial orientation towards the state flagship companies, while the Australia Council has provided support for 'the others'. The Australia Council saw it as the states' and local governments' responsibility to award capital grants and to provide the theatres and buildings for local arts companies to occupy. Accordingly, in New South Wales, the ballet, opera and state theatre companies were all given accommodation, for management, organizational infrastructural requirements and public performance, in the Sydney Opera House—and that arrangement continues. In Chapters Four and Five I shall discuss the funding of theatre precincts in NSW, with particular reference to the role of the NSW Ministry for the Arts, which has been instrumental in all development stages of The Wharf Precinct and the CarriageWorks Contemporary Arts Precinct. I argue that prioritising building programs has often been at the expense of the artists. Since many independent artists develop new work outside of these precincts, in Chapter Three and the Conclusion I present a case for reviewing the current arrangements.

Reviews and Reports

A good deal of quantitative research has been conducted in Australia over the last twenty years—for example, in reviews and reports commissioned by the Australia Council—into aspects of the arts: how they are housed, priced, sold, as well as how they manage artistic and cultural priorities. Many of the reports provide in-depth studies of individual art forms and overviews of all the art forms, based on invaluable data and statistics. These reports often expose serious issues, but do not always produce easily achievable recommendations. (The problem of the decline over recent decades in the average and median incomes of individual arts professionals is a case in point). The impact of the arts is mainly measured by economic impact terms. However, the non-quantifiable impacts that make the arts a unique industry, such as innovation, are more difficult to address, and are sometimes difficult to quantify. Innovation in dance practice involves finding and exploring new ways of practising and creating new forms. This requires experimentation and

¹⁸ Hans Hoegh Guldberg, p. 87.

risk-taking, and a long-term commitment over time that may result in failures along the way.

One of the most significant reports in recent years for the independent dance sector has been the ‘Report To Ministers On An Examination Of The Small To Medium Performing Arts Sector’ (2002).¹⁹ A number of important dance reports have been undertaken since the late 1990s.²⁰ However, the strength of the 2002 report is that it reported on the small-to-medium sector across all performing arts. The original brief addressed by the Cultural Ministers Council (ten state and federal arts ministries) was limited to ‘an examination of the factors influencing the artistic and financial position of small-to-medium sized performing arts organizations’. The resulting Report primarily provided an overview: it did not supply any detailed research into the financial and infrastructural requirements needed for the sector to strengthen its position, but it did emphasize the sector’s artistic value as a major source of innovation in the art form:

The Working Party found overwhelming evidence that the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector is essential to the artistic vitality and ongoing development of Australia’s performing arts. It is the main source of new Australian works in the subsidised performing arts. [...]

The Working Party believes that this Sector’s key contribution is to artistic advancement and further notes that the Sector plays a fundamental role in research and development, experimentation, innovation and risk-taking with a commitment to new Australian work and diversity of artistic form. The Sector is seen within the arts more broadly as the crucible for new ideas and approaches to creating and producing work.²¹

Excellence and Innovation

Excellence and innovation are recognised and clearly articulated as priorities in the Australia Council Handbook. Alongside these goals the Council encourages diversity and creative experimentation. As the 2002 Report acknowledges, the work

¹⁹ Prepared by a Working Party of Cultural Ministers Council Standing Committee, *Report To Ministers On An Examination Of The Small To Medium Performing Arts Sector* (March, 2002).

²⁰ I will discuss a selection of these reports later in this chapter.

²¹ *Examination Of The Small To Medium Performing Arts Sector*, pp. 5-7.

of smaller companies and independent individual artists is a major source of innovation and experimentation for the larger companies. Diversity and experimentation are also strengths of this layer of small companies and independents' activity, which supports the existing larger companies.

Research and development, which are a core priority of the independent dance sector, make a valuable contribution to the development of the art form, albeit with inherently high costs at a professional level. The collaborative nature of the work—which may require the services of a sound artist/composer, new media artist/filmmaker, designer, dramaturg and production personnel—often means that the lion's share of the budget must be allocated to artists' salaries. In addition, an often-protracted period of time in which to fully develop the new work means that the financial return from an often-modest box office is not high and puts pressure on the funding support as primary income. Even when the funding climate is sunny, dancers are frequently subjected to working with reduced opportunities to innovate, experiment, conduct research and develop artistic production. Even in this area expectations of risk and innovation compete with the pressures of financial stability and sustainability. These are all relevant considerations for the vulnerable independent dance sector. In summary, the problems for the sector can be traced to inherently large costs of research and development in the labour-intensive dance field and an almost exclusive focus of funding bodies on developing and presenting new works. The pressure from funding organizations for audience development and successful performance outcomes often outweighs individual artistic development and the development of the art form in general. It is difficult to negotiate the balance between realising the aims of research and development, highly valued and practised by the independent dance sector, while developing audiences to sustain infrastructure, as valued by the funding bodies.

Crisis of Confidence

It was at the time of the release of the Small to Medium Report that I officially enrolled to begin this study of the independent dance sector in Sydney. My original intentions were shaped by the escalating sense of unrest and dissatisfaction within

the dance community. In the early stages I focused on the main symptom of this crisis, which manifested itself in public forums as a very profound feeling of hopelessness. It became apparent that a key factor contributing to this despair was that artists clearly discerned a lack of understanding regarding not only what they did, but also how and where they did it. My particular interest was in the fast-declining opportunities open to dancers for suitable places in which to make their work. This appeared to be a core reason why many artists were thinking of giving up or moving out.

At this time, in 2002, I attended a series of meetings of NSW independent dance artists and producers at the Performance Space, all concerned with the crisis of confidence in the development of dance culture in NSW. This was a low point for the morale of the independent sector: not only were the effects of decreasing Australia Council funding for NSW-based artists since 1997 taking its toll, but so too was the limited dance budget available from the NSW Ministry for the Arts.²² Simultaneously, the Tertiary Dance Department at the University of Western Sydney was in the process of being disbanded. A lack of opportunity to scope a longer-term vision as an independent artist in Sydney had seen Gideon Obarzanek and Garry Stewart leave to pursue opportunities interstate.²³ Other artists such as Rosalind Crisp and Tess de Quincey were spending an increasing amount of time overseas, while the diminution of federal funding for NSW had led a number of significant artists to disengage from the funding application process.²⁴

²² In an unpublished paper produced by Executive Producer of One Extra, Amanda Card for one such meeting, statistics were provided that showed funding for dance in NSW had declined from \$571,137 in 1998-99 to \$131,950 in 2002-03—a reduction of 78 per cent over a four-year period.

²³ Obarzanek is currently Artistic Director of Chunky Move in Melbourne and Stewart, Artistic Director of Australian Dance Theatre in Adelaide. See Chapter Four 'Case Study Narelle Benjamin', pp. 158, for further information on Obarzanek and Stewart's departures from NSW.

²⁴ In the minutes of an emergency meeting held in the midst of 'the crisis' for independent dance in NSW it was noted that: 'The diminution of federal funding for NSW has led a number of our most significant artists including Julie-Anne Long and Nikki Heywood, to disengage from the application process. As a result the number of works presented has been greatly reduced, giving the mistaken impression of a dearth of innovative practice in the state.' Whether this was a permanent decision that resulted in the artist discontinuing their practice, or a temporary decision to withdraw from applying for funding, the disruption to individual artists' careers and the damage to the well-being of the community was significant. Fiona Winning and Gregory Nash (representing the NSW independent dance sector) raised issues such as this at a meeting attended by Sally Chance and Steven Richardson (Australia Council Dance Board), Rosalind Richards and Ben Strout (Australia Council staff) and Susan Donnelly (NSW Ministry for the Arts) on Saturday 28 September 2002.

Several important studies of the economic situation of professional artists in Australia have been conducted over the past two decades—most importantly by David Throsby, with Devon Mills, Beverly Thompson and Virginia Hollister—and the titles of these reports suggest that there is a serious problem regarding the status of artists in Australia: *When Are You Going To Get a Real Job? But What Do You Do For a Living?* and *Don't Give Up Your Day Job*.²⁵ These surveys were carried out at the Department of Economics, Macquarie University, with funding from the Australia Council. All of them were dependent on the voluntary participation of the artists (both salaried and unpaid artists), who contributed a substantial amount of time to reading and responding to the written data and involvement in interviews. Provocative and often alarming factual information emerged about the economic circumstances under which artists of all kinds conducted their practice. One of the factors contributing to a lack of parity in recognition and remuneration in relation to dance artists may be the gap between the artists' and the public's expectations and needs.

There has been frequent criticism of the lack of action following extensive consultations and published reporting of proposed outcomes. *RealTime* editor Keith Gallasch, in whose magazine much of this criticism is published, has spoken with alarm of the increasing distance between the Australia Council and the arts sector:

The restructured Australia Council positions itself above the arts ecosystem of which it has been a part, albeit in an increasingly difficult relationship, its funding levels essentially frozen, its roles and functions multiplying, its structure rigidly top-down, and less and less responsive to the bottom-up emergence of new ideas and forms that regenerate the arts.²⁶

In 1995, as a result of restructuring of the art form categories, the Major Organizations Board (MOB) was set up within the Australia Council to promote the effective delivery of artistic excellence by Australian arts organizations of national

²⁵ See David Throsby and Devon Mills, *When Are You Going To Get a Real Job?: An Economic Study of Australian Artists* (Sydney: Australia Council, 1989), David Throsby and Beverly Thompson, *But What Do You Do For a Living?: A New Economic Study of Australian Artists* (Sydney: Australia Council, 1994) and David Throsby and Virginia Hollister, *Don't Give Up your Day Job: An Economic Study Of Professional Artists in Australia* (Sydney: Australia Council, 2003).

²⁶ Keith Gallasch, *Art in a Cold Climate: Rethinking the Australia Council*, Platform Papers No.6 (Sydney: Currency Press, 2005), p. 3.

standing. Currently, five dance companies are members of this Board, recently renamed the Major Performing Arts Board (MPAB), and operate under conditions introduced by the Nugent Report into the Major Performing Arts Companies (1999) and the injection of resources resulting from that inquiry. They are the Australian Ballet, Sydney Dance Company, Bangarra Dance Theatre, Queensland Ballet and West Australian Ballet. Inclusion in the Major Performing Arts Board is by invitation and the process does not include any peer review.

As with the MPAB, companies are also ‘invited’ by Council to apply for ‘Key Organizations’ status—which is assessed by peer review. According to Amanda Card, in 2002 ‘NSW, for a state of its size, has been disproportionately under-represented in the area of Key Organizations funding by the Australia Council Dance Board’.²⁷ This continues to be the case. These companies are funded on a triennial basis. Small companies and service organizations in this category were encouraged to support community-based initiatives, local and regional activity, one-off projects, artists from culturally diverse backgrounds and independent artists.

However, in 2008, all triennially funded dance Key Organizations were re-evaluated against a new set of assessment criteria that included demonstrating national and international impact, or being an acknowledged centre of excellence. This altered the stakes for those who had been anxious to satisfy the former criteria, obliging them to relegate community and local activity to a low priority. As a result, two NSW-based companies were given Emerging Key Organization status for three years from 2009 to 2011. One was *Reeldance*, a dance-on-screen organization with an extensive national and international festival touring profile. The other, *Force Majeure* a dance theatre company directed by Kate Champion, had been successfully managing high-demand national and international festival appearances on intermittent and inadequate project funding. Triennial financial support for the development of these two NSW Emerging Key Organizations has the potential to provide opportunities and contribute to a stronger infrastructure for independent

²⁷ Amanda Card, ‘Support Material: *The State of Funding for Dance in NSW*’, unpublished document, (2002).

artists in the NSW dance landscape, as both companies have long-term prior relationships with many of the local independent dance artists.

Artists and Audiences

In 1998, Saatchi & Saatchi Australia was engaged in a consultancy to measure the extent to which the general public valued the arts.²⁸ They found that while the arts were tied into everyday life, entertainment and social opportunities for the majority of people, there were misconceptions by both artists and the public about what the other wanted. This issue is particularly pertinent to contemporary dance and the challenges it faces in improving its accessibility to the general public:

Many Australians do not feel welcome to enjoy the arts due to a perceived sense of exclusion, a lack of access, lack of relevant information and education about the arts, and negative connotations about the social environment of the arts.²⁹

The public's attitude to dance contributes to the sense of crisis that has developed in the local dance community. At the 1997 Green Mill Australian dance festival, Canadian arts administrator Andrew Goledzinowski spoke of the difficulties that the non-dance public have in decoding dance and their perceived sense of exclusion from the secret world of dance. These problems were not exclusive to Australia, he said:

I know the best dance is often difficult. It is highly personal, it is an abstract form of communication, and it is often necessarily self-referential. But I believe that from my personal experience there are people out there who are artistically literate and are prepared to use their brains but who often won't go to contemporary dance because they believe they cannot decode it. What is more they are not even sure that dance is being made for them. They think the dance is being made for people who do have the code, presumably dancers who do make up a large proportion of the dance audience. [...] There is no

²⁸ *Australians and the Arts: Overview. A Report to the Australia Council from Saatchi & Saatchi Australia* (Surry Hills, NSW: Australia Council 2000).

²⁹ Appendix G.3. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Expenditure (Leo McLeay, chair). 1986. *Patronage, Power and the Muse: Inquiry into Commonwealth Assistance to the Arts*. Canberra, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia.
http://epress.anu.edu.au/anzsog/revisioning/mobile_devices/apgs07.html [accessed 20 March, 2007].

common framework within which the dance conversation can take place between dancers and the non-dance world.³⁰

Many independent dance artists only reach a small and exclusive audience, often performing for colleagues and audiences accustomed to dance. At the *Size Matters* Forum in 2002, Executive Producer of *One Extra*, Amanda Card mused on what is ultimately a challenge for many dance artists interested in making their work accessible to a broader audience:

With dance it's really difficult. In the case of a show like *Traffic* (stella b.), it was incredibly innovative in terms of someone watching a lot of dance. But you get someone who comes in from outside of that, I can't see that they'd necessarily see that. There's not a lot of bells and whistles there.³¹

The push for audience development and advocacy, and accessibility of the 'arts for all Australians' since the mid-nineties, has been a challenge for independent dance, which is often presented without 'a lot of bells and whistles', that is without undue emphasis on lavish sets and costumes, or on solely creating an entertaining experience for an audience. Market-driven research in the area of accessibility of the arts has tended to deal with mainstream work in particular and its results applied generally, even to those independent dance artists making highly personal, innovative, challenging and often difficult work for a non-dance-literate audience.

There have been a number of dance-specific initiatives, notably the national touring programs *Made to Move* and *Mobile States* that have been invaluable for the exposure of tried-and-tested small-to-medium dance works. However, there is little opportunity for smaller, more experimental works and independent productions to be given national exposure. *Dance Down Under* (DDU), initiated by the Community Partnerships and Market Development Division of the Australia Council in 2005 is a market development strategy designed to promote Australian Contemporary Dance to the American Market. However, to be eligible for this platform one needs to have

³⁰ Andrew Goledzinowski, 'Introduction to The State We're In,' *Heritage and Heresy Green Mill Papers 1997* (Braddon, ACT: The Australia Dance Council (Ausdance), 1998), p. 122.

³¹ *Size Matters* RealTime-Performance Space Forum, April 8, 2002. This forum was held just before the release of the 'Report on the Examination of the Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector.'

already had significant international touring experience. In other words, most independents whose touring networks are much more localised are excluded.

The question each individual and each company has to ask is this: 'What is a workable proportionate relationship between creativity and its promotion?'³² In each case the answer will be different:

Artists and institutions within the contemporary arts sector want their audience to increase, however, the current priority audience development (as articulated within Creative Nation) threatens to disrupt the equilibrium of an already fragile existence by endangering the more challenging developmental work where over exposure is not appropriate.³³

Some independent dance artists create products that are not always market-oriented in advance. Instead, they find an audience for the work after it has been created. With this approach many years can lapse between the making of the work and public presentation. Also, the time between each public presentations of new work by independent artists can be lengthy. This pattern of intermittent public productions is very different to that of the Major and Key Organizations who set schedules of regular new work, and remounts to maintain an audience. For some independent dance artists an important part of their process is showing work throughout the development stages, in a state of uncertainty, being in-progress. The reasons for this are not always clear to a non-dance audience and the presentation of the work itself in an unfinished state is often not framed carefully enough as such. All of these development stages require different approaches to connecting with an audience, often creating demand in the questions they propose, rather than meeting it with a finished product. There are many different types of relationships between artists and audiences and the independent dance sector is proficient at providing a deep, participatory audience experience in informal research and development settings.

³² Keith Gallasch, 'Between The Making and The Selling', *RealTime*, no. 17 February-March 1997 (Sydney: Open City), p. 4.

³³ Philip Rolfe in discussion with Keith Gallasch, 'Between The Making and The Selling'.

Looking Back at Moving Forward

In 1990, Peter Alexander and Associates undertook *Directions for the Future of Dance in Australia*, a review and report on options and strategies for the development of dance in the 1990s, based on consultations with approximately 300 people around Australia.³⁴ As is always the case with these Australia Council commissions, it was undertaken ‘in consideration of the currently available resources.’ Among the myriad topics of discussion raised, there are a number of key matters that are still relevant almost twenty years later. These include: support for independent artists; dancer-training issues in tertiary education; lack of community acceptance of dance; concern about the lack of research and development in dance; cross art form issues i.e.; dance activity which links and draws on other defined art forms such as music, theatre and design; and absence of any adequate history and documentation of dance.

These issues were discussed by the Australia Council Dance Committee of the time and by the dance profession at the National Dance Summit *Moving Forward* in April 1990. The Report argued the need for broad agreement regarding the development of dance in Australia as a dynamic and diverse art form. The situation presented was of a divided dance sector:

Indeed without that vision for the development of dance it is probably fair to say that the present divisions will continue, states and territories will tend to go their own way according to their local priorities, and many people, including a wide range of independent artists with interests in dance, could continue to feel less and less apparent support.³⁵

Written in 1990, this paper identified a fragmented community in a despondent state, with much the same sense of crisis that currently concerns me. However, the specific problems and concerns regarding place and identity that I am at pains to identify in this thesis differ somewhat from those of 1990.

³⁴ Peter Alexander and Associates, *Directions for the Future of Dance in Australia –A Discussion Paper* (SA: September 1990).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

The crisis in dance, especially the independent sector, that has escalated over the last twenty years was recognised formally in August 2000 when the proposal was put forward, at a meeting of Cultural Ministers Council, a proposal was made to undertake an investigation into the artistic and financial state of the entire Small to Medium Performing Arts Sector. Released in March 2002, it was followed by an analysis of the subsidised Australian dance sector. Commissioned by the Dance Board of the Australia Council, this was undertaken between January and March 2003 and released in February 2004 under the title *Resourcing Dance, An Analysis of the Subsidised Australian Dance Sector*.³⁶ This analysis stated that the key problem for the dance sector outside the largest companies, especially the small-to-medium sector, was the serious decline in funding to dance suffered since 1992.³⁷ *Resourcing Dance* provided no clear strategic model for how to allocate the injection of \$3-5m that it recommended. In addition to this lack of action, recommendations in the March 2002 Report were finally acted upon in 2007, five years after the release of the report.³⁸

The key objectives and emphasis of much government arts support since the early 1970s have been directed towards the fostering of a wider spread of interest and participation in the arts, together with an encouragement of excellence and innovation. The Australia Council mission has consistently been committed to enriching the nation by supporting and promoting both the artistic practice and the enjoyment of the arts. One of the tensions highlighted by my exploration of the funding and political attitude for dance is between these two distinct goals and how this tension provides a constant challenge for the independent dance sector in particular. This is due to the fact that both its actions and organization favour investigative practices with limited emphasis placed on public outcomes.

³⁶ Positive Solutions, *Resourcing Dance: An Analysis of the Subsidised Dance Sector*.

³⁷ In 1992–93 overall funding for dance (including MPAB) stood at \$9.44 million. By 2001–02 this had risen to \$11.52 million. Allowing for inflation, however, this represented a decline in real terms of \$516,000 between 1993 and 2001–02.

³⁸ The Australian Government announced additional arts funding of \$19.5 million in its 2007–08 Budget. This allocation was earmarked for the small to medium performing arts sector to be spent over four years. In its first year \$2.9 million was allocated to Key Organizations, \$1.3 mil in additional funding to support Program Grant companies and \$0.6 mil to special initiatives, across the Theatre, Music and Dance Boards.

Close-Up: Dance as a Complex Adaptive System (CAS)

Through a ‘close-up’ view I employ complexity theory in order to reframe independent dance practice and arrive at a new way of engaging with the uncertain dance environment previously discussed in the ‘mid-shot’ section. In this section, the close-up, I will refer to the dance sector, represented in the earlier pyramid schema, as a system made up of networks, with my focus being on the independent dance sector. Complexity theory, in particular its engagement with space, best reflects my interest in practical actions and organization of the dance processes of dance artists, active within a spatial system. As geographer Nigel Thrift puts it:

Here furthermore, is a body of theory that is preternaturally spatial: it is possible to argue that complexity theory is about, precisely, the spatial ordering that arises from injections of energy. Whereas previous bodies of scientific theory were chiefly concerned with temporal progression, complexity theory is equally concerned with space. Its whole structure depends upon emergent properties arising out of excitable spatial orders over time.³⁹

My intention is to focus on the spatial distribution and diversity of independent dance practices and networks starting from a nexus in Sydney and interacting with their own local, national and international networks. My argument for more diverse places and spaces for independent dance, set up in the Introduction, will be developed over the following three chapters.

In this chapter I shall provide a more holistic account of the actions and organization of the dance artists than the pyramid model makes possible: I shall be observing ideas of complexity from the bottom up, ‘from the base, of the base’, viewing the independent dance sector as an insider from within its own networks. In taking this approach I am advocating what Terry Ingold has called ‘the primacy of processes over events, of relationships over entities and of development over structure’.⁴⁰ This is an original perspective gained from being in the sector or ‘the system’, as a

³⁹ Nigel Thrift, ‘The Place of Complexity’, in *Theory, Culture & Society* (London, Thousand Oaks and New Delhi: Sage, 1999), pp. 31-69 (p. 32).

⁴⁰ Terry Ingold, ‘An Anthropologist Looks at Biology’, *Man* ((NS) 25, 1990), pp. 208-29 (p. 209).

practising independent artist, ‘active agent’ and ethnographer insider. It is a position that makes me privy to subtle nuances of seemingly small, often informal interactions that can have significant implications for network building and adapting to change.

The lens of complexity enables me to pay closer attention to the structures and behaviours of this complex, creative collection of dance artist clusters and communities in Sydney. The socio-economic web connects fluid, diverse, networks of artists, through many local interconnections. Local interactions and diversity of practice both strengthen the independent sector’s ability to adapt and evolve as they maintain a wide range of responses and a more specific and agile adaptive capacity. ‘Thus diversity is most valuable during times of change’.⁴¹ My concern is with the way in which independent dance networks might organise themselves in the future, in relation to place, make progress and achieve sustainability in the face of diminished and/or unpredictable economic resources. I argue for the value of diverse local networks, since what is done locally is essential to generating the most favourable conditions for the health of the entire dance system.

Complex or Merely Complicated?

Many of us experience our lives in a constant state of flux, as a process of flow and change, with endless combinations of connections to local, national and international networks. Complex systems have become a recurring motif in the popular press and constitute a rapidly advancing scientific field. It is difficult to disagree with Uri Merry’s truism of more than a decade ago, that the world in which we live ‘is becoming more and more complex’. He goes on:

As individuals and as societies, people are finding it increasingly difficult to cope with a world that daily becomes more complex and uncertain. This is an endeavour to trace how and why this is happening, where it is leading, and to

⁴¹ Jan Norberg and Graeme S. Cumming, ‘Introduction to Part 1: Diversity and Heterogeneity’ in *Complexity Theory for a Sustainable Future*, ed. by Jan Norberg and Graeme S. Cumming (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 9-13 (p. 12).

examine what options are open to people, as individuals and as societies, to find ways of coping with uncertainty.⁴²

But does this mean our lives are ‘complex’ or merely ‘complicated’? Paul Cilliers provides a useful way to distinguish between a complex and complicated world:

If a system – despite the fact that it may consist of a huge number of components – can be given a complete description in terms of its individual components, such a system is merely complicated. Things like jumbo jets or computers are *complicated*. In a complex system, on the other hand, the interaction between the system and its environment, are of such a nature that the system as a whole cannot be fully understood by analysing its components. Moreover, these relationships are not fixed, but shift and change, often as a result of self-organisation.⁴³

Since the 1980s a growing community of scholars has been actively involved in developing the theory of complex adaptive social systems. The Santa Fe Institute in New Mexico is a research facility founded by a diverse disciplinary group of biologists, economists, computer scientists and physicists, for the purpose of conducting research into the field of complexity.

Professor Daniel L. Stein, from the Santa Fe Institute writes: ‘[C]omplexity is almost a theological concept; many people talk about it but nobody knows what ‘it’ really is.’⁴⁴ Numerous commentators on how complex systems work, including Terry Bossomaier and David Green, have claimed that ‘complexity has proved difficult to define.’⁴⁵ Even though common behavioural traits like:

[t]he ability to interact with the environment, to recognise patterns in the world and to apply acquired knowledge to the modification of future behaviour is easily detected, yet the definition of complexity remains elusive.⁴⁶

⁴² Uri Merry, *Coping with Uncertainty: Insights from the New Sciences of Chaos, Self-Organization, and Complexity* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 1995). p. vii.

⁴³ Paul Cilliers, *Complexity and Postmodernity: Understanding Complex Systems*, p. viii.

⁴⁴ Cited in Merry, p. 7.

⁴⁵ *Complex Systems*, ed. by Terry R. J. Bossomaier and David G. Green (Cambridge, U.K: Cambridge University Press 2000), p. 2.

⁴⁶ L. Marshall, ‘A world that slipped away’, *The Sciences*, 34, (5), (1994) p. 45, cited in Bossomaier and Green, p. 343.

Although a simple definition eludes these scholars its application has been beneficial to workers in a number of fields such as financial markets, ecological communities, computer science, physics and biology. Certain challenges of organization, adaptation and robustness are of relevance to all these fields.

Characteristics of Complex Adaptive Systems (CASs)

Complex systems are usually associated with living things: social systems, corporations, government departments, the human brain, diseases, languages are all examples of complex phenomena. In order to make a coherent case for dance as a complex adaptive system I want to take a description by Samir Rihani, writing on development practice in the Third World, as my starting point:

Certain nonlinear systems attracted the attentions of scholars as a potentially useful avenue for analysing natural and social phenomena. They are commonly described as being *Complex*, because their behaviour is defined to a large extent by local interactions between their components. When such systems are capable of evolution they are also known as Complex Adaptive Systems.⁴⁷

The systems Rihani refers to are those that have the possibility of self-reinforcement or self-moderation such as a change in the proportional contribution of different processes to the structure of the entire system with variables that have undetermined value but definite probability. Interactions within the system and its environment are constituted by intricate sets of random and unpredictable relationships in addition to being adaptive and responsive to change. Changes in the environment are often beyond the control of individual agents in the system. There is a high degree of uncertainty in determining the outcome and impact of interventions, as it is not possible to know all the small-scale contingent histories of individual events or to predict outcomes from seemingly unimportant actions.⁴⁸ The interplay between many diverse dance subsystems and the socio-economic systems of the environment make nonlinear, random interactions a feature of the independent dance system.

⁴⁷ Samir Rihani, *Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice: Understanding Non-linear Realities* (London: Zed Books, 2002), p. 7.

⁴⁸ Graham Harris, *Seeking Sustainability in an Age of Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 22.

Complexity arises when the dependencies among the elements become important, as we will see from the examples in the following *Complexity Situations #1-4*.

Paul Cilliers describes the interactions of an economic system providing examples from banking, shopping and economic exchange by human beings of a single country, where unpredictable outcomes can occur: '[M]oney can receive compounded interest; small investments can produce large returns (e.g: buying the right shares at the right time, or vice versa).'⁴⁹ In a similarly unpredictable manner to those of the economic system, the interactions of the dance system are created by a number of factors affected by circumstance and chance happenings. Within the hub of each artist's work processes you see the interactions with administrators, management, production, training, marketing, producing, audience, critics, funding bodies, other dance artists, cross-disciplinary connections, even physiotherapists. In order to manage these different and sometimes difficult negotiations, the independent artist needs a broad skills base and an entrepreneurial flair for interacting in all sorts of situations. This is essentially a case of a single individual fulfilling the roles that in large companies are carried out by a whole team of professionals. In effect, the demand of these tasks produces the probability for hectic interactions often beyond the artist's control and outside their sphere of expertise. These tasks occur at crucial times of the artistic process, which can have both negative and positive effects. For example, the demands of sourcing financial support and the associated meetings with potential partnering organizations and funding organizations means that the independent artist is obliged to spend a large proportion of their time taking on the role of a producer. This can severely disrupt the actual dance-making process, which is, after all, the artist's core business. On a practical level, the injury of a performer or an unsuccessful application for funding can jeopardise a production with limited resources and small budget. On the other hand, a favourable review or a highly contentious critique can result in high audience attendances and leverage further presentation opportunities for the dance work.

Moreover, the relationships between artists and their environment are not fixed: they shift and change, often as a result of self-organization, an inherent quality of a

⁴⁹ Cilliers, p. 6.

dancer's existence. An awareness of the behavioural characteristics of interactions and interconnections provides an understanding of the nature of complexity within the dance sector—and it is essential that this complexity be properly understood if we are to grasp the means to achieve improved conditions within that system.

In his *Complexity and Postmodernism*, Paul Cilliers employs a combination of scientific and philosophical concepts to examine his interest in ideas of complexity and complex systems.⁵⁰ Arguing that the contingent aspects of complex systems are very important, and suggesting that complexity can be modelled, he identifies two fundamental characteristics of a complex system. The first is the ability to grapple with a changing environment, and store information for the future concerning the conditions of the external factors affecting the system. He refers to this process as 'representation'. The second is what he calls 'self-organization', the ability to adapt one's structure when necessary. I propose to explore the potential of these characteristics as they manifest themselves in the independent dance sector, and to develop their application for the dance system in the following Chapters and my Conclusion.

Webs, Systems, Networks, and Clusters

Throughout this thesis I use the terms 'system', 'network', 'cluster' and 'web'. 'Web' seems to me a fitting metaphor to evoke a construction of resilient threads of connection, woven together for a supportive purpose. It suggests fragility, but has the ability to recover from setbacks, bend when shifted out of shape and rebuild when demolished. Independent dance activities in Sydney consist of diverse strands of practice and networks, all contributing to strengthening the web. There is usually a positive correlation between the richness and diversity of a person's networks on the one hand and the health of the individual on the other.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Cilliers, p. 3-7.

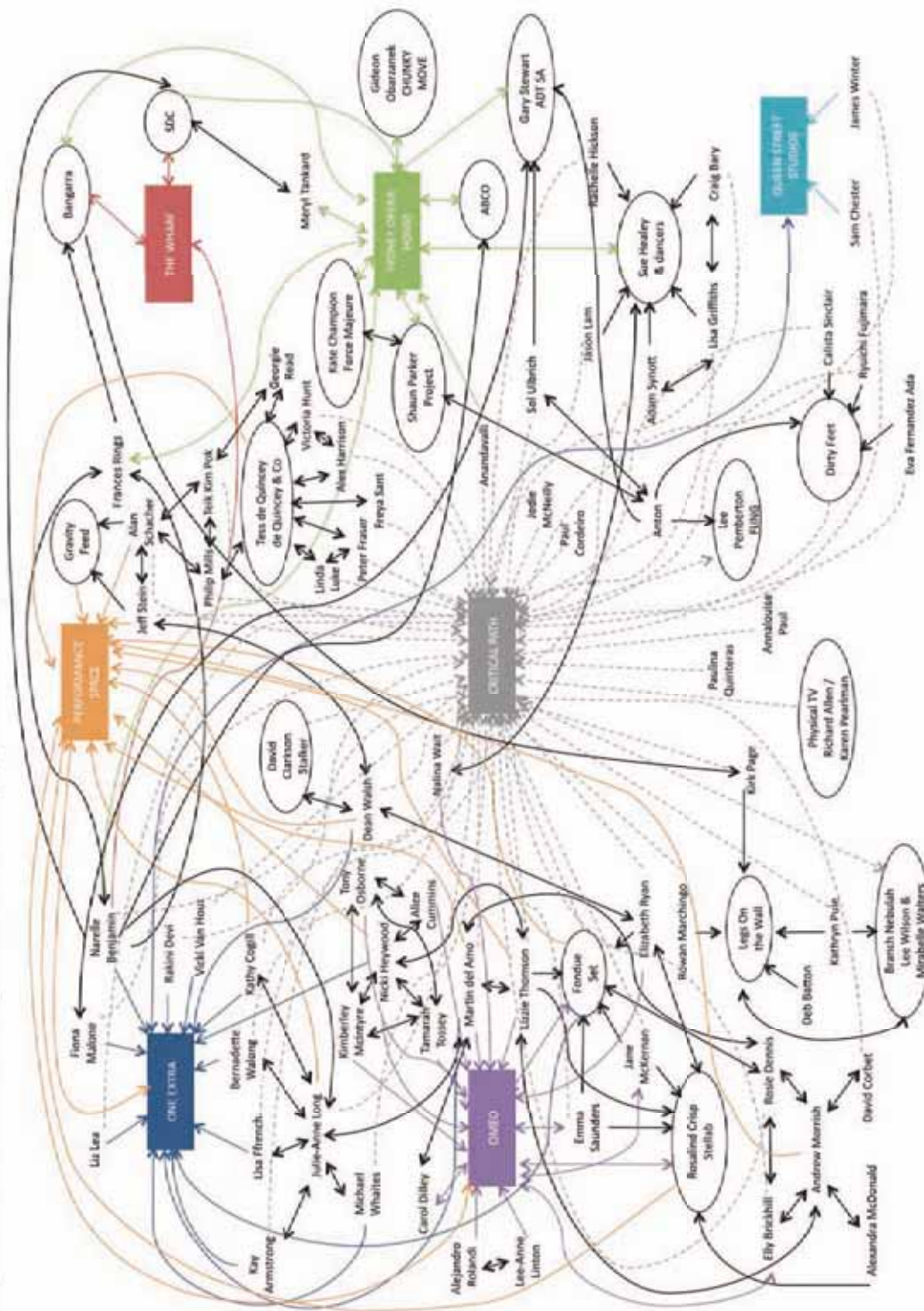
⁵¹ *A Dictionary of Public Health*, ed. by Jonathan Law (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), *Oxford Reference Online*, Oxford University Press, University of New South Wales, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t235.e51734> [accessed 9 November 2009].

When viewed through the complexity lens, the dance sector as a whole looks like a system made up of interconnecting and intersecting networks. The independent dance system, which constitutes one component part of this larger system, is itself made up of various networks. Often, each individual artist is a member of a number networks within the system. Networks are circuits of interrelationships where interconnections and interactions occur between clusters. Clusters are a vital part of the system and created when people share common interests and/or congregate through location and close spatial proximity:

In the first place, society forms a network. Although different discourses form ‘clusters’ within this network, they cannot isolate themselves from the network. There are always connections to other discourses. The different local narratives interact, some more than others, but no discourse is fixed or stabilised by itself. Different discourse – clusters in the network – may grow, shrink, break up, coalesce, absorb others or be absorbed.⁵²

Diagram 4, a mapping of the independent sector as a web, provides a vivid image of the dance clusters and networks in Sydney. It does not include absolutely every practicing dance artist in Sydney, but it does represent those who have been working in the sector for a considerable length of time—the generation of independent artists to which I happen to belong. It is not possible for me to refer to all the young and emerging dancers in this thesis, so I have included only those who are choreographers or ‘makers’. To produce a map that showed all those who are relatively recent on the scene, those who no longer work in the profession, and those in memoriam, would require a very large surface indeed.

⁵² Cilliers, p. 116.



There are obvious advantages to be derived from dance artists working in sufficiently close proximity to one another: the sharing of common resources, mutual co-operation and easy exchange of ideas. In this thesis I pay attention to clusters that form in the different places where dance is made and presented in Sydney. Combinations of possible communications and interactions are organised into a complex whole, which is always growing, changing and rearranging itself. The independent dance networks are part of a productive functioning system linked by processes and common characteristics, which assist the artists within it to work simultaneously together and apart as a complex whole.

Groupings of diverse dancers and choreographers interact with each other¹ as well as with clusters consisting of different types of entities including funding bodies, producing organizations and marketing companies. Clusters may come together on a regular weekly basis for example for class, or they may work for a concentrated period of time on, say, a 'pick-up' project, which might bring together a group of artists for a specific project, such as the development, rehearsal and performance of a new work. In the case of this model, when the contract is finished, the group disbands to pick up in some other combination and possibly in some other location. This model of complexity within dance is common and can be observed in many places locally, nationally and internationally.

An element in the system may belong to more than one clustering, especially the freelance, self-employed artists, with multifarious employment patterns. For example, an artist may be a performer, a peer assessor on a funding body, a masseuse to other dancers, a dance teacher at a high school etcetera. Kay Armstrong is one such independent dance artist who is adept at many skills, engaging in many networks and moving between a multitude of clusters.

¹ On an intimate scale these interactions between dance artists occur in specific projects led by a choreographer working with a group of dancers and since the advent of Critical Path to the NSW dance landscape in 2005 regularly in a workshop setting. This dance research organization provides a myriad of workshop opportunities where groupings of diverse artists are brought together. See Appendix A: *Mystory #6 Critical Path*, pp. 277-83.

Complexity Situation #1

A.K.A

Kay Armstrong's business card reads:

KAY ARMSTRONG

A.K.A.

Choreographer performer writer dancer actor director teacher- contemporary technique composition stretch adult yoga pre-primary R.A.D. ballet beginner Jazz Modern Syllabus Spruiker M.C. Host/ promotional speaker Great Aunt' Close-up Magician Volunteer – RSPCA, WSPA Pub Trivia Host Cousin Stilt Walker Fire Breather Tenant Puppeteer Future Partner Clown Balloon Twister Sister Domestic Cleaner Daughter Half-Sister Ex-Wife Affiliated Artist Aunt Cat Sister Part-time Friend Voice-over Artist

FOR ALL OR ONE OF THE ABOVE PLEASE CONTACT KAY

kayzel@hotmail.com²

Dance clusters consist of individual agents who come together with other clusters for a variety of reasons to form the larger scale phenomena, which make up the independent dance sector and are usually fluid in their organization and often form for temporary periods of time. The PROjECT is an example of a cluster of ten dance artists, of which I was a part, who met informally during the years 2001-2002 and who generated a manifesto to apply for funding and lobby for improved access to space for dance practice in Sydney. While the group no longer exists as an entity, the main objective of the group, to make connections with organizations and other clusters within the system, has made an impact that can be traced today to the relationship between independent dance artists and the Creative Practice and Research Unit at The University of New South Wales. Further details of this cluster are included in Mystory #4.³

As dance-making is a collaborative art form dependent on inter-human interaction, dancers often work as part of a cluster. Even solo artists need others to manage, promote and produce them and audiences are also an agent in this dynamic interactive system. The individual within the whole system has a highly fluid existence. Individual independent dance artists are accustomed to dealing with constant change in their working lives. The demands on an independent artist in a

² Business card text for independent dance artist Kay Armstrong.

³ See Appendix A: Mystory #4 THE PROjECT, pp. 263-69.

single day, week-to-week and year-to-year shift frequently. These circumstances include: where you are working and what you are doing. Touring and moving-for-the-job are common conditions for independent dancers. Rapid readjustments between roles, and interactions with others, are also common occurrences. This can range from a period of employment that may include teaching, rehearsing and writing a grant application for a new work, sometimes all in one day, to times of unemployment, where the challenge is to use the ‘down time’ to continue to work productively, by carrying on regular training and using the fallow time as an opportunity for contemplation and developing new ideas. The ability to adjust to the flow of energy and expectation and maintain motivation is an important aspect of the independent dancer’s toolkit.

Complexity Situation #2

Running a Business

For over twenty years I have been running a successful small business, recognised by industry awards and government funding support. My core business revolves around coming up with innovative solutions to investigate the present as it is taking place and realising these developments through my creative practice. I have acquired and developed skills over the past two decades that include negotiating financial statements, understanding legal structures and requirements, responding to current market trends, strategically planning for a viable future and being expert at anticipating difficulties. My business structures enable me to respond with a great adaptive capacity to change. My processes are flexible, messy and fluid. Paradoxically my business and my identity as Chief Executive Officer are simultaneously extremely unstable and incredibly specific. I am in the business of dance. I earn my living from dance. I practice dance. I produce and sell dance. Often it is from a position of despondency that I ‘do dance’.

I didn’t set out to start a business. No arts management diploma, rather trial and error and on the hop training. I am serious about my business but only as a means to an end in that it provides me with tools that enable me to address issues of sustainability under the uncertain and unfavourable economic conditions that I frequently find myself in.

Diversity

Diversity or ‘heterogeneity’ is a key feature of complex systems. In ecology, the term diversity is used to capture the complexity of communities: ‘In general the more varied the mix of species in a community, the greater the potential for complex

interactions and processes to occur.’⁴ The most obvious measure of diversity is the number of species, with biological communities made up of many species: some common, some rare. Sydney includes just such a diverse collection of dance artists, both culturally and in terms of discipline. Dance clusters are distinguished by idiosyncratic identities and diverse practices creating a variety of different dance discourses. Independent dance artists frequently establish dialogue and share resources with like-minded practitioners from dance and other artistic disciplines, creating a concentration of shared-interest clusters. The maintenance of these diverse independent clusters is dependent on their ability to connect and contribute to strong resilient networks and support systems. In the following chapter I argue that diverse types of dance clusters are important as contributors to the strength of the entire dance system and discuss the critical role of diversity of practice for innovation within the art form and for creating change.

In Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane there are tertiary dance training institutions with strong identities and histories.⁵ In Sydney there is currently no tertiary dance institution dedicated to training performers. The tertiary dance courses in the other cities graduate large numbers of high calibre technical dancers into the profession each year. Currently in Sydney there is one course that has a vocational focus on dance education rather than performance, choreography or dance studies.⁶ Consequently, there is no significant flow from tertiary education in NSW into the dance profession with low numbers of young and emerging independent dancers in Sydney in marked contrast to the significant number of young and emerging dancers in Melbourne. A majority of independent Sydney-based dancers are mature-age, mid-career artists, who choose to work as independent artists outside formal structures, and are actively committed to their practice. This demographic, plus the diversity of practice inherent in a community that does not have a tertiary dance course graduating dancers every year, contributes in a positive way to the unique

⁴ Roger H. Bradbury, David G. Green and Nigel Snoad, ‘Are Ecosystems Complex?’ in *Complex Systems*, pp. 339-65 (p. 346).

⁵ Particularly The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA, Melbourne University), West Australian Academy of the Performing Arts (WAAPA, Edith Cowen University), and Queensland University of Technology (QUT).

⁶ University of New South Wales, School of English, Media and Performing Arts, Dance.

character of the Sydney independent dance sector.⁷ A more eclectic collection of movement practices means that the transference of information about diverse practices and form is incredibly rich and the potential for hybridisation is increased in Sydney.

Interactions

Interactions are one of the key aspects to be drawn from my mapping of the independent dance sector, in this case in Sydney. Some artists are connected to many in the system, for example the performance photographer, and appear on the map as a busy hub with many lines radiating in and out, and others have only a few such interactions, such as the artist who chooses to work primarily within their own discrete company structure. However, this does not represent the quality or amount of activity that artist is involved in, neither is it indicative of their influence on the system.

Dance systems in Australia can be observed to exhibit a predominance of local interactions, with identifiable differences especially in genre and performance styles between the larger cities. This is chiefly because of the challenges of distance across the continent contributing to isolation of artists between the major cities. It is often easier to find opportunities and funding to tour one's work internationally than it is within Australia. There are a number of dancers within the independent sector in Australia, who move between the small to medium companies in different states, from project to project.⁸ However, exchange is mainly driven by numerous local interactions that take place between individuals, working singly and in groups within the same city.

In the 'mid-shot' view of the policy and funding environment, policy reports were presented as valuable feedback mechanisms for the arts sector. There are also the

⁷ Albeit, this dearth of tertiary dance training courses does limit teaching opportunities, which can be an important feature regarding sustainability for many independent dance artists.

⁸ Amanda Card, *Body for Hire? The State of Dance in Australia* (Strawberry Hills, Currency House, 2006). Card takes up Susan Leigh Foster's notion of 'body for hire' and applies the phenomenon to the Australian situation, tracing its increasing emergence over the past fifteen years, in direct relation to the demise of the permanent small-to-medium dance ensembles of the 1980s.

roles of the critic and audience as agents in the system that can produce negative feedback (unsuccessful grant application), or positive feedback (full box office and noteworthy reviews), producing detrimental returns or the opposite effect with both short-term and long-term ramifications. Other valuable loops in the interactions include personal knowledge and assessments, mentoring relationships and peer support. Without feedback there would be no dance system. Although some think of dance as an insular self-serving art form, dance artists thrive on this feedback loop in their interactions. The outcomes are not always evident immediately, but they can produce positive results over time and provoke ongoing re-assessment.

With a suitable place to come together in and when the constraints of time and economy are not overwhelming, the local clusters can generate opportunities that allow the independent sector as a whole to acquire self-organised, stable but evolving, patterns—as a result, progress comes mainly in the form of modest local improvements that accumulate over long periods of time.⁹ Development specialist Samir Rihani, argues that development in third world countries:

[I]s essentially a local affair; a marathon dogged by unexpected twists and turns rather than a rush to a nearby summit [...] to show that sustainable economic development has to follow consistent progress on the human development front, and not the other way round.¹⁰

I argue that the small investments determined by independent dance artists at a local level shall provide crucial outcomes and I question the more recent trend for government funding initiatives that prescribe from the ‘top down’ what should be done from the ‘bottom up’. The importance of the local interactions lies in their capacity to provide a more informed response to the local environment.

In addition, the international dance system is a ‘global village’, with individual artists, dance companies and cultural organizations becoming more related and dependent on each other through the increasing mobility of dancers internationally

⁹ Samir Rihani, *Complex Systems Theory and Development Practice: Understanding Non-linear Realities* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

¹⁰ Ibid., p. xvi.

and the influence on their lives and work of this travel. As previously proposed it is the prohibitive expense and lack of opportunities to tour nationally for independent artists wishing to present their own work that hinders interactions between networks and clusters within the dance sector across Australia. It is common for dance artists to seek out long-range interactions within the global dance system and its networks, as there are more opportunities for support to foster international collaborations.

This movement of dancers between companies and projects, nationally and internationally, generates a cross fertilisation of ideas and extends professional and personal networks in a ‘deconstruction of a ‘place-focused sense of culture’’.¹¹ In Australia over the past two decades there has been an increase in transient multicultural ensembles working in different locations and in co-operation with international festivals or producing arts organizations, alongside a history of visiting international acts to Australia which have influenced different people at various times in their development. Many of these artists are independent and cross with relative ease between positions in the network and in turn create their own new place in the system. Examples include: *In the Dark*, a collaboration between UK based dancer/director Wendy Houstoun and a group of Australian artists in Sydney that began in 1999 and concluded in 2004, of which I was a collaborator along with Narelle Benjamin, Brian Carbee, and Michael Whaites; *The Natyashastra and Body Weather*, a residency project developed by Tess de Quincey conducted between Kolkata, India and Sydney, Australia, 2002-2005; *A Woman ‘In Transit’*, Rosalind Crisp’s work that details her frequent trips between Australia and Europe, and assesses the pros and cons of her decision to relocate to Europe in 2003.

Previous conditions of the dance system form vital influences on present behaviour. Dance artists must have a diachronic understanding of their environment through the history in their bodies as well as knowledge of external developments. They must also be able to make opportunities for themselves, responding to conditions as they arise. This therefore requires the dance artist to have a complex understanding of the

¹¹ Karen Fog Olwig and Kirsten Hastrup, ‘Introduction’ in *Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object*, ed. by Karen Fog Olwig and Kirsten Hastrup (London; New York: Routledge, 1997), pp. 1-14 (p. 4).

environment, the market and its trends and an understanding of context and what has gone before. This self-organization process can be active and passive with actions being reactive and proactive but both involving some degree of transformation of the individual as well as the environment. For example, patterns of funding and employment influence access to training and development of individual dancers, as well as a choreographer's opportunity to expand her vision. Time, however, is a major pressure for dance artists. Dancers 'learn' from experience, from 'doing', they 'remember' previous muscle memories and compare them with new ones. Injury and maintenance of the body through ongoing training are all interconnected in the past, the present and the future of these embodied dance practices.

Complexity Situation #3 ***Fall and Recovery***

The small dance is a meditation on the subtle dynamics of fall and recovery while standing. Created by Steve Paxton one of the pioneers of contact improvisation.

*To begin the small dance: find a comfortable standing position. (Give it a go)
Find your balance, find your concentration. Observe the body for any tensions and let go of unnecessary muscle use. Relax your shoulders feel the weight of your arms falling down, find the smallest stretch in the same direction, relax your arms.
Feel the small dance.*

*Study the small dance, which is keeping you standing.
Imagine but don't do it taking a step with your right foot. Imagine but don't do it left foot right foot left foot. Imagine but don't do it. Stand. Balance.
Feel the small dance.*

With just a little attention it is obvious that the body in this stillness is still in motion, far from equilibrium. There may not be a lot to see but the constant subtle flows of energy keep you falling and recovering.

Sustainability: Far from Equilibrium

Complex systems operate under conditions far from equilibrium. There has to be a constant flow of energy to maintain the organization of the system and to ensure its survival. Equilibrium is another word for death.¹²

¹² Cilliers, p. 4.

Sustainability is not a well-defined concept. It is a word with popular currency, in much the same way as complexity. Many definitions of sustainability suggest maintenance and continuing to do something in spite of difficulties.¹³ The thrust is that sustainability confirms that something is true and valid and that it has a right to exist and ability to survive:

Sustainability cannot be determined objectively because defining sustainability involves value judgements with respect to which qualities of which resources should be sustained by which means, as well as for and by whom. Differences in human values make people's answers to these questions and hence their definitions of sustainability differ.¹⁴

Sustainability does not mean perpetuating a system in static equilibrium or continuing the status quo. Rather, I use the concept of sustainability to describe how artists adapt methods for resilience. This form of sustainability also involves flexibility, feasibility and possibility in order to survive a changing environment.¹⁵

Brian Arthur, the protagonist of Mitchell Waldrop's complexity study has a vision that I find inspiring for thinking about how to exist and manoeuvre in a complex dance world:

... you want to keep as many options open as possible. You go for viability, something that's workable, rather than what's 'optimal.' A lot of people say to that, 'Aren't you then accepting second best?' No, you're not, because optimisation isn't well defined anymore. What you're trying to do is maximize robustness, or survivability, in the face of an ill-defined future. And that, in turn, puts a premium on becoming aware of non-linear relationships and causal pathways as best we can. You observe the world very very carefully, and you don't expect circumstances to last.¹⁶

¹³ *The Oxford Dictionary of English* ed. by Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson, (rev. edn.), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). *Oxford Reference Online*, Oxford University Press, University of New South Wales, [accessed 9 November 2009].

¹⁴ Thomas Sikor and Richard B. Norgaard 'Principles for Sustainability: Protection, Investment, Co-operation, and Innovation', in *Complex Systems*, pp. 49-65 (p. 49).

¹⁵ *Sustainability in Question: The Search for a Conceptual Framework*, ed. by Jorg Kohn, John Gowdy, Friedrich Hinterberger and Jan van der Straaten (Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar, 1999).

¹⁶ Mitchell Waldrop, *Complexity: The Emerging Science at the Edge of Order and Chaos* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1992), pp. 333-34.

I would add to this that the breadth of skills utilised by dance artists are important keys to adapting and sustaining a dance practice. Balancing working with one's own creative independence and working collaboratively, as well as having an understanding of finance and self-management, all contribute to making a high quality artistic contribution.

The dance art system in Australia is driven by arts policy and the dynamics of supply and demand. Both government directives and commercial trends create a swing up and down for all independent artists; therefore there can never be a state of equilibrium. An alternative relationship to stability would be acceptance of a state *far from equilibrium*.

Competition and Altruistic Behaviours

Altruistic behaviour is a characteristic necessary for the survival and flourishing of the system. The modelling of evolutionary (or self-organising) systems has shown that purely selfish behaviour by members of a system is detrimental not only to the system, but ultimately also to particular individuals involved.¹⁷ At all times competition is one of the flows of energy in the dance world and competing clusters of artists can exist separately, but most coexist, often joining forces for sharing of certain resources.

An abundance of local artists makes for a healthy flow of supply and demand with the capital of artistic products and services helping to maintain the dance system. In the case of supply of artists, a tertiary dance sector in NSW would be beneficial. Innovation and new developments also generate a flow of energy and connect the small to medium and independent systems, which are acknowledged as a 'crucible for new ideas and approaches to creating and presenting work', to the wider arts, as discussed in the mid-shot section of this chapter.¹⁸ In a state of uncertainty and instability, working with deficient resources, brittle management structures and a large volunteer workforce, the independent sector still manages to adapt to adversity

¹⁷ Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

¹⁸ *Examination Of The Small To Medium Performing Arts Sector*, p. 7.

and be resilient with a capacity for persistence and self-repair. However it must be considered that:

To maintain its wholeness – its coherence through transformative discontinuous changes – it has to invest in more meaningful communication and effective relationships between its component parts and between itself and its environment.¹⁹

This point is crucial to thinking about a strengthening of constructive behaviours and sharing of resources within the dance system, as it appears that when a human system takes care of its communication systems it can maintain its resilience and stability. On a pragmatic level this makes the face-to-face meetings, both informal and formal between artists, producers, administrators and bureaucrats an essential investment of resources. It is obvious to state that an individual cannot know what all the others are doing. A dancer in the system can only act on the information available to them. Therefore, a strategic approach to communication is essential for optimal interactions and interconnections between individuals and organizations within the system.

Dance Research Centre Critical Path has had a significant impact since its inception in 2004 on linking and facilitating networks of communication.²⁰ This has been achieved via a program that brings the independent sector together in an ongoing full-time capacity through workshops, forums and discussion groups, informal social gatherings, meetings, exhibitions and sharing of research and development processes through studio showings, all activities that were provided in sporadic ways beforehand and which now contribute to the resilience of this fragmented community. *Mystory #5* presents a speech I wrote when I was Acting Director of Critical Path for the launch of its 2007 program which gives an overview of the activities of the Centre and details how the Centre supports the sustainability of the independent sector through its commitment to dance and related research.

¹⁹ Merry, pp. 65-66.

²⁰ Statistics from the *Critical Path: Report against Performance Indicators for 2007* include: in 2005, 17 projects supported the work of local artists, in 2006 11 local artists received support, in 2007, 13 local projects were delivered by Critical Path. At least 10 gatherings involving a dozen or more choreographers per annum were hosted and 2 large showings by artists involved in the program were presented each year. In addition, 8 workshops were facilitated by invited international and national choreographers, which provided over 80 opportunities for exchange between choreographers. For further details of the program strands and artists involved in 2007 see *Mystory # 6*, pp. 277-83.

On a more intimate level, individual artists also recognise the value in opening up communication channels. One example of this may be by means of the sharing of resources between peers. The sharing of dance practice space in Sydney is a vital point of contact for face-to-face verbal communication and, importantly for dance practice, somatic exchange.

Complexity Situation #4 ***Altruistic Behaviour***

'Hello there

I have a space at the FraserStudios in Chippendale from the 9th-27th of February. I will be engaged in a solo movement-based research and development and would like to open the morning session as a working, self-directed space to other artists from Monday to Friday 10am -12pm. The current structures are the time constraints, the space itself, the knowledge that other people will be working, the acceptance that this may require negotiations and the possibility that other structures may emerge. I am happy for people to come everyday, just once or anything in between. Visual artists, performers, musicians, dancers, makers and others are welcome.

If this appeals to you and you would like to use the space please let me know of your general interest so I can keep you informed and have an idea of numbers.

If there is anyone else you know (and i have a serious lack of email addresses in my contact list so i have certainly not sent this letter to all who may be interested) who would like to participate please pass on my email so they may contact me.

Many thanks
alex (harrison)

also kaz, lizzie, deb, victoria, eva and martin could you please forward to alejandro and leanne, georgie ree/ad and the fondue ladies, anton, cecily, fiona malone, mei wah and rosie dennis and if anyone knows tammy's email and nalina's and tess'

please forward to them also
*xx'*²¹

²¹ Email from Alex Harrison. Sent to the author and 29 other email contacts, 16 January 2009.

Perennial Production

Creativity and innovation take time and advance by subtle and often uneven degrees. Charles Landry defined creativity as distinct from innovation. He said that creativity is the process through which new ideas are generated, whereas innovation is the process through which they are implemented and produced.²² Neither processes of creativity nor innovation sit well with immediate economic imperatives of production, profitability, revenue growth and audience and marketing development. In Chapter Three I discuss the practice of the independent artist outside the institution. To be successful in creating original work, discovering new things and solving new and evolving artistic problems, requires constant practice, long training, intense focus and perseverance. These requirements are rarely possible for the independent artist practising in today's dance landscape in Sydney.

Writing on the subject of sustainability, Geoff Davies reminds us: 'The world is a complex place that changes all the time, and what is sustainable at one time is unlikely to remain so. The quest for sustainability will be perennial and will require vigilance, creativity and continual adaptation.'²³ Inspired by Davies' use of the word 'perennial' I propose that it would be more useful for dance artists to aspire to perennial production than to sustainability, suggesting that bigger arts organizations work to sustain themselves whereas smaller independent producers should accept that they work perennially or are perennial practitioners.

Perennial is the term used to describe a plant that lasts for more than two growing seasons, either dying back after each season as do some herbaceous plants or continuously as do some shrubs. This perennial pattern of recurring on a continuing basis, rather than maintaining an existence or holding a position could replace the notion of sustainability, as it allows for an ebb and flow which adjusts to the different phases of one's existence and adapts to an ever changing external environment. It is

²² Charles Landry and F. Bianchini, *The Creative City (Working Paper 1: Key Themes and issues)* (London: Comedia, 1994), cited in J. Hartley, *Communication, Cultural and Media Studies: The Key Concepts* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002).

²³ Geoff Davies, *Economia* (Sydney: ABC Books, 2004), p. 433.

a way of adjusting to the abundant times and the less favourable times, but still continuing.

This perennial process involves the artist adapting to the ‘fallow’ times in the cycle when there may be lengthy struggles with little output. This fallow time is often perceived as unproductive time, but it can be extremely advantageous for the members of the independent dance sector as there are no expectations of any public results, allowing time for experimentation and for innovation. The fallow periods need to be offset by periods of production and interactions with others in the sector. This provides a balance for the interactions between artists and between artists and institutions and gives shape to the flows of a perennial pattern.

Perennial production provides a model of optimal chance for the sustainability of independent artists’ practices. All the artists in this sector of independent dance organization can experience a higher quality of practice, with greater freedom, not always controlled by economic and market forces. These multiple networks of interactions can be engaged with in different ways at different times. They have opportunities for creative play, and rich interactions.²⁴ Perennial production is beneficial for the artists and beneficial for the sector as a response to changing circumstances. This perennial pattern of dance practices recurring on a continuing basis, rather than maintaining an existence or holding a position as suggested by some definitions of sustainability, allows for a distribution of control through the system with ebb and flow of fluid networks interacting between artists and institutions.

Conclusion

This chapter has given an overview of the dance landscape in Sydney and its symbiotic policy and funding environment, focusing on the independent dance sector itself. In order to preserve the dance species, that is the independent dancers of Sydney, I have argued for an understanding of complexity theory and the characteristics of CASs and highlighted the importance of the local network, where

²⁴ Davies, p. 433.

success or failure is largely determined by what is, and is not done locally. In an attempt to understand the complex nature and effectiveness of these diverse dance networks and clusters, I have given attention to non-linear interactions that engage with instability and uncertainty and that demonstrate self-organization and adaptation, all characteristics that facilitate resilience for the independent dance artist.

In this chapter I have provided an explanatory framework that promotes an understanding of complexity theory, introduces ideas of an adaptive system into embodied dance practices and assists in understanding how to manage the contributions that are made by the independent networks to the broader dance system. This has provided a different perspective than that which is currently prevalent. I argue for recognition by artists and policy makers of the small interventions, which can have large and long-term importance.²⁵ Social networks and informal clusters of artists that meet for limited amounts of time to support each other when needed, such as THE PROjECT and Alex Harrison's invitation to artists to share her studio space are examples of the impact of these interventions on a local level.²⁶ These small contributions from independent clusters expose the dance sector to the position of 'the other': other cultures, values and ways of practice and relates to models of subsidiarity whereby the central is not recognised as the only advantageous position. Indeed, independent spaces and practices are valued as vital contributors to the network and the entire system. See Chapter Three and my Conclusion for further examples of subsidiarity.

The underpinning goal of this chapter has been to set the scene for how independent dance artists are organising themselves. My intention is to shift the thinking around how artists can most usefully optimise their chances of sustainability through perennial production in an uncertain and highly competitive world. In examining the

²⁵ Graham Harris advocates that a consideration when trying to control or manage complex adaptive systems is that 'a small nudge at a critical time may be better than a large intervention.' Graham Harris, *Seeking Sustainability in an Age of Complexity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 22.

²⁶ Mystory #4: THE PROjECT, (Appendix A, pp. 263-69) provides a narrative and archival materials that includes two examples of social networks, both formed at times where limited resources and inadequate funding left artists feeling demoralised and in need of support.

factors that help or hinder an individual artist's ability to interact through dance activities, I have prepared a case for improving awareness of the ability to create, maintain and manage networks, in this complex dance environment.

Chapter Three

Invisible Spaces: Tactical Heterotopias and Independent Dance Practice

This chapter explores three dance studios that have accommodated and supported independent dance artists in Sydney but which are no longer in operation: the various studios of The One Extra Company (1985-2006), Omeo Dance Studio (1996-2006), and Queen Street Studio (2005-2009). All of these dance studios generated high levels of investigative dance practice, dance community activity, and an awareness and sharing of artistic practice between artists working within the small to medium and independent dance sector. Importantly, these studios were places that did not necessarily register, or even need to have a profile in the broader spectrum of public culture. These independent dance studios and others like them operating at the time of writing I name 'invisible spaces'. They are animated by investigative and innovative dance practices with irregular public outcomes. This chapter argues for the recognition of the importance of such dance practices in invisible spaces that navigate innovation and the unknown in ways that are not easily facilitated by the mainstream.

It is significant that these invisible spaces sustained and continue to sustain a diversity of dance practices that predominantly encourage experimentation and risk-taking. In addition, collaborative practices between dance artists, and interdisciplinary collaborations often occur in invisible spaces. These independent studios operate outside the economic pressures and aesthetic expectations of the mainstream. They provide accessible and affordable dance space for independent artists with limited financial resources and are accepting of a diversity of dance

aesthetics and practices. For these reasons invisible spaces play an important role in supporting innovation and the development of the dance art form.

In addition, the spaces I will define in this chapter as ‘invisible’ assist and, in some cases, generate the complex networks of independent dance practitioners in Sydney. This chapter provides a way to understand the importance of artist-community networks and artist clusters sustained by these independent studios and an understanding of how independent networks and clusters contribute to the dance system through face-to-face interactions in these spaces. I argue that these invisible spaces foster investigative dance practices and dance communities that are a vital alternative to the visible places and arts precincts discussed fully in the following two chapters.

Each case study in this chapter illuminates a particular model of an independent dance studio with distinct collaborative organizational operations. The first studio discussed here is The One Extra Company (One Extra) (1985-2006), with a particular focus on how it provided free access to studio space for independent dancers. In doing this, One Extra acknowledged the mutually beneficial relationship between itself as a small-to-medium dance company and the clusters of independent dancers working at the time. The second study explores Omeo Dance Studio (Omeo) (1996-2006), an artist-run initiative set up by independent dance artist, Rosalind Crisp. The structure of Omeo centred on the requirements of Crisp’s own artistic practice and her interest in developing a community of like-minded artistic associates committed to a studio practice. The third model, Queen Street Studio at Queen Street (2005-2009), is an example of a business-like organization operating primarily as a space for hire. However, in fundamental ways its philosophy—‘run by artists for artists’ defined the successful operational model of Queen Street Studio.

In this chapter I walk the city and map invisible spaces as small vigorous nodes in the landscape from which it is possible for innovative practice and community to grow and flow outwards. In existing maps of dance in Sydney, these independent studios are most often represented as places on the margin, peripheral to the main action of the larger arts precincts and mainstream dance activity. The image I favour

is one of a dance system where all networks are crucial to the strength of the overall map and where independent dance artists are able to navigate within and between different spaces, practices and networks, both independent and mainstream.

Dance Processes, Rehearsal, Practice and Training

Here I define the activities of rehearsal, practice and training as embodied dance practices that animate space. Invisible spaces, as defined above, are places animated by dancers' bodies, actions and interactions where the spatial processes and embodied practices of dancers include not only making dance, but also moving, touching, talking, listening and thinking while working in the dance studio. All of these processes, including individual, idiosyncratic artists' practices and dance community-making activities, animate the space of the dance studio in different ways. De Certeau uses the example of 'the street geometrically defined by urban planning' being transformed into a space by walkers.¹ I use the example of a dance studio situated as a place, being transformed into a space by the animation of dancers' bodies, and their actions and interactions within it.

The processes of rehearsal and practice, as I define these two terms, have similarities and differences. *Répétition* in French is the word for rehearsal, meaning repeating to recall and remember what has previously been set. Rehearsals are the stage of the creative process leading up to the performance of a polished and finished work. I am using the term 'rehearsal' to refer to processes that tend to have specific time frames and usually involve an engagement in the final stages of creating a new work or the reproduction of a performance that already exists. The aim of rehearsals is to complete and polish an artistic product for consumption. The constraints this activity often engenders will be explored more fully in the case study of the following chapter.

Many independent dance and physical theatre artists in Sydney refer to 'having a practice' and finding it difficult 'to sustain a practice'. I hear the word practice used frequently as a holistic description to name and encompass a range of different

¹ de Certeau, pp. 91-114.

activities and processes where training, creative development, rehearsal and performances all become part of a practice:

and stand in a continuum that bleeds into: starting points for devising, finding collaborators, staging trials of works and public performance. All these stages contribute to a dance practitioner's development.²

In addition to the use of the term 'practice' as a name for many dance processes, I also use the term 'practice' to define one particular activity in the continuum of dance processes. That is, an activity, distinct from 'making work', in which the artist solely commits to developing personal investigations and explorations both physically and conceptually. Practice in this sense has only an imperceptible and occasional relation to presentation and is particular to the individual artist. Although some artists engage in a shared practice, it is essentially a private process.

Rosalind Crisp describes her approach to the practice phase of her process both in relation to and in opposition to rehearsal: practice involves the dancer's awareness being brought 'to the present moment, to the making of their movements.'³ I interpret Crisp as referring to the mindfulness of the specific choices one is making in each moment. This practice is very distinct from repeating the movement in order to recall it accurately as in 'rehearsal' or the French *répétition*. Crisp elucidates:

I tend to call my rehearsals 'hearsals, since they are not about re-doing things, but about negotiating. Every 'hearsal brings to light new elements in the work. It never seems like a 're' to me. Although with repeated practice understandings and strategies for dancing are accumulated. What my repetitions are concerned with is engraving ways of producing movement in the body-mind, rather than a set of re-memberable steps. I am interested in this notion of repetition.⁴

Crisp's notion of practice as a means for accumulating knowledge through a type of repetition that involves 'engraving ways of producing movement' is useful when thinking about the specificities of how rehearsal and practice, Crisp's 'hearsals',

² Yana Taylor, 'Thinking Through Training In Practice/Practice in Training – Some Musings', in *Dance NSW #31 Spring 2007* (Sydney: Ausdance NSW), p. 4.

³ Rosalind Crisp, 'A few words on repetition', in *Cadences Catalogue*, Macquarie University Art Gallery, 7 May-16 June 2009, ed. by Yuji Sone (Sydney: Macquarie University, 2009), p. 8.

⁴ Ibid.

create space. Her investment in ‘hearsals as discovery, ‘rather than a set of re-memorable steps’, provides a point of difference to the rehearsals shaped by marketable outcomes of mainstream spaces. Later in this chapter further engagements with this notion of practice emerge from artists who worked with Crisp at Omeo Dance Studio.

I define training as a physical regime adhered to on a regular basis, which is intended to maintain and develop the body’s technical abilities. Some artists include training as an integral part of their private practice, while for others training is one of the many processes that make up their practice. Training for independent dance artists may include contemporary dance classes, ballet technique, body weather, yoga or martial arts in the studio as well as physical activities outside the studio such as swimming and running. Most training regimes favoured by dancers include a substantial level of repetitious technical placement, refined movements and learnt sequences and are allocated a concentrated block of studio time, usually an hour or two per day.

For Sydney dancer choreographer Dean Walsh, the time in the studio includes intense physical training. He has a considerable repertoire of highly physical solo works and, as he gets older, his holistic practice includes the need to dedicate time in the studio to bring attention to ‘precise points of injury or muscular/skeletal unease that need attention.’ Walsh also invests his practice with methods that can ‘reveal new, quite personal insights to artistic expression – especially in the case where the dancer is also the choreographer’.⁵ To this end he acknowledges the importance of time in the studio to enable him to be more open to unknown outcomes without the pressures of deadlines. As with Crisp, adhering to this practice (including training) on a regular basis allows the dancer time to harness a body-mind connection in a studio space that supports such processes. Sometimes clusters of dance/movement artists’ group together in Sydney to engage in training. Some have developed a community of practice, meeting on a regular weekly basis. Others meet on a

⁵ Dean Walsh, ‘Repetition: as an injury prevention and a gauge to engage, and as choreographic and performance device’, in *Cadences Catalogue*, p. 12.

monthly or bi-monthly basis to share improvisation practices in an informal performance setting, such as *Whip It!* co-ordinated by Tony Osborne.⁶

Dance Heterotopias and Tactics

My inquiry into the independent dance experience and my definition of ‘invisible spaces’ is indebted to philosopher Michel Foucault’s exposition of ‘heterotopias’.⁷ Foucault describes places and spaces that function in non-hegemonic conditions as ‘heterotopias’. They can be identified as ‘different spaces,’ ‘other places, other spaces’ ‘counter-sites’ and ‘heterotopias’.⁸ This term is useful in this chapter’s discussion as it is here that I posit that the dance studios of the independent dance sector, my invisible spaces, are spaces of diversity and ‘otherness’, different from the places of mainstream dance. In other words, I argue these invisible spaces function as heterotopias.

Heterotopias are closely aligned with subverting power structures. The organising principle of subsidiarity—that is, a shift of power where matters are handled at a local level by the smallest, least centralised competent authority—acknowledges that recognition and investment by state, federal and other possible funding sources is necessary however these independent dance heterotopias should be managed at a local, autonomous level. This thesis argues that the optimal approach for the processes particular to these independent spaces and for the sustainability of the independent dance sector can be attained if these dance heterotopias are able to be responsive and adaptable at a local level, as appropriate for those who inhabit them, without the need for official approval thus essentially subverting power structures.

⁶ Since 2005, artists such as Nikki Heywood, Victoria Hunt, Georgie Read, Ashley Dyer, Tamarah Tossey, Linda Luke, Tony Osborne, Jeff Stein, and Alex Harrison have been involved in a bi-weekly shared training practice, which has provided these artists with an opportunity for sustained practice. The methodology (including Body Weather exercises and improvisation) is physically rigorous, with the training primarily focusing on body conditioning, as distinct from performance practice. *Whip It!* is a monthly improvised performance, curated by Ryuichi Fujimura, Nikki Heywood, Catherine Magill, Tony Osbourne and Eve Papadopoulos, held at the Life & Balance Centre, Glebe.

⁷ Michel Foucault, ‘Of Other Spaces’, *Diacritics*, Vol 16, No 1, Spring, (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1986), pp. 22-27.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

In his most well-known and influential work *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau's analysis of power relations gives new meaning to the military terms 'strategy' and 'tactics'. He sees strategy as an imposition of power through institutions and the organization of space.⁹ The hegemonic, government-initiated theatre buildings and arts precincts described in 'Visible Places' employ appropriate strategies to organise and secure the continuing existence of their places of operation. Strategic precincts have an enormous investment in actual buildings and assets, and the artistic work produced is made and presented within clearly defined time frames in order to achieve maximum efficiency and quantifiable production outcomes for the widest possible market. The presentation of a publicly recognised cultural product and its economic success ensures the survival of the arts precinct. The goal of the strategic arts precinct is to perpetuate itself: 'A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as *proper* and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it.'¹⁰ A strategic place is relatively inflexible because it is embedded in the institution that marks itself off from others and is not able to respond easily to change.

For de Certeau strategies and tactics are spatially distinct. Strategies construct places as fortifications or distinctly defined locations that are linked with institutions and power. Organizations that adopt strategies are able to produce and systematically arrange information. They are recognised as an authority within a place of operation. Independent dance artists and the networks they form are itinerant users of place, sometimes through choice, sometimes through lack of choice, sometimes through necessity, and sometimes through resistance. Thus, independent artists employ tactical practices of 'making do' alongside the practices of power of the strategic institution. Tactics are not necessarily aligned with place, rather, they use manipulate and divert places with momentary occupation without full ownership:

A tactic on the other hand is 'a calculus which cannot count on a "proper" (a spatial or institutional localization), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of the tactic belongs to the other. A

⁹ de Certeau, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰ Ibid., p. xix.

tactic insinuates itself into the other's place, fragmentarily, without taking it over in its entirety, without being able to keep it at a distance.¹¹

Tactical behaviours are born out of not having a (proper) place. Choreographer and dancer Calista Sinclair is a member of Dirty Feet, a group of emerging independent dance artists who have forged a partnership with the City of Sydney providing the group and their community of dancers with part-time subsidised studio space for classes and rehearsals in council facilities.¹² Even though DirtyFeet are currently housed in The Peter Forsyth Gymnasium in Glebe, Sinclair feels despondent about the space situation that they find themselves in, as 'independent dancers in Sydney are displaced and rather homeless'.¹³ The peripatetic experience of independent dancers encourages them (or forces them) to assume tactical approaches to sustaining dance practice. When working in these invisible spaces the artists' engagement is often transitory. It is common for independent studios to be in operation for shorter periods of time than those permanent precincts established by government funding. Artists are often evicted from these invisible spaces when the building is sold or the rent increased beyond the capacity of its tenants. However, adaptive tactical behaviours employed by independent dance artists make resourceful and opportunistic use of time and space in the dance studio. These tactical behaviours offer a productive way to think about the sources of power and the potential of fragmented, essentially makeshift space created by independent dancers for themselves in Sydney.

¹¹ de Certeau, p. xix.

¹² 'If you are a recent dance graduate, or between dance jobs, or interested in meeting other dancers in Sydney you can participate in the DirtyFeet program. Feel free to make contact at dirtyfeet@optusnet.com.au or stay tuned for the official call for dancers that will appear in Ausdance networks soon.' Quoted in Cathy Murdoch, 'Focus on Youth Editorial' in *Dance NSW #31 Spring 2007* (Sydney: Ausdance NSW, 2007), p. 3.

¹³ Calista Sinclair quoted in *Ausdance NSW Dance Space Report 2005* (Sydney: Ausdance NSW, 2005), p. 13.

Walking and Mapping Invisible Spaces

The One Extra Company Various Rented Studios (1985-2006)

In the 1980s the Sydney dance and performance community was predominantly located around a small geographical neighbourhood, that is, the CBD (Central Business District) and inner city. Scattered around the area were many studios leased by dance and movement theatre companies for lengthy periods of rehearsal and practice: Sydney Dance Company at Woolloomooloo, One Extra in George Street and Wentworth Avenue, Entr'acte in Liverpool St, D'arc Swan above the Mandalay Restaurant on George Street, Dance Exchange at Railway Square, Dance Camp at Sid's Warehouse Crown Street and numerous other privately rented warehouse spaces. Regular dance work involving project companies also occurred in community-based places: L'Atelier on Glebe Point Road, Redfern Town Hall, Alexandria Town Hall, Reginald Murphy Community Centre in Kings Cross, St Canice Catholic Church in Kings Cross, Stanley Palmer Cultural Palace in East Sydney, Juanita Neilson Recreation Centre and Plunket St Primary School in Woolloomooloo, Quakers Hall on Devonshire Street Surry Hills, Sails Ballet Academy at Circular Quay, Scots Church at Wynyard, the Chinese Youth League in Haymarket, Dynamite Studios on Chalmers Street, Halliday's Ballet Academy on Holt Street in Surry Hills, Gala Studios on Broadway, St Stephens Church Hall in Newtown, St Lawrence Arts Centre at Railway Square to name just a few. None of these spaces, except the church hall in Newtown, are still available as performance and/or rehearsal spaces.

Over the past two decades in Sydney artists have been evicted from studios throughout the city as development of old buildings into business offices and inner-city apartments have occurred—a trend similar to many major cities. For more than a decade the City of Sydney Council has been supporting residential developments that encourage people to move into the CBD, often into neighbourhoods previously known for their bohemian, artistic identity. In the ten years between 1991 and 2001 the residential population in the CBD grew from 6,600 to 16,150 and the population

of artists both working and/or living in the city declined significantly.¹⁴ With increasing rents and limited space available for artistic activity there has been an exodus of artists out of the city in search of more affordable workspaces. Initially it was possible for artists to relocate their studios to suburbs around the inner-city, but progressively it has become necessary for artists to move their workspaces and in some cases their place of residence to suburbs further away from the city. In addition to those who struggle to stay in Sydney, there are those Sydney-based dance artists who have relocated to other cities and countries, or who have simply discontinued their practices.

In this section I return to the dance studios that once punctuated the city and were important to networks of independent dancers when I worked as a full-time dancer in the mid 80s with One Extra.¹⁵ In the Introduction to this thesis I wrote of the unique actions and organization of these studios and of how coordination between these studios, homes to small-to-medium dance companies, facilitated interactions between local, national and international networks of the dance system. Without a studio as a permanent home base, ongoing and sustained interactions between artists are not possible. Most importantly, at the time of writing, this range of studios no longer exist as the few small-to-medium dance companies that remain in Sydney are unable to maintain the costs of permanent studios and full-time ensembles of dancers.¹⁶ Consequently, independent dance artists work under very different and more fragmented conditions utilising a smaller collection of independent studios and physical hubs. This cultural crisis in the city of Sydney is demonstrated by the fact that not only is there a lack of accessible and affordable studios, but also, there is

¹⁴ 2001 Sydney Census.

¹⁵ Malaysian-born architect and dancer Kai Tai Chan formed the One Extra Company in 1976 as a vehicle for his eclectic experimental multi-cultural dance work. In 1985 the company became fully professional maintaining a full-time ensemble for five consecutive years by means of regular funding. Based in Sydney the company toured extensively in Australia and overseas. In 1991 Kai Tai resigned from the company and from 1992-1996 Graeme Watson and Julie-Anne Long were appointed joint artistic responsibility. In 1996 One Extra became a production house for a stable of emerging and established dance artists, in response to more and more artists working independently with little or no infrastructure or managerial support. Initially, One Extra was led by producer Janet Robertson and from 2000 onwards, the executive producer was Amanda Card.

¹⁶ Force Majeure, directed by Kate Champion is a typical example of the current small-to-medium dance company model in Sydney. The company hires a permanent office space in the CarriageWorks precinct and employs dancers on short-term project-based contracts. This means that they hire whatever studio space is available when needed.

limited recognition of the value of invisible spaces to support the self-determined, independent dance community.

I go walking, in search of lost dance studios, invisible spaces...

I devise a walking itinerary to see what, if anything, still exists of these places. This walking and looking for the disappeared places and spaces of the One Extra Company also provides a contextual layer for a larger cultural memory:

The term *cultural memory* signifies that memory can be understood as a cultural phenomenon as well as an individual or social one.... We also view cultural memorization as an activity occurring in the present, in which the past is continuously modified and redescribed even as it continues to shape the future.¹⁷

Each site I plan to revisit has been important to me on a personal level but more importantly these studios were a vital meeting place for many dancers and performance makers as discussed in the Introduction. I create a walk to anchor myself to a city and a dance history.

I go walking...

In the middle of the day I go walking in the city, feeling like a vagrant, now adrift and slightly out of place. The city feels flat and hard and the streets where I walk let in little sunlight. Everyone seems to be on the way to somewhere else. As I walk in the mild sunlight the image of a theatre burning to the ground in the middle of the night engulfs me. During the 1870s and 1880s fire destroyed a number of theatres in Sydney. Its two major theatres – the Prince of Wales Opera House and the Royal Victorian Theatre were destroyed by fire only eight years apart. The Prince of Wales was built on a site in Castlereagh Street formerly occupied by an earlier theatre of the same name, which had opened in 1863. But the greatest loss of all was that of the Royal Victoria Theatre – at that time the oldest theatre in Australia, which was razed to the ground on the night of 23 July 1880. With the fire came the loss of ‘the

¹⁷ *Acts of Memory: Cultural Recall in the Present*, ed. by Maike Bal, J. Crewe and L. Spitzer (Dartmouth College: University Press of New England, 1999), p. vii.

history, the records and the backbone of Sydney's theatrical scene since 1838'.¹⁸

This significant public loss is comparable to the disappearance of the spaces that I describe in this section. The invisible spaces that I am interested in did not have as epic or as spectacular an ending as the burning theatres. Although unknown to the general public, these lost dance studios were very important to those who knew and used them and are no less significant because of the important role they played in the vitality of the dance community. In the 1980s these physical places supported dancers' needs for daily physical work, sustained practice, allowed for face-to-face contact with other artists and as I remember it, provided a potent sense of belonging.

Walking...

#75 Wentworth Avenue, 1985

Just down from Central Station and up two flights of stairs, was the first permanent studio of The One Extra Company, with windows along one side of the studio, tarkett floors and wobbly folding doors partitioning off a small noisy second studio. There was also a sink, toilet, changing area, couch and indoor palm. The Wentworth Avenue studio even had a storeroom for props and costumes. Members of the company had access to the space seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day, and were known to sleepover at the studio on occasion. Each year from 1985-1987 One Extra facilitated Summer Schools, where participants attended two weeks of workshops following the Christmas break. Local, national and international artists would converge on the Wentworth Avenue Studios and from there, spread out to workshops held in studios around the city. The sixty or so participants walked between studios during the course of the day, from the Wentworth Avenue Studio over to Stanley Palmer Cultural Palace in East Sydney, down Oxford Street to the Entr'acte space in Liverpool St, and across Hyde Park via a session of tai chi in the park to the Boy Charlton swimming pool for synchronised swimming. These cheerful clusters of artists carved paths through the city, creating a presence of dance activity in the city, their uniform tracksuits and torn t-shirts marking them as different to many of the other city workers. During this time One Extra employed an

¹⁸ Edward Pask, *Enter the Colonies Dancing* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp.71-72.

artistic director, two administrators, seven dancers and one production manager. Its full-time schedule included Sydney seasons premiering new work, plus regional, national and international touring of repertoire.

The Wentworth Avenue Space is now gone.

In 2009 #75 Wentworth Avenue is the Sydney Central Private Hotel, Quality Budget Accommodation. Across the road is a new Backpackers Hostel and 24 hour convenience store, but the Motorcycle Accessories Supermarket that was there in 1985 survives.

Walking...

#363 George Street, 1986-87

On the corner of George and King Streets in the centre of the city is the American Express building, once again up two flights of stairs, but this time there was the option of a rather dodgy lift. You entered via a reception area (the potted palm survived the move) and off to one side were the dressing rooms with office space on the other side and full time office staff managing the administrative affairs. There were two large studios from which you got a great view of the street scene below. Once again I was drawn to the world outside the window. I enjoyed stepping out onto the street into the midst of the office workers going about their daily business. Lunching everyday in holey tracksuits alongside the respectable suits made me aware of social regulations of the body and how our bodies, as dancers were different, in both appearance and demeanour. We were looser in our gestures and louder in our conversations than our office counterparts. Following lunch we retreated to the studio, back to home base, back to our other world. Once again we had access seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day to the studios. Each morning during the week when the company was in town there was an open technique and training class, where anyone other than company members could attend for a small price. In the evening, classes were held for the public taught by members of the company and on weekends, company members and independent dancers held

rehearsals and performances, with a program of informal works-in-progress. The studio schedule spilled out around the edges of a nine to five day. This studio served as a social space, a meeting place for the loose community of dancers associated with the company and also visiting artists to Sydney, a kind of dancers' drop-in-centre that facilitated social networks and the incidental exchanges that spark ideas.

The George St Studios are long gone.

In 2009 on this former dance site there is an imposing chrome, stone and glass office development with not one but two revolving doors opening into a large atrium. The Office block is flanked by Surf shop Quicksilver and Stewarts Gentlemens Outfitters. A sign of the times, 'All Tenants Please Note Strictly No Smoking In This Area At All Times Thank You Management', would have been ignored by the dance company members puffing away in the building in the 1980s. Food featured prominently in the working days here. Across the road was Darrell Lee chocolates and a rather dingy subterranean food court. I am pleased to find Darrell Lee still in residence, alongside a sushi bar. The food court has been replaced by a restaurant/cafe/bar and down an escalator is a Coles Express supermarket doing a brisk trade. At 1.25pm on a week-day the crowds of workers and the buses roaring past are the same as twenty years ago. The background hum of traffic was once a stimulant in the rehearsal room. Now inner city apartment dwellers who have recently moved into the vicinity complain of the noises that were there long before they took up residence.

Still walking...

After vacating the George Street Studios in late 1988, due to refurbishment of the building, the One Extra Company was able to maintain a small office but no full-time studio space. Between 1989 and 2006 the company hired studios in a variety of locations around the city. During this time One Extra moved its full-time office space four times: first it was located in the office of Judith Johnson, Marketing and Publicity, Milson's Point (1988-1992), next at St Lawrence Arts Centre, Railway Square (1993-1996), followed by the Seymour Centre, corner of Cleveland Street

and City Road (1996-2003), and finally Performance Space, Cleveland Street, Redfern (2003–2006).

Throughout its history, One Extra's structure has been moulded by the contemporary realities of life as a dance artist in Australia. It has always been a flexible organization, responsive to the needs and desires of the artists it represents. The move to a producer led organization in 1996 reflected the changing realities of the contemporary environment for dancers and choreographers in Australia at that time. As elsewhere, more and more artists found themselves working independently with little or no infrastructure and managerial support. Today, One Extra provides a location within which the most promising or experienced independent local dance artists can find a supportive environment to make their work. This allows these artists to practice their craft without being swamped and distracted by the pressures of managing everything from administration to finance and promotion as well as making new work.¹⁹

In 1996 the company's operating model changed and the company was remodelled in response to the perceived needs of the times, to provide a producer model for independent dance artists. The company consisted of a part-time executive producer, part-time project manager/administrator, and choreographers, dancers, composers, designers, production crew and marketing personnel employed on a project-to-project basis.

One Extra at Performance Space, 199 Cleveland Street, Redfern, 2003-06

I walk up George St past St Lawrence Arts Centre and cross through the underground walkway tunnel at Railway Square, Central Station. I exit into the sunlight at the Devonshire Street end of the Railway Tunnel and walk away from the city up Chalmers Street, proceeding diagonally through Prince Alfred Park, where I pass the outdoor swimming pool, tennis courts and Intensive English Language High School, with the incessant rumble from the trains passing by on one side and the sound of road traffic on the other edges. I can see Performance Space, the building on Cleveland Street, in which many networks of dancers, musicians, contemporary performance artists and visual artists converge. (I provide a detailed discussion of Performance Space in Chapter Five). In 2003 the One Extra office relocated from

¹⁹ One Extra Website, <http://www.oneextra.org.au/content/blogcategory/27/51/> [accessed May 13, 2002].

the Seymour Centre in Chippendale and One Extra became the resident dance company at Performance Space. One Extra was one of the few dance companies in NSW at the time committed to the development and maintenance of experimentation with form and content. With its structural flexibility, the company provided space for a collaborative supportive environment, stimulating many significant interventions in dance, especially over its last three years at Performance Space. The One Extra Company Ltd ceased trading on 31st December, 2006.

The One Extra Company is now gone.

Gone but not forgotten. If the city is an active force in constituting bodies as Elizabeth Grosz argues, then I extend this to include the dance studio and how its specificities leave traces on a dancer's corporeality.²⁰ The One Extra Company studios are remembered in the bodies of those who worked there. Similarly bodily traces are left in the space of a building by the bodies that animated that space. Many layers of human experience contribute to make a space of a place: with dance practice these layers include—physical language, sensory perception, memories, feelings, social connections and the presence of others, cultural roles and conventions. A trace of myself is left, out there somewhere in the city, shaped by the ritual of 'taking class' in these studios and carving through the invisible spaces with my body and others.

Traces in the Space

For over twenty years I have been using a simple warm up exercise for professionals and children alike to isolate the shoulders and arms. You "roll" your shoulder from the front to the back, then, placing your hand on your shoulder, you draw a circle with your elbow and 'pierce' the air as if with the tip of a pencil. Lengthening your arm, you 'slice' through the air with a full sweep, circling from front to back. Keeping the momentum, you 'slice' around again, rather like a circular saw blade:

*RIGHT ARM Rrrrrrolll, pierce! Slicccce, slicccce,
LEFT ARM Rrrrrrolll, pierce! Slicccce, slicccce,
BOTH ARMS Rrrrrrolll, pierce! Slicccce, slicccce,
Rrrrrrolll, pierce! Slicccce, slicccce,*

²⁰ Elizabeth Grosz, *Space, Time and Perversion: Essays on the Politics of Bodies* (New York: Routledge, 1995), p. 110.

This exercise is effective for two reasons. Firstly, the relationship of the words to the movements is strangely symbiotic and creates a contagious enthusiasm. It is difficult to execute the circles without expressing the sounds and before you realise it, the whole class is hissing and smiling 'slicccce, slicccce'. Secondly, the simple repetition of circles encourages the weight of the bones to initiate the movement rather than taking the muscles for granted and letting them assume the work. This weighted bones approach encourages a deeper muscle memory, making it possible for a type of 'forgetting', or 'letting go', to take place. It is also possible to add an atmospheric texture or image to this sequence by imagining you are slicing through water, mud, smoke or butter, whatever captures your imagination.

I have always had the sense that at the end of the exercise the space is filled with a palpable tracing of movement lines, much like the light trails revealed in a slow shutter photograph, or a vapour stream in the wake of an aeroplane. These energetic traces remain in the space and leave an inscription, after the dancers have gone. An imprint of a ghost body survives in the space.

Dancers carve through space. They feel it around them, between them, are supported by it and weighed down by it. Dancers are space eaters. Dancers can fill a space with energy and emotion; vigour, life, spirit, power, potency, dynamism, zing, pizzazz, oomph. But what is left as tangible evidence once the body leaves the space? Or once the space is gone?

SEE YOUR BACK IN FRONT OF YOU
 STEP FORWARD INTO YOUR OWN BACK
 SEE IT BEHIND YOU AND STEP BACK
 SHADOWS
 ECHOES
 MOVING INTO THE SPACE BEHIND YOU²¹

In Butoh they say the body is moved by its surrounds. Take your right hand and move your fingers... Now take your left hand and allow the space between your fingers to move them... The fingers themselves aren't moving but the space between them is supplying the energy to move. It is as if the space is haunted 'by many different spirits hidden there in silence, spirits one can "invoke" or not. Haunted places are the only ones people can live in ...'.²²

²¹ Exercises for improvisation and performance in Miranda Tufnell and Chris Crickmay, *Body Space Image* (London: Dance Books, 1993), p. 17.

²² de Certeau, p. 108.

Creating a Community of Practice

Omeo Dance Studio Studio B2, 1-3 Gladstone St, Newtown (1996 – 2006)

During the ten years of its existence Omeo Dance Studio (Omeo) operated in response to the philosophy, structures, patterns, behaviours and complexity of the local independent dance sector in Sydney. In turn, the identity of independent dance in Sydney has been informed by the studio practices at Omeo. This case study presents examples of a culture in which critical movement inquiry and choreographic research is the central focus, and provides evidence for the importance of investigative studio processes and the interdependent relationship of invisible spaces and dance practice. Through this case study I aim to produce an understanding of dance practice, in order to highlight the need for recognition and investment by federal and state governments for invisible spaces such as Omeo. These spaces sustain investigative dance practice and are not solely about material profit and visible representations of dance.

Omeo was a studio with a high profile within the local and national independent dance sector. Its identity was strongly aligned with the dance practice of Rosalind Crisp, and also with the networks and clusters of dance artists and their associates who made and showed work there. Audiences who attended informal, often improvisational performances in the studio were predominantly made up of other dancers and other artists, as well as friends and people who were specifically interested in the dance practice at Omeo. In this section I provide a framework with which to consider the importance of such spaces, for dance practice, as generators of innovation and new form. Together with artistic endeavours that were central to animating the studio and sustaining its dance community, the primary focus at Omeo was an emphasis on supporting investigative dance practice. Because of its commitment to innovation and community Omeo played a crucial role in sustaining independent dance practice in Sydney at the time.

The Home of Omeo

Omeo Dance Studio was established in 1996 by dancer/choreographer Rosalind Crisp at The Crago Flour Mill, in Newtown, an inner west suburb of Sydney. Located beside railway tracks, in an area where many artists live, the Flour Mill was affordable and suitable for a number of artistic enterprises. It provided the benefits of a home base to a diverse artists' community. The sounds of feet from the Flamenco Dance School on the third floor resonated through the old industrial building along with the hammering and machinery of numerous visual artists, jewellers and craftspeople all adding to the atmosphere of artists at work.

It was significant that Rosalind Crisp named her studio Omeo. Crisp grew up in Omeo, an old goldmining town 400km northeast of Melbourne located on the Great Alpine Road on the edge of the Snowy Mountains. In 1998 she wrote:

It has become more of an imperative, more interesting to me to find/develop the coat that fits – the one of this country, of this light, of this space, of this land. This was always important but I am now more aware of its finer relationships to me – not simply the wombat hole of my childhood.²³

A place is often more than just a location being inextricably linked to people and the things that happen in that location that is meaningful to them. Crisp thought of the Omeo studio as being 'home to the work', as well as her home. A road sign 'borrowed' by her father from the 30km out-of-town mark sat impressively on top of some shelves in the Studio naming the place as Omeo. In constructing the place/space in connection to her birthplace and her Australian identity, Crisp intensified her desire to maintain the place of Omeo, the dance studio, as a home for her dance practice over the ten often challenging years of its existence.

When Crisp took on the lease at 1-3 Gladstone Street, the room was a patched-up, splinter-floored, utilitarian workshop. With much care and assistance from friends and colleagues it was transformed into a clean and efficient dance space. With artists contributing to activities such as building and maintenance, a sense of belonging and

²³ Program notes accompanying performances of *The Omeo Dance Project*, (February, 1998).

collective ‘ownership’ was built. Studio B2 was fifteen metres long by ten metres wide, with good ventilation and generous windows on two sides. There were wooden floors of specially laid and treated plywood. Other signs that the studio was equipped for dance were a portable compact disk/tape player, a portable barre and a mirror leaning up against one wall. The barre and the mirror served as gestures to the traditional dance studio. However, the mirror was purposefully draped with an old rug, allowing a choice as to whether to refer to the mirror as in traditional dance studios, or not. Omeo was an artist-run-initiative dedicated solely to dance activities unlike many of the venues that independent dance artists in Sydney work where sharing space in conflicting and often unsympathetic ways with other users is common.

Before setting up Omeo, Crisp worked in a number of such unsatisfactory and challenging studio spaces:

I used to work in this church hall in Leichhardt. Every Wednesday evening this Italian group would come and they would usually come around lunchtime and go into the kitchen and start cooking pasta. So it was ready for night-time. And on Thursday morning it was such a mess and it took me two hours to clean the place, because they weren’t rolling around on the floor of course!²⁴

Crisp’s story of working in a place where multifarious purposes overrode her requirements of it as a dance space, resonates with my memory of a year of rehearsals with the One Extra Company in the early 1990s. We shared a small office with another arts organization on the north side of the harbour and we rented St Stephens Church Hall in Newtown in the inner west. In the afternoons, we shared the hall with the after school program from the local schools. At 3.15pm each day, kids began running in and out, yelling and bouncing balls. This continued for the duration of the afternoon, and that was on the sunny days. When it rained we didn’t get much work done at all as the kids spilled out of their small room into the hall. The One Extra Company hired the hall for contained periods of a few weeks at a time specifically for funded creative development periods, creating new shows and conducting rehearsals for upcoming productions.

²⁴ Interview with Rosalind Crisp by Julie-Anne Long, 9 November, 2005, Sydney.

Place is a space which is invested with understandings of behaviour, appropriateness, and cultural expectations. The spaces of these studios were shared with people and organizations that lacked an understanding of what behaviour was suitable when sharing the place with dancers. Many different people engaged in a variety of diverse activities should have access to a church hall. These church halls and the people and activities that inhabit or traverse them, shape conduct and dance practice very differently to the purpose-built Sydney Dance Company Studios at The Wharf Precinct. Actions and interactions within these contrasting places, as they are occupied and experienced by dancers, is a challenge for independent dance artists in Sydney. A preference for working in proximity to a wider community does not naturally extend to being in the same space.

Rosalind Crisp has always had a studio one way or another. For three years in the early nineties she shared a studio space with musicians *The Mambologists* and two women who were devising and performing shows for schools. Crisp sustained a regular practice at the studio during this time, while the others used the studio for intermittent rehearsals for their 'gigs'. The studio was opposite Central Railway Station on the second floor of a building owned by the Sydney City Council. To support herself financially, Crisp worked at night in the pub next door. The council offered free rent on the agreement that the artists would perform twenty-three shows a year at Council events. Entertaining at nursing homes was a regular engagement. Crisp remembers this arrangement fondly as 'a way of making it happen'.²⁵

Following this arrangement, from 1994-95 Crisp lived in a studio in Annandale, in the inner west of Sydney. Taking on the burden of the rent was a huge risk but she survived for eighteen months there and credits her experience of maintaining the Annandale studio, primarily for her own practice but also hiring it to other dance artists to subsidise the rental, as excellent preparation for taking on the management of the Omeo studio in Newtown.

²⁵ Crisp, interview.

The Studio: Organization and Philosophy

The first two or three years of managing Omeo was a constant struggle and Crisp used to ‘pray’ for money: ‘I lived on nothing really’.²⁶ During the first six years Crisp managed Omeo for at least 12 hours a week in exchange for space. None of the administration and management was paid work in this non-profit organization. Sub-letting the studio for classes, workshops and rehearsals made the money that it needed to run, supported by the generosity of the owner who put the rent up only once in nine years. The realities of financial survival are often the downfall of an enterprise such as Omeo, but the philosophical underpinnings of Omeo were clear:

You could rent it out for higher rates like other studios, but then it’s just a studio for hire and it doesn’t generate a community. I’d made the decision to have a sliding scale so people with a ‘studio’ practice could use it for longer hours... There was a vision – things I had decided to do and not to do and having people contributing to the rent who were people I really wanted to support was one of those things.”²⁷

Crisp’s desire to surround herself with a community of like-minded artists was pivotal to the philosophy of the organization of Omeo.

Omeo Dance Studio was an interesting phenomenon in Sydney. Artist-run-initiatives are commonplace in the visual arts in Sydney but few dance artists have taken on the responsibility of running a studio. Omeo was a dance-artist-run-initiative that survived and evolved through the hard work of artists along with financial support in the form of grants received at opportune times.

The timing of successful funding outcomes for Crisp’s artistic practice was crucial to the financial viability of Omeo. The lease for Omeo was signed only after a successful grant application that had a substantial amount in the budget for studio hire. In the early years at Omeo, Crisp was the recipient of a two year Choreographic Fellowship from the Dance Board of the Australia Council for the Arts (\$90,000), as well as a one-year Women and the Arts Fellowship from the NSW

²⁶ Crisp, interview.

²⁷ Erin Brannigan, ‘Rosalind Crisp: a European Future Pt 1’ in *RealTime*, no. 48, April-May 2002 (Sydney: Open City), p. 28.

Ministry for the Arts (\$15,000). With the money from these awards she was able to subsidise the rental costs of the studio and provide a degree of financial security for three years. This financial stability helped to determine the direction of the space and made committing to the venture possible, ultimately benefiting the community who accessed Omeo.

A Context for Practice

Having access to a studio space provided the right conditions for the development of Crisp's work. It gave her time and space for choreographic practice. Crisp's dance practice includes an intense inquiry into movement vocabulary:

I had my own studio so what I did was develop this myopic obsession with making movements because that's all I had. It was much less about making shows, because you get so little chance to perform here and then the show doesn't have a life, so back into the studio for another ten months. So that has naturally informed my practice. It's probably tapped into certain tendencies as well but I do think my work is shaped by the context I've grown up in.²⁸

An evolution of her solo practice involved the formation of a company of dancers known as *stella b*. Having the resources of a regular studio base and desiring to deepen her practice, Crisp developed a more expanded way of working, through the training of a consistent group of individuals. At various times *stella b*. included dancers Lizzie Thompson, Nalina Wait, Alexandra McDonald, Emma Saunders, Jane McKernan and David Corbet:²⁹

My inquiry into dance is addressed through the body, through my body and through the bodies of the dancers who collaborate with me. We are engaged in a corporeal practice of using multiple sources interchangeably to propose an unstable body, one that is continuously reforming and deforming, without resolution.³⁰

This concern with the unknown and unstable body required an investment over time by all the dancers. This was only possible due to Crisp's commitment to an ongoing

²⁸ Crisp, interview.

²⁹ Each of these artists continue to practice - in Sydney (Thompson, Wait, Saunders, McKernan), Melbourne (McDonald) and Canberra (Corbet).

³⁰ Rosalind Crisp www.omeodance.com [accessed 10 May 2004].

practice and ongoing access to space and place without the constant demand of public presentation. Despite and perhaps, precisely because of this prioritising of practice by Crisp, interest in performances of her solo work and her performance work with *stella b.* increased from 2000, with presentations in galleries and theatres throughout Australia, Japan, Korea, Belgium, Germany, Scotland, America and France. Early in 2005 Crisp made the decision to relocate to France where she was offered dance employment opportunities more attractive than those in Sydney. Crisp is currently based in Paris, France, at the studio of Carolyn Carlsson and is dividing her time between Australia and Europe, moving between Sydney, Melbourne, Belgium, Paris and Berlin.

Space is a practiced place.³¹

There are two aspects that continually arise in the articulation of what a practice is when talking with independent dance artists. One is the regularity of being in the studio, be it everyday or once a week. Second is that the process is not product orientated. Martin del Amo is a Sydney-based dance artist and movement trainer, originally from Germany but now an Australian citizen. Del Amo works mainly as a solo performer using movement and spoken word in real time improvisation. In the following quotation he describes his experience of practice:

It just consolidated this view that I had always had, that it wasn't rehearsal that I was doing it was an investigative ongoing practice, a process. And I thought this makes so much sense. That means I'm not working towards *something* only this regular ongoing practice and that any show I do is going to happen out of that and be part of that longer process. It kind of takes the pressure away, of working towards *something*... You do see that often. You've got a particular time (covered by funding) to get your work up and then it's over, and that means it's not an ongoing practice. Of course you intensify the training (leading up to a performance) and it becomes rehearsals. But nothing beats every day just to keep myself in that flow so the performance is really a year of practice distilled into a show.³²

³¹ de Certeau, p. 117.

³² Interview with Martin del Amo by Julie-Anne Long, 17 November, 2005, Sydney.

The notion of the show being a distilled version of one's ongoing practice rather than a product that one creates for a specific purpose or audience is one that is possible only with a relationship to a studio such as Omeo.

Del Amo practiced regularly at Omeo during the final three years of its existence. He describes his experience of the invisible space of Omeo as collaboration with the space. Where the space has a history, prior to its activation by the dancer, and which provides energy for the dancer to work with, or against:

The thing I love about the studio, about Omeo, is it has a particular atmosphere. It is an empty room that you go into, but there is something else in there, that's got to do with what you do with it. Some people are daunted by the prospect of going into an empty space. Maybe I don't feel that it is an empty space because I'm walking into 'something' and I love that.³³

Del Amo thinks of the space as 'something' that gives you energy to work with. This differs from Edward Casey's notion that the body must be moving for space to exist.³⁴ Casey's space is a place that *sits waiting* for the dancer to enter and animate it, and comes into being when the body moves. 'For space to arise, our body as geared into it cannot remain static: it must be in motion.'³⁵ Both of these definitions are relevant for different approaches to the invisible space of the studio by dancers.

The relationship of a dancing body with space is fundamental to the dance practitioner's existence and a primary constituent of their craft. The dancer can also describe the space in relation to place: distance from the front of the room, height of the ceiling when lifting a partner, the condition of the floor. These are all creations of space in a physical place with the negotiations that occur in the studio generating a connection between the physical place and the space to be animated. As with Rosalind Crisp's naming of Omeo Studio after her hometown, those who became familiar with the studio thought of it as more than just place. It became loaded with meaning that personalised it for them:

³³ del Amo, interview.

³⁴ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1997).

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

With Omeo, it is the affection for the space... I've been thinking about that now that the space will probably vanish quite soon, because I've got a very close relationship to the space. After a while it becomes imbued with so many things, personal stuff, of course, I live my life there... (Following a personal tragedy) I went into Omeo, of course I didn't do much work but that's where I really gathered myself, a space where I could breathe and just gather myself.³⁶

Breathing and gathering oneself are acts of grief but also part of preparing the body in practice. As with Rosalind Crisp, a number of artists, including del Amo were attracted to the philosophy and organization of the space at Omeo and interested in finding ways to support a dance practice that was much less about making shows than about learning something new.

Martin del Amo has always had a studio practice, where he spent regular time in a studio not only when rehearsing for a performance but also training and developing new ideas. Del Amo was interested in the work of Andrew Morrish and was encouraged by Morrish to begin an improvisational practice.³⁷ Del Amo incorporated improvisation into his studio practice, and improvisation became part of his toolkit for practice:

Not that I think of myself as an improviser, but (of improvisation) as something to get a practice, to get inspiration from. So I thought who could I have that with? The first person I thought of was Tony Osborne, but he was busy ... Rosie Dennis... we got together ... we started doing exercises where one person was watching and the other doing. Of course you can do improvisation by yourself but to be able to have some feedback and also the possibility to do something in front of someone else.³⁸

Since 2002 Martin del Amo and Rosie Dennis have had a regular practice session together, once a week for a few hours utilising a form of training through improvisation. However, there have been periods when they were each working on other artistic projects, or 'a job-job', where they were unable to maintain the training,

³⁶ del Amo, interview.

³⁷ Andrew Morrish is a freelance performer, researcher, facilitator and teacher of improvisation working between Australia and Europe.

³⁸ del Amo, interview.

but where possible they arranged their other commitments around the practice, giving priority to the continuation of their regular practice sessions.

Sustaining a Practice and Generating Social Networks

The Fondue Set is Jane McKernan, Elizabeth Ryan and Emma Saunders. This trio of dance performers met at Omeo Dance Studio in 2000, as part of the cluster of dancers working with Crisp, coming from different networks that intersected at Omeo. They attribute their need for regular time for practice to the schedule they set up at Omeo. Elizabeth Ryan spoke of her desire to sustain a practice as an important part of her work with The Fondue Set:

Lately we have had a few projects backed up so we have not had our ongoing practice. But we've always tried to maintain one... now we're meeting on a Monday and we at least have a couple of hours together and ideally when we're functioning at our best, that's not product orientated. We have a thing where we like to get together... authentic movement, improvising movement scores, things like that, that we have as an ongoing practice...³⁹

Influenced by her training with Andrew Morrish and Rosalind Crisp, Emma Saunders, another member of The Fondue Set put it like this:

Andrew was really big on a practice as was Ros, where you go into the studio and you work on an idea that has perhaps come from a class or from somewhere else and you would play with it and learn something and then use that to do the next thing. That would be a way of using improvisation to play with quite tangible movement scores and then work out what that is, pluck out something you notice, or are interested in, and then that way you are practicing, thinking, without having to make a product. So in that way a practice is significant... For me when I say I've got a practice I'm not saying I've got a product necessarily but I feel like it's not just training or rehearsing something, it's where you might work on something and go back down into the body and keep it in the body using writing, responses...⁴⁰

Saunders definition of her personal practice privileges notions of playing as a way of learning and deepening understanding of her own body, quite apart from processes of

³⁹ Interview with The Fondue Set; Jane McKernan, Elizabeth Ryan, Emma Saunders by Julie-Anne Long, 17 February, 2006, Sydney.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

production. Jane McKernan another member of The Fondue Set, also alludes to this deeper engagement with the body and how it ‘feels’ as an important aspect of her personal practice. Like Saunders and del Amo, it is not necessary for McKernan to align her practice with making a product. Much like Saunders’ going ‘down into the body’, McKernan thinks of her practice as a way to clear and clean the body:

I don’t feel like me if I haven’t once a week done something. So when Emma and Elizabeth were away I felt I needed to go to the studio by myself. Not working towards anything at all, it’s just about how my body feels. Somehow I feel like I need to do this and when I wasn’t, I was working at the café and I would go across to the park and on my way home I would be doing this kind of thing (she stretches, twists and shakes) and it’s some sort of getting it out. The practice is getting it out so that you can start where you are, rather than [...] carrying it all with you all the time. There’s some need to expel this creative energy in your body so that you start clean or something.⁴¹

In my interview with The Fondue Set they all spoke of the role Omeo played in making it possible for them to sustain a practice, which they value highly and define in subtly different ways. They also spoke of the importance of friendships and social networks that grew out of the studio:

Emma: “I went with Julie and Gab and I remember Nalina’s first class and Jane...”

Jane: “I felt like it was this gang and so I didn’t continue and then the next year I tried again and felt more in there... Nalina was hanging around the edges... Well actually I met Emma... Lizzie and I had been working on something and Emma came in behind us (in the space schedule) and that was the first time I really met her...”

Emma: “I remember bumping into Jane on King Street and we had a discussion and we realised we had a few things in common and that we had a lot to talk about and then we went to a barbie not long after that and played frisbee...”

Jane: “You taught me how to play Frisbee while we discussed dance”.
(They laugh)⁴²

As described above, Omeo was a place from which friendships and artists’ networks could grow through a sharing of practice. These social and professional networks were central to the success of the self-organization of Omeo.

⁴¹ The Fondue Set, interview.

⁴² Ibid.

Dancer in Search of a Place

Imagine this... It is 1997. You are a young and emerging dancer...

You grew up in Darwin and then after finishing school, went to Perth to undertake a three-year tertiary dance course at Edith Cowan University. You have just graduated and decide to try your luck in Sydney. Two years ago you saw a work by a small company from Sydney at The Perth Festival that you liked, so you think you'll go and see what's happening in Sydney. After three years of full-time dancing all day every day, now that you no longer have access to institutional supported daily practice you continue to feel the need to take class every day. You are driven to keep your body moving in the way that you have become accustomed to, so when you arrive in Sydney you 'let your fingers do the walking'. Thumbing through the Telephone Directory close on the heels of Damp Houses Repairs & Waterproofing you find Dance Tuition-Ballet &/or Theatrical: Dancexcitement, Donna Jean's Stage Dance Studio, Dreaming of Jeannie Bellydance, Latin Motion, Red Shoes School of Dance, Tania's Strictly Dancing, Turning Pointe Academy of Dance. You are pretty certain that none of them are quite what you are looking for.

You locate the company names that you are familiar with. You phone the Bangarra office, but the company is away on tour for the next two months, which means no classes. The One Extra Company doesn't have any projects on for the first half of the year, which means no classes. You phone the Sydney Dance Company. The receptionist informs you that company class is by invitation only. She recommends you come to the public evening classes and directs you to the timetable on the website. You attend a Hip Hop/Funk class, not your first choice of dance style, but the schedule suits. The room is over crowded and it feels more like a gym work out than a dance class, with generalised instructions and motivational missives being shouted through a microphone by the teacher. After two weeks, you get a job in a bar at night, so the evening class is no longer viable.

When visiting Melbourne last year you went straight to the Victorian College of the Arts School of Dance and were able to participate in class there. It was easy, with lots of classes to choose from and a constant stream of outsiders taking class. You discover that there are two tertiary dance courses in Sydney, one is located an hour and 20 minutes out from the city at University of Western Sydney. The other, a dance education course, is at the University of New South Wales. You phone the number listed for Dance at UNSW but no one answers the phone, you leave a message, but no one gets back to you.

You look in the newspaper and see that there is a dance show on at the Opera House. You go to the show and hope to see some dancer-types in the foyer. You were hoping to ask someone about dance classes but everyone looks like they've come straight from the office. You go to another show at the Performance Space. You feel out of place, everyone seems to know everyone else. By chance you start up a conversation with someone who is waiting for the toilet. You mention your recent arrival and ask where the places to take dance class are. She says you'll be lucky to find anywhere in Sydney at the moment, except Omeo. As an afterthought she adds, it depends what you're into, but give it a try.

For the interim, you are staying in Bondi, but need to find somewhere else soon, as your friend is coming back and will need the room again. You have a map of the city and inner suburbs and decide to launch into class the next morning. You take a bus from the beach, then a train from Bondi Junction. It all takes longer than you expected. You leave Railway Square at Central on the 424. The bus crawls along Broadway, up City Road and into congested King Street. Finally you alight from the bus at the intersection of King St and Enmore Road just outside the train station – you could have caught the train so maybe next time.

You've been told that Omeo is alongside the railway tracks away from the city. So you head off. As you round the corner you see The Old Flour Mill. The front of the building is dotted with signs for jewellery makers, printers and other artists. There is a sign pointing to Omeo on the first floor. From the footpath you go up a creaky external staircase through a heavy metal door and arrive immediately at another. Both industrial doors have been left slightly ajar in preparation for the morning class arrivals. A carefully sealed wooden floor suggests the sanctity of a dance floor and you take your shoes off. Light spills in from two walls of the predominantly white room. The room is not particularly big and it is interrupted in three places by floor to roof columns, wrapped in painted tin. This is nothing like the university dance facility that you are used to. The ceiling is low for a dance studio, and rough wooden roof beams divide the room. It is all rather makeshift, essentially an industrial space, however much work has been done to the floor and general painting of the space. An impression of orderliness is made by the finishing touch of a minimal calico curtain that hangs covering the sink and small refrigerator.

Neat piles of bags and clothes are stacked against the wall closest to the entrance along with a couple of stray stacks of chairs. Dancers are positioned around the studio, warming up. No one is stretching their leg over their head or forcing their knees to a frog squat. There is a lot of lying horizontal, rolling, adjusting, and breathing going on. You wonder where the dancers stretching their legs over their heads are. The atmosphere is quiet and calm with a hint of chatter. No one seems to take much notice of you except one woman who comes over introduces herself and then lets you know that she'll collect the money at the end of class.

You want to go to the toilet before class begins. Someone advises you that you'll need to take the roll of toilet paper, conveniently sitting inside the door, up to the next floor where the toilet and shower is, and then bring it back with you after you have finished. 'Each tenant must provide their own consumables' the sign in the toilet says.

Then the long awaited class begins with more rolling, adjusting and breathing. You become aware of the way you 'picture' your body. You are copying and responding in space to the other's spatial and temporal actions. This training is more than just steps. It is about you and where your body is today. This is a new sensation for you, you feel exposed, but you decide to return, every Tuesday and Thursday morning. Each time you are becoming more aware of how this practice is overlaying your previous 'body histories' (of ballet and modern dance training) and working with them to begin understanding your body in a new way. You begin to make shape and

rhythm out of feeling and sensation. One day the session ends with news of a performance on the Friday and Saturday night. Another time someone asks you if you want to go for a coffee? You're beginning to feel part of this Omeo place. This is happening through attending studio performances and beginning friendships, but mostly you are aware that you are becoming part of this dance community through the classes and the work with your body and other bodies, in the 'live' space of the studio. This is the parallel coexistence of place and space, or as Rosalind Crisp thinks of it: 'place is in the body for me, more than anything'.⁴³

Cracks Around the Edges: A Place for Community

A significant reason why Crisp started Omeo was that she didn't have a physical place to meet with the community of artists who worked in a similar way to her or who might be interested in this type of artistic practice. Her work with dance students and other artistic collaborators and her desire to find time and space to engage in a dialogue around her work through a sharing of knowledge, found nourishment at Omeo.⁴⁴ This required an all-consuming schedule for Crisp, including a high degree of involvement in the day-to-day running of the studio. Crisp was often at the studio all day everyday, co-ordinating class in the morning and managing other activities in the evenings and on the weekends. She participated in classes and taught at least once a week. This was in addition to maintaining her own dance practice, through time spent in the studio alone working on her solo practice, as well as sessions with other dancers and the dancers of *stella b*.

In recalling this time Crisp values the unexpected opportunistic meetings that provided fortuitous opportunities for developing a sense of community, whereby:

What was great was this thing that I started to realise was happening around the edges of other things. For example when someone would come in accidentally to check up about space and you would sort of half stop what you were doing and talk. Or someone would come to drop something off... and then they might stay and watch something and then there'd be a bit of a talk. It was very malleable with lots of cracks around the edges where a lot of the creativity and community thing was. And it was often by accident. And I really liked it. And that's only possible when you're there a lot.⁴⁵

⁴³ Crisp, interview.

⁴⁴ Brannigan, p. 28.

⁴⁵ Crisp, interview.

For Martin del Amo it also began to feel like a community, one where artists supported each other and were mutually validated, partly through becoming aware of other artist's practices. Through the activities of the studio, clusters of dance/movement artists were created, interested in movement practices such as contact improvisation, authentic movement, Body Mind Centering and Feldenkreist. Each cluster worked in the space independently without being answerable to anyone, and there were also possibilities for the clusters to come together. Importantly the studio also facilitated opportunities for engagement and exchange through informal presentations in the studio.

Having access to an affordable space encouraged Martin del Amo to start an ongoing solo practice. At the end of 2003, del Amo was commissioned to make and present a new work at Performance Space, scheduled for June 2004:

I knew it would be the following year and that space and time would not be paid for until a month before and I thought why don't I start now. I did that three times a week for 2–3 hours. Just concentrated. Trying to be in the studio a lot. Together with those three other days and I was also teaching. I was there for at least five days. As someone who works physically you have to be there in the space even if you just stretch or something, it's a connection to a space. Just being there is always important.⁴⁶

In addition to his solo practice del Amo was also involved in other informal organised activities. At the end of 2002 del Amo, Rosie Dennis, The Fondue Set and Elly Brickhill convened a small group meeting once a week, which they called *The Luncheon Club*. They met over lunch and each person could choose to use their allocated time as they wished to talk through an idea, to show some work, or to just catch up on the gossip! These different types of coming-together were connected but also varied: the one-on-one (such as the improvisation practice of Del Amo and Dennis), the group of peers (such as *The Luncheon Club*), and the informal studio presentations for small audiences (such as *The Grapes of Sloth* improvisational forum).

⁴⁶ Crisp, interview.

Rushing for the Sloth and *Blind Date* were monthly forums for improvisation dedicated to the development of artists and audiences interested in the potential of improvisational performance to create new form, endorse 'being present' and embody open-ness. *Dance Briefs* and *Un-coordinated* were both performance series' that encouraged the continuing evolution of independent dance artists by facilitating the presentation of new works developed in studio practice and sharing ideas in an informal environment. The possibility of having ongoing access to a space in order to attract a regular artist and audience base is crucial to events such as these.

With Rosalind Crisp's relocation to France in early 2005, The Fondue Set took over the management of Omeo and it was renamed The Fromagerie. The Fondue Set continued to manage the studio with similar objectives to Crisp's organization of Omeo. Towards the end of 2005 The Old Flour Mill was sold to a developer with plans to renovate the buildings into 'creative spaces' namely offices for the creative industries. These plans did not accommodate tenants such as the cluster of independent dance artists who used Omeo. On 16 March, 2006 The Fromagerie aka Omeo Dance Studio shut its doors.

The Fromagerie aka Omeo is now gone.



Figures 5-8: Martin del Amo, *For What it's Worth* #2
Omeo Dance Studio, 2005
- the walls, the floor, the windows, the street lights, the columns, the cracks and
crevices
Photographs by Heidrun Löhr

Run by Artists for Artists

Queen Street Studio

2nd Floor

Standex House

12-16 Queen Street

Chippendale

(2005 – 2009)

Local artists Sam (Samantha) Chester and James Winter opened Queen Street Studio in June 2005, motivated by a frustration with the shortfall in availability, affordability and accessibility for appropriate independent performing arts spaces across the city of Sydney. The opening of Queen Street Studio coincided with the news that The Fromagerie, formerly Omeo, was close to the end of its lease. The brochure for Queen Street Studio publicised ‘a non-profit rehearsal facility and creative development space run by artists for artists.’

Located in the inner city suburb of Chippendale amidst a bustling network of artist-run initiatives inhabited by mainly visual artists and writers, Queen Street Studio quickly filled a gap by supporting the local performing arts community, including independent dance artists.⁴⁷ Primarily the business of Queen Street Studio was as a studio space for hire. Affordable rates made the studio accessible for all kinds of training, classes, workshops, creative developments, rehearsals, meetings, photographic shoots and castings.⁴⁸ The studio was situated on the 2nd floor of a re-conditioned warehouse space with ‘chill-out space’ including kitchen and bathroom facilities and large north facing windows with views across the city. The 7.3 metre by 16 metre rehearsal floor had no pillars or obstacles, unlike Omeo, and was covered by a tarkett dance floor, which is favoured by many dancers who work in bare feet.⁴⁹ The studio was also fitted with mirrors and a sound system. Positioned a convenient five-minute walk from Central Station and Railway Square, Queen Street

⁴⁷ *Art Map a guide to Sydney's artist-run galleries and projects* was produced in 2008 citing 26 artist-run initiatives (ARIs) in Sydney's inner city and inner west run by visual artists, curators and writers.

⁴⁸ Rates were charged by the hour and fell into two categories: Member and Non-member (Membership for 12 months was \$20-individual and \$100-organization). Member Rates were \$12 (unfunded individual), \$16 (unfunded group), \$22 (funded), \$28 (commercial).

⁴⁹ The tarkett was on loan to Queen Street Studio from Bangarra Dance Theatre as the company was no longer using it.

Studio was a well managed and necessary addition to the Sydney dance landscape following the end of Omeo.

Chester and Winter managed the day-to-day business of the studio, maintaining a membership of over 100 artists and organizations and hosting rehearsals to over 1,000 artists in the first year of operation.⁵⁰ Following the inaugural year, Queen Street Studio formed a strategic partnership with Ausdance NSW and receiving funding from the City of Sydney initiated an Artist-in-Residence Program.⁵¹

Other initiatives organised by Queen Street Studio included a round table discussion with 14 local independent artists and the Federal Shadow Minister Peter Garrett hosted by Chester, herself a practicing dance artist.⁵² One of the issues highlighted by this meeting was the ongoing scarcity of resources for the independent performing arts community in Sydney. Many under-funded artists frequently lack time and appropriate/affordable space to develop their creative ideas therefore having fewer opportunities for creative exchange and for connecting their community. Chester and Winter took on a leadership role in lobbying government and local business for this cause. Argued elsewhere in this thesis, and recognised as a key concern at this meeting, was the lack of studios in which to create work and nurture innovative performing arts practice. This lack was identified as having a detrimental effect on the viability and development of independent arts practice in Sydney.

The Artist-in-Residence program, the meeting with the Minister, the full schedule of hirers and Chester and Winter's unrelenting advocacy of Sydney artists in their dealings with the commercial and business world of inner city Sydney set the Queen Street Studio model apart from the previously explored models of One Extra and Omeo. The approach of Queen Street Studio complemented the philosophy and core philosophical concerns of The Fromagerie, (Omeo Dance Studio) which was in its final year when Queen Street Studio started. The unique program at Queen Street

⁵⁰ Statistics cited in a speech James Winter gave at *Creative Sydney*, Series of Talks at Museum of Contemporary Art, 'Space Race' 28 May, 2009: in 4 years membership had grown to 550 members, with 18,000 people passing through the studio.

⁵¹ 2006-2007 Cultural Grants and Sponsorship Program of the City of Sydney.

⁵² I attended this meeting on 20 March, 2006, as a local independent dance artist representative.

Studio fostered creative networks of artists especially those who were working on funded creative development and rehearsal projects and wanted to work outside the mainstream arts precincts.

Queen Street Studio also built on current resources and created an epicentre of training and skills development opportunities for independent artists that further highlighted the exciting and flourishing multi-disciplinary arts precinct in Chippendale. They argued that these creative capacities enhanced the vitality and uniqueness of the city.⁵³ Interestingly, when Winter was asked at a forum on creative urban space⁵⁴ why he thought Queen Street was such a success he offered this assessment: 'Because we know how we need to be treated as performing artists. We just applied that to how we ran with the business and the fit worked.'⁵⁵ Their 'run by artists for artists' approach, and the sensibility it contributed to this well-managed organization, was evidenced in the décor and atmosphere of the studio. It is also apparent through the projects that have been initiated by the Queen Street Studio team, such as the Artist-in-Residency Program that was created to provide free space for artists as a direct response to the high costs and limited options for dance studio space in Sydney.

Significantly, the success of the Queen Street Studio model can be attributed to the collaborative partnerships Chester and Winter made over four years with businesses in the area as well as government. Working with what some artists think of as 'the enemy,' Queen Street Studio built an impressive collection of allies who advocated for them at all levels of government and business and who recognised the value of Queen Street Studio and saw its artistic contribution as essential to the city. This was recognition of the importance of independent, often invisible spaces and acknowledgment of their contribution to the city, not just culturally but economically. Governments often implement regulations and creative policies from above, without direct experience of the situation. The Queen Street Studio model

⁵³ 'Queen Street Artist-in-Residence Program 2006/2007', (Proposal to Cultural Grants and Sponsorship Program, City of Sydney, 2006), p. 2.

⁵⁴ *Creative Sydney*, 28 May 2009.

⁵⁵ Gail Priest, 'Activating Art Spaces' in *RealTime*, no. 91, June-July 2009 (Sydney: Open City, 2009), p. 21.

has been organized ‘from the bottom up’, making strategic partnerships with ‘the top’ and with Chester and Winter acting as artistic advisors to the business sector. In addition, their philosophy ‘run by artists for artists’ has perpetuated a necessary range of tactical behaviours and activities at a local level, in order for the studio to maintain a viable contribution to the health of the independent arts sector.

In late 2008 the landlord of the Queen Street warehouse building instigated a refurbishment and as a result the soundproofing of the studio was removed, leaving it unsuitable as a dance space. Queen Street Studio vacated the premises over the month of April 2009.

In the Conclusion to this thesis I return to this case study to discuss the current studio model that Sam Chester and James Winter are managing at the time of writing. Having successfully demonstrated that they ‘know their business’ these two artist-managers are now working in partnership with multinational developer Frasers Property and the City of Sydney. Located just around the corner from Queen Street, in Kensington Street, Chippendale, FraserStudios is a new inter-disciplinary arts initiative which includes a visual arts residency program and multi-purpose performing arts space produced for Frasers Property by Queen Street Studio. I posit the FraserStudios model as an exemplary case study of a heterotopia that houses an invisible space and in so doing employs both strategy and tactics to provide what is needed for independent dance practice to prosper in Sydney.

Conclusion

Dance practice evolves in conjunction with a dynamic and frequently changing environment. Therefore there needs to be a variety of places and spaces where it is possible to be responsive to these conditions, on both a personal level for artists and a political level for the entire dance sector. This is especially relevant at times in the dance process where intensified perception and reflection is necessary and may lead to new discoveries. Through the repetition of regular private work in an intimate studio space and occasional performances for an audience, invisible spaces make possible the practising and innovative dance-making that is a largely introspective

and contemplative undertaking. In addition, the dance processes these studios support are often arduous and protracted, with unpredictable outcomes and a value that is often difficult to measure.

This chapter has also presented the case for the value of the endangered invisible space, one not defined by the demands of the outside world of consumer markets. In Sydney, a city that has a shortage of physical places and space for independent dance practice, the One Extra studios, Omeo Dance Studio and Queen Street Studio were all essential and significant focal points for the independent dance sector. Their support of under-resourced dance artists, (who favour a commitment to investigative dance practices), and of independent dance networks, provided a crucial counterpoint to the established company structures of Sydney Dance Company and Bangarra Dance Theatre and to the environment of the arts precinct model favoured by government funding.

The case studies of this chapter provide exemplars of independent dance studios as significant sites for contemporary choreographic research and innovation within dance practice in Sydney. Innovation is supported in the invisible space of the independent studio, providing a place where failure and inconsistency are accepted as an essential part of the dance-making process. Invisible spaces also represent optimal places for community activities, and altruistic interactions within and between dynamic clusters of artists. Collaborative partnerships between dance artists, as well as with artists from other disciplines and arts organizations are mostly flexible and informally organised in the independent dance studio. This form of subsidiarity is a desirable model of organization for independent dance artists, where artists' needs at a local level are afforded priority. This is especially so in the research, creative development and exploratory stages of the dance process.

For those independent dance artists who competently work in both invisible spaces and the visible places of the precincts, usage of each is often clearly delineated, with exploratory stages of the process occurring in invisible spaces and more easily defined rehearsal and presentation processes taking place in the visible places. At the time of writing there is a disparity between the precincts and independent studios

in relation to how they are each afforded value. This is partly demonstrated by how resources are prioritised favouring the precincts. When government, business and arts institutions recognise ‘run by artists for artists’ as important places for dance practices that require time without always having to meet the imperatives of immediate public outcome, this imbalance will be addressed. I argue that the relationship between the invisible spaces created by the independent studios of this chapter and the visible places of the precincts discussed in the forthcoming chapter needs urgent attention. The tensions this situation contains will be discussed further in Chapters Four, Five and the Conclusion to this thesis.

Chapter Four

Visible Places: Strategic Arts Precincts and Dance Production

Chapter Four draws attention to a pattern in Sydney, begun in the 1950s and expanded over the past twenty years, in which significant government support has gone into constructing arts precincts, namely well-resourced, highly visible, strategically located cultural facilities. It does so through an examination of two high-profile arts precincts in the Central Business District (CBD) of Sydney: first, the purpose-built monumental Sydney Opera House (SOH), an internationally recognised symbol of culture for both the city and for Australia; and second, the Wharf Precinct (The Wharf), a recuperated heritage wharf and bond stores, which is home to State flagship arts organizations including the State theatre and dance companies. In this chapter I explore the benefits and the shortcomings of ‘the arts precinct’ as a model for supporting dance-making, demonstrating what these precincts mean for local independent dance artists when making and presenting work there.

An arts precinct is a distinctive geographic area characterised by a concentration of arts-related uses, activities and visitation, with fairly definable physical boundaries. The arts precincts of this chapter have been constructed to showcase the performing arts, are government funded and have a flagship role. Hence, they have a highly visible public presence and distinctive media profiles based on constant cycles of production and reproduction. Their focus is on display and consumption of the performing arts by an audience who wants a highly polished, proven product, unlike the invisible spaces of the preceding chapter, which have limited desire for general

public profile and are predominantly animated by experimental dance practices. For these reasons I name arts precincts ‘visible places’.

The first part of this chapter explores the exterior, material elements of place and the interior, organizational structures and activities characterising both the SOH and The Wharf arts precincts. It considers their identities in relation to the dance processes that occur there, mainly rehearsal and presentation, and the public’s perception of the value of the art that is produced there. Urbanist Kevin Lynch’s focus on three key components of place—identity, structure and meaning—informs my approach to the design and processes of these precincts.¹ Geographer Edward Relph’s approach to the identity of place, particularly his observation that physical appearance, activities and meaning are key to that identity, has been similarly influential.²

This chapter establishes the political connection between place and identity that shapes dance in Sydney. My discussion of the identity of these arts precincts highlights the prestigious profiles of both the SOH and The Wharf embodied in and fostered by their harbour-side positions. My interest is in how their strategic locations and public representations impact on the dance that is produced and presented there. This chapter examines the interactions of the independent and mainstream dance systems as they engage with arts precincts, in order to expose their different values and modes of operation with regard to dance-making activities.

Increasingly independent dance artists present their work in finished form within these institutionalised arts precincts, whilst maintaining a primary practice in the invisible spaces of the independent dance studios. As discussed briefly in the previous chapter these precincts house studio space within them, however, the work that is done on site in the precinct has an emphasis on public performance outcomes. Some independent artists engage with the precincts through choice, as a necessary progression for recognition and development of a public profile for their work. Some engage with precincts to address the imperatives of funding criteria, and in order to increase audience numbers in larger venues, thereby being in a better

¹ Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1960).

² Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (London: Pion, 1976).

position to leverage further funding. However, engaging with the processes and production of dance in highly visible arts precincts can sometimes be to the detriment of the independent dance artists' identity, especially when the experimental form of the work, its content and/or making processes are not compatible with mainstream structures and expectations.

Through a case study of independent choreographer Narelle Benjamin and two instances where she prepared and presented dance work in these two distinct precinct venues, I examine the opportunities and challenges for the independent artist in interacting with mainstream dance companies and these highly visible arts facilities. I focus on *Gossamer* (2006) for the Sydney Dance Company (SDC) presented at the Opera Theatre, SOH and *The Darkroom* (2007) for the Australian Ballet Company (ABCo) at the Sydney Theatre, in The Wharf Precinct. An analysis of Benjamin's rehearsal experiences and the dance works presented, critiques how these mainstream companies produce and reproduce dance in the highly visible context of arts precincts. The study examines the challenges for an independent artist who values process and productivity that occurs organically, and considers how Benjamin's independent artistic identity is constituted within the visible place.

Writing of Michel de Certeau's long-held concern 'to bring closer together the cultural provision of the major facilities and the real practices of culture and communication,' Jeremy Ahearne, in his paper on cultural policy thinking, advocates that the notion of experimentation in relation to cultural institutions is restrained by 'the inevitable drift towards superficiality induced by the stress on productivity and visibility.'³ Both Ahearne and de Certeau value an 'interiorization' of artists' work that can only take place if they are afforded time and conditions to work through their experiences. This chapter will reveal that the Sydney arts precincts discussed here are not suitable places for investigative and innovative practices favoured by the independent dance artist, as the need for time to experiment, and possibly fail, conflicts with the financial and accessibility (public accountability) constraints experienced within precincts. As discussed in the previous chapter, the independent

³ Jeremy Ahearne, *Between Cultural Theory and Policy: The Cultural Policy Thinking of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel de Certeau and Régis Debray* (Centre for Policy Studies, University of Warwick Research Paper, no.7, 2004), p. 99-110.

dance artists' practices and dance-making processes are best supported by the invisible spaces. Albeit, as this chapter explores, there are benefits for the independent dance artist working in the precinct specifically when presenting polished performance outcomes: these benefits include access to larger production and marketing resources that expose their work to broader audiences and build public recognition.

Centre and Periphery

In the last generation Sydney has not only become the commercial capital of Australia but a major international business and financial centre. With a population exceeding 4.4 million, it is slightly the larger of the two main financial and trade centres of Australia, the other being Melbourne.⁴ In the press and tourist brochures Sydney is regularly declared to be one of the most beautiful and liveable cities in the world. It is a desirable tourist destination with the harbour and city beaches featuring strongly in representations of the city. However, Sydney is frequently accused of being brash, often criticised for its shallowness, pretension and corruption and painted as the glitzy, superficial, single sister to Melbourne's more considered and cultured dowager.

Not surprisingly the most recognised city landmarks, the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and the Sydney Opera House, are located on the harbour. In the psyche of the city Sydney harbour is the location to aspire to, and a position harbour-side suggests status, power and prestige. It is as if the harbour is a magnet, attracting the centre of the city towards it. Both SOH and The Wharf are positioned in prestigious harbour-side locations encouraging assumptions that high quality cultural products are presented in these visible places.

The geographic centre of Sydney is not in the CBD but situated twenty kilometres west of the CBD in Parramatta. The population of Greater Western Sydney is 1.85 million and over the past nine years has been growing faster than both Sydney and

⁴ Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 2009.

NSW.⁵ Equally important to the region of Greater Western Sydney is its identity as the multicultural heartland of Australia. With one third of the population born overseas, another third second generation immigrants and more than one hundred nationalities represented, Western Sydney's focus on cultural diversity in the arts is an essential and exciting feature of the area.

Recognising the limitations of the CBD arts precincts to service a culturally diverse population increasingly based in western Sydney, the Commonwealth, State and local governments funded the construction of the Riverside Theatres Parramatta and further west, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Blacktown Arts Centre, Casula Powerhouse and the Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre at Penrith. The Parramatta Riverside theatre complex, and similar cultural facilities at Penrith and Campbelltown are built on the 1970s regional art centre and precinct model. Each includes a large proscenium theatre and a smaller adaptable performance space. Campbelltown and Penrith both have a significant connection with the visual arts through their regional art galleries and are increasingly recognised for their vibrant and culturally diverse programs.

Like the city-centric arts precincts, the Western Sydney arts centres have large administrative and technical support infrastructures with dense line-ups of subscriber-based mainstream programming. Connecting with their local communities of artists and audiences is crucial to the mission of these metropolitan arts precincts. Therefore in addition to commercial programming they also present and hire to a diverse range of community groups and independent productions. Due to the effectiveness of the NSW Government's Western Sydney Arts Strategy⁶ these centres are now beginning to program independent dance in their subscription seasons, actively encouraging independent dance artists to show their work 'out west' through co-productions and commissions. For Sydney-based dance artists this ensures that their work reaches a new and broader audience.

⁵ Greater Western Sydney. Economic Development Board. <http://www.gws.org.au/page.asp?id=32> [accessed 21 March, 2007].

⁶ 'The Arts in Western Sydney 2006 Progress Report on the NSW Ministry for the Arts Western Sydney Arts Strategy'.

Historically amongst artists and city based audiences there has been a pervasive negative attitude towards Western Sydney locations identifying them as being too far away from ‘the city’. With the lure of the harbour situating the CBD as the centre in popular imagination and inner city living being a preferred option for artists rather than the outer suburbs, many dance artists live close to the city, in the inner suburbs.⁷ This tendency for spatial proximity around the inner city suburbs has created a physical network and community of independent dance artists, necessitating arts facilities that are close to where artists live.

First and foremost, the arts precincts in the western suburbs have been placed ‘on the periphery of cultural systems of space in which places are ranked relative to each other’.⁸ Identified as peripheral despite their central geographical location, their distance from the city contributes to the perception of their lack of importance and relevance. ‘They all carry the image, and stigma, of their marginality, which becomes indistinguishable from any basic empirical identity’ they might have.⁹ Since the appointment of a Dance Curator at Campbelltown Arts Centre in October 2008 a dramatic shift has occurred in both the perception and conception of independent dance artists to the opportunities available for working outside the CBD specifically in Greater Western Sydney. For the first time Campbelltown Arts Centre has a three-year dance plan, produced by the Director of the Centre and the Dance Curator, which included in its first year (2009) art form development projects and performances involving over thirty Sydney-based independent dance artists. I will return to the potential of this positive development in the conclusion to this thesis.

The Sydney Opera House, Bennelong Point

In the late 1950s the NSW State government launched a competition for the design of a new Opera House. For a young and isolated country like Australia the building

⁷ It takes approximately one hour to drive to Campbelltown Arts Centre from the CBD. With peak hour traffic or delays on the notorious M5 freeway it can become a much longer trip. Rationalising two-three hours travel for a one-hour meeting can be difficult.

⁸ Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 3.

⁹ Ibid.

of an internationally recognised Opera House was a means to gain status on the worldwide stage. As semiotician Marvin Carlson states:

By the second half of the nineteenth century the opera house had become an obligatory monument for any city anywhere in the world wishing to establish its European-oriented cultural credentials [...] The continuing importance of this symbol in the twentieth century may be clearly seen in one of its most striking and controversial modern examples—the Opera House in Sydney, Australia [...].¹⁰

Ove Arup, senior engineer, described the building as ‘a focal point and a civic symbol for a city which seeks to destroy once and for all the suggestion that it is a cultural backwater.’¹¹ With the exodus of many successful Australian artists to England and Europe, it was vital to stake a claim for the excellent art that was being made in Australia, to provide an appropriate place to house it and to further opportunities for presenting international visiting artists.

The documents presented for the successful bid to have the SOH declared a World Heritage site stated that from the beginning the SOH ‘has captured the imagination of people the world over and has become a cultural symbol not only of the city in which it stands but also of the Australian nation.’¹² At the primary level of meaning the SOH is ‘a cultural monument, a site of display for a dominant social class...’¹³ Henri Lefebvre contrasts a ‘monument’ with a mere ‘building’ as it constitutes ‘a social mirror,’ offering ‘each member of a society an image of that membership, an image of his or her social visage’.¹⁴ In the 1950s when the SOH was proposed, patriotic pride and discussions about a distinct Australian identity were coming into circulation and it was decided that an impressive monumental Opera House was just the thing to define Australia as a nation through its artistic identity.

¹⁰ Marvin Carlson, *Places of Performance: The Semiotics of Theatre Architecture* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1989), p. 83.

¹¹ Michael Baume, *The Sydney Opera House Affair* (Melbourne; Sydney: Thomas Nelson (Australia) Ltd, 1967), pp. 118-19.

¹² *Sydney Opera House Nomination by the Government of Australia for Inscription on the World Heritage List* (Canberra, ACT: Australian Government Department of the Environment and Heritage, 2006), p. 1.

¹³ Carlson, p. 8.

¹⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. by David Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), p. 220.

Many physical features of the building place it as a ‘cathedral of the civilised world’,¹⁵ invoking adulation and reverence with the inspiration for Utzon’s design coming from Mayan monuments, Chinese temples and Islamic mosques. Geographically the prominent position at Bennelong Point gives an uninterrupted view of SOH from all sides. In this geographically prominent position it has an iconic presence, which is impossible to ignore.

Outside, Inside, High and Low

An estimated three million people per year, in addition to the one million theatre patrons come to the site simply to look from the outside.¹⁶ On the one hand, as Gay McCauley points out, the SOH ‘is a major tourist attraction and its forecourt is usually thronged with crowds of people who have little or no interest in what goes on inside the building’.¹⁷ On the other hand ‘the awesome interior of the concert hall is a cathedral of ‘Art’ whose brow is as high as its vaulted ceiling’¹⁸ and where the price of an opera or ballet ticket excludes many potential patrons.

While many cultural facilities with imposing exteriors suggest that what matters is inside, away from the public, John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner suggest that the SOH does not have this type of façade but presents an alternative and contradictory message, one where what is inside is not for everyone:

[...] the Opera House is different, since what happens inside pales into insignificance besides its triumphant exteriority. The broad steps lead around it rather than into it. These steps, still not leading to the exclusive inside[...]¹⁹

In agreement with Fiske, Hodge and Turner’s suggestion, I argue that this ‘triumphant exteriority’ affects how the public views the art product that is presented inside in two ways. Firstly, what happens inside the SOH does become less

¹⁵ An expression coined by Theophile Gautier and used by Nikolaus Pevsner in *A History of Building Types* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1976).

¹⁶ 2004 figures in *Nomination for Inscription on the World Heritage List, 2006*, p. 31.

¹⁷ Gay McCauley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Michigan, USA: University of Michigan Press, 1999), p. 46.

¹⁸ John Fiske, Bob Hodge and Graeme Turner, *Myths of Oz* (Australia: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p. 160.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

important and the art ‘productions’ presented in this arena are in danger of becoming a mere commodity to entertain an elite audience. Secondly, and contrary to this first result, the production and reproduction of the professional performing arts that occur within are unquestioningly elevated to a high status as a consequence of their presentation in this highly visible monumental place.

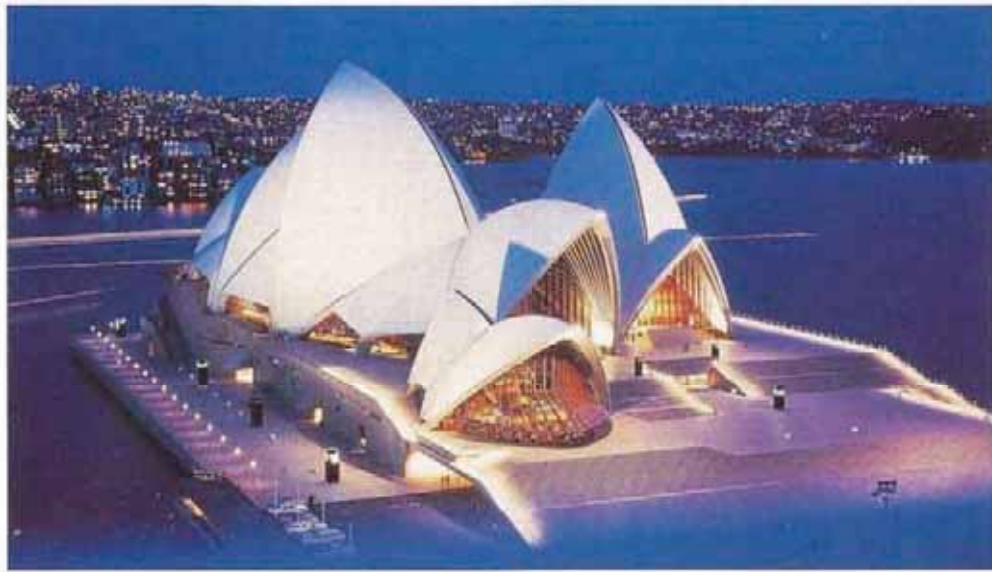
In addition to being an iconic monument and presenting what Goad calls ‘high-brow’ artistic productions, the SOH is also simultaneously ‘low-brow’,²⁰ with the main source of this egalitarianism being its placement and exteriority. It is ‘free and open to all, a place for meeting, for festivals and for being Australian.’²¹ The exterior and surrounds have been used for performances such as the New Year’s Eve Celebrations at the beginning of the millennium when performers abseiled down the ‘sails’ of the Opera House, and since 2004 the Grand Finale of national reality television singing competition *Australian Idol* has been televised live, in and around the Opera House. In becoming an image of Sydney and of Australia, the Opera House has become the property of all: possessed by tourists and photographers it is instantly and easily appropriated into popular culture through photographs, postcards, T-shirts, tea towels, glittery wall hangings, ashtrays, in other words all the paraphernalia of mass accessibility.

Close Encounters of the Artistic Kind

I’m looking at a postcard of the Sydney Opera House. It is a sparkling clear night, with the Opera House glowing against a royal blue sky. White and luminous, it appears to be floating above the ground, with a border of footlights marking its perimeter, and water on three sides. The fourth boundary is framed by a digital manipulation of fading light suggesting that it is not connected to anything other than itself. It is presented as a self-contained metropolis and bears a distinct resemblance to the spaceship in the final scenes of Steven Spielberg’s 1977 science fiction film, ‘Close Encounters of the Third Kind’. In the final climax to the film a huge alien spacecraft with hundreds of glittering, illuminated windows touches down on earth. Some people are lured into the container while others stay at a distance.

²⁰ P. Goad, (unpublished written statement, 2005, commissioned for the World Heritage nomination for Sydney Opera House).

²¹ Fiske, Hodge, and Turner, p. 160.



SYDNEY
AUSTRALIA

Figure 9: Sydney Opera House (Postcard)



Figure10: Sydney Harbour—Sydney Opera House and The Wharf (Postcard)

Condensing Culture

With more than one thousand rooms, the complex of the SOH presents as a satellite city, suggestive of a self-contained world, albeit one that is accountable to government and connected to and reliant on its partnerships with a myriad of national and international art centres which share similar rationale and validation objectives.²² The pressures of profile define dance processes and productions that occur within the edifice of the SOH, as will be evidenced in the case study of Narelle Benjamin in the final section of this chapter.

Extending the travel metaphor, the edifice reminds me of a giant generic transport hub such as an international airport, a zone with no discernible relation to the external world or to markers of day or night. Through the stage door at the Opera House you enter a type of transit lounge or customs area. The stage door and its attendant security officers serve as the control centre. Everything is available on the premises: somewhere to eat, to sleep, to wash, and to socialise. At any one time there is a mix of international visitors, as well as national and local artists performing at the Opera House. The inside of the Opera House is similar to many other theatres worldwide with its maze of backstage passages and small, medium and large stages. The essential theatre prerequisites, including technical production requirements strip individuality from the venues and create a generic global theatre space until you walk outside and experience the particularities of place of the exterior.

The SOH is a cosmos of multiple strands of creativity, art production, technical functions, and services for the community based within it, as well as for the general public who pass through. In Edward Casey's words, the building 'condenses a culture in one place.'²³ This condensation manifests as a lack of diversity in the professional artistic product that is possible within the SOH. It leads me to ask what

²² The New South Wales Government is responsible for the operation and maintenance of the Sydney Opera House. Its authority is vested in the Sydney Opera House Trust, which is constituted as a body corporate under the SOH Trust Act, with trustees nominated by government. The Government supports the maintenance of the building through annual grants and special capital works grants. The General Manager heads a permanent staff of approximately three hundred public servants including engineers, firemen, security, theatre managers, producers, box office staff and backstage technicians.

²³ Edward Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of the Place-World* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. 32.

type of dance community is constituted inside a visible place like this, with its clearly defined parameters tending towards a generic cultural hub?

A visitor to Sydney wanting to see a dance performance would probably be pointed in the direction of the Opera House by tourism publicity material. Dance is a major component of the programming at the Opera House, with dance productions, that have mostly been presented somewhere else before, occupying the Drama Theatre, the Opera Theatre, the Playhouse and the Studio. The Australian Ballet Co (ABCo) spends half of their performance year in residence at the Opera House. Sydney Dance Company (SDC) has two major seasons as a permanent booking and Bangarra Dance Theatre (Bangarra) favours the Opera House for at least one home season a year. Visiting dance artists' work is shown regularly throughout the year especially in the Studio and Playhouse programs and during the Sydney Festival in January, while local independent dance is presented sporadically in the Studio within a program that also features cabaret and physical performance.

Rehearsals and technical bump-ins of dance work that has been tried and tested elsewhere are the staple activities of the Opera House. Well-worked productions such as opera and ballet maintain an emphasis on a high rate of productivity—a profitable balance of regular artistic output and successful box office results—and ease of movement in and out of the theatres. The dance work presented at the Opera House is generally already known, having been performed previously with limited studio time scheduled for creating new work. There is minimal interest in the process of making new work within the Opera House, as it requires time and space that is not readily available or economically viable in an arts precinct with high overheads. The ABCo rehearses in the internal rehearsal rooms on the ground floor for the six months that it is in residence. As we will see in the case study later in this chapter, the processes that occur in the studio spaces are mainly rehearsals of existing work and only occasionally creation of new work within a rigid schedule. This chapter argues that such processes tend to foster the mainstream status quo and homogeneity of dance practices and forms rather than innovation and difference/diversity. A similar resistance to difference characterises another arts precinct situated around the harbour.

The Wharf Precinct, Hickson Road, Walsh Bay

To the east of the Opera House stretch the Botanical Gardens. If you wander in the westerly direction, away from the Gardens and stay at the water's edge, you find yourself walking via the Circular Quay Promenade, *en route* to The Wharf, an arts precinct situated at Walsh Bay. Passing through Circular Quay, a bustling, dynamic public transport hub, you see buskers mixing with commuters going to and from the train and ferry terminals. Restaurants and bars spill out onto the wide path and tall luxury apartment blocks sit close to the water's edge. Continuing along the walkway, on the opposite side of the Quay from the Opera House, you pass the Museum of Contemporary Art. This is a large block-like edifice that was once considered too monumental a building to attract a passing crowd when the gallery was originally established there. Its rather unapproachable exterior may be intimidating to passers-by and for some its facade might suggest that only the initiated might enter to experience the exclusive art world inside. To counteract the severity of the material nature of the edifice large banners announcing current exhibitions cover the facade. In addition the building is animated through diverse curatorial choices and accessible artistic activities, enabling the gallery to function for the enjoyment of large numbers of people of widely varied backgrounds through free admission. These include highly regarded retrospectives, popular exhibitions and public workshops, as well as more challenging exhibitions that incorporate innovative, sometimes controversial contemporary art, demonstrating that a precinct can be refunctioned and open to diversity.

Walking on through the lower Rocks tourist precinct, you pass more restaurants, tourist shops and hotels. Once you have crossed under the Harbour Bridge you find still further to the west, the first of five 1914 timber finger-wharves. Along the street lined with rows of parked cars and past the people fishing despite the *No Fishing* signs, you arrive at Pier 4 and 5, Hickson Road, Walsh Bay, The Wharf, home of the Sydney Theatre Company (STC) and SDC.

Historically this has been an area of dock industries, skirted by public housing tenants. There are frequent discussions about the relocation of the long-term public

housing community in order that their multi storey Victorian terraces, currently rented at peppercorn rates, can be gutted and redeveloped. This is a trend that has taken hold of many parts of Sydney, escalating since the 1990s. Marvin Carlson discusses the role of developing new theatres as significant elements of urban design. He refers to the Lincoln Centre in New York and the South Bank Complex and the Barbican in London, as examples of arts precincts, which have been developed ‘to stamp a new image on an entire district’.²⁴ The Wharf Precinct in Sydney is an example of such a development, as is CarriageWorks in Redfern, which I discuss in detail in the following chapter.

Since the new millennium an extensive amount of building construction has occurred around Walsh Bay and the reclamation of this maritime area is now almost completely transformed with multi million dollar apartments bringing in a new residential population and ‘real estate interests using the theatre as a cultural emblem for the enhancement of surrounding commercial property’.²⁵ The benefit projected in publicity for arts development and associated residential wharves claims that it reinvigorates an under-utilised area and gives it back to the public. The recently delineated district of Walsh Bay and The Wharf Arts Precinct mutually inscribe each other:

Districts are the medium-to-large scale sections of the city, conceived of as having two-dimensional extent, which the observer mentally enters “inside of,” and which are recognizable as having some common, identifying character. Always identifiable from the inside, they are also used for exterior reference if visible from the outside.²⁶

Lynch goes on to define such districts as having no need for connections to other areas. This is indeed how The Wharf Precinct organises itself, in a self-contained manner with little need for external contact, ‘introvert, turned in upon itself with little reference to the city outside’.²⁷

²⁴ Carlson, p. 94.

²⁵ Ibid., p. 97.

²⁶ Lynch, p. 47.

²⁷ Ibid.

A Self-Contained Place

The Wharf is somewhat isolated, very different from the busy transport hub that is Circular Quay. Minimal public transport passes this way on an irregular basis. The best way in and out is by foot—a fifteen-minute walk—or by taxi or private car, with expensive parking facilities. On a practical level, the lack of services close at hand limits accessibility. There are no banking or postal facilities and little evidence of any community other than the arts workers as the residents are barely visible when coming and going along Hickson Road. There is little chance of colliding with ‘other’ workers except the occasional construction manager from the building sites nearby.

I return to two quotations referenced in the *Dancing in the City* section of my Introduction, that of Roland Barthes in reference to the city as ‘the place of our meeting with the other’ and also Richard Sennett’s idea that to be in the modern city is to be always in the presence of otherness. An elite arts precinct does not engage with this otherness, rather it is disengaged from the business of everyday living, with little infrastructure to support an urban community and limited physical connections through public transport to other districts. This becomes a particular concern if making and presenting artwork full-time in the precinct. Like their counterparts in London and New York, both the SOH and The Wharf precincts produce a particular form of high-culture theatre, maintaining the mainstream status quo. The dance produced and presented quickly within the institutionalisation of these exclusive models has little regard for development of new form or innovative content but rather an emphasis on a known model of arts consumption. The precinct provides the benefit of having an identifiable arts community located in a defined place.

The Wharf at Pier 4 and 5 juts out into the harbour like a huge ocean liner recently docked or impatiently waiting to leave. This feeling of arrival and departure recurs whenever any sea craft docks alongside and the entire wharf rocks slightly on its pylons. By using travel vessel metaphors for both the SOH and The Wharf I propose that on entering into these arts precincts you are transported to somewhere self-contained and controlled, disconnected from your everyday life. The advantage of

this type of enclosed environment for artists is that it provides a professional situation where the focus is primarily on ‘the business of art production’.

Opportunities for networking with like-minded artists are possible. However, arts precincts like The Wharf do not host a great deal of diverse art practices, giving preference to known aesthetics and funded artists. These precincts in Sydney are isolated from immediate local socio-cultural realities in contrast to the enmeshed location of the independent dance studios.

A Permanent Home

In the mid eighties the first floor of Pier 4 was converted for the Sydney Theatre Company (STC), funded by the NSW State Government. On this wharf the STC has a 350 seat theatre venue, a smaller studio theatre venue, three large rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, workshops and storage space plus offices, a green room, foyer, bar and restaurant. Upstairs at the end of Pier 4, from a seat in The Wharf Restaurant or outside on the balcony you have a prime viewing spot looking across the glittering emerald harbour to the historic amusement park Luna Park. If you are lucky enough to secure a New Year’s Eve spot, you have a view of the extravagant ‘internationally renowned’ fireworks, on and around the Harbour Bridge. As the state theatre company of New South Wales, STC has a substantial subscriber base that responds to a program of largely new versions of tried and tested commercial theatre. The benefits and pitfalls of satisfying a subscription audience are a continual challenge for a company that proclaims an interest in innovative and relevant theatre.

In 1987, half of the lower level was refurbished as home for the Sydney Dance Company (SDC) providing five rehearsal rooms, dressing rooms, green room, offices, wardrobe, production workshop, foyer and café area, everything the company required except a performance space. The then Artistic Director, Graeme Murphy, in partnership with his associate director Janet Vernon, led the company until 2007, occupying the helm for over twenty years. SDC is often referred to as ‘The Dance Company’ or ‘Sydney Dance’. These titles suggest that this company represents the main manifestation of dance in Sydney. A full itinerary of public classes is conducted at SDC, which attracts large numbers of enthusiastic after-work

amateurs and smaller numbers of professionals. SDC presents in Sydney at the SOH and, across the road from its home at The Wharf, at the eponymous 'Sydney Theatre'. Officially opened in 2003, this 800-seat theatre was built to fill a perceived gap in the severely limited theatre venues in Sydney.

There are a number of other organizations that share Pier 4 and 5 with the theatre and dance companies, such as Australian Theatre for Young People (atyp), which offers workshops and practical theatre experiences for young people. This is a high profile youth theatre training company with actress Nicole Kidman as its patron. In the annexe to the far left is Arts on Tour, an arts touring organization, which facilitates performance tours around regional NSW. To the right of the main entrance a wing adjacent to the road houses the state flagship Sydney Children's Choir.

Sharing the other half of the lower level are the NSW offices of Ausdance, the state offices of the peak body dance organization that networks a number of dance services nationally, as well as engaging with the profession through conferences, forums and generating employment opportunities. Further along The Wharf is Bangarra Dance Theatre (Bangarra) which houses two rehearsal spaces and a studio performance space. Artistic Director Stephen Page has led Bangarra, Australia's premiere indigenous dance company, since the early 1990s and their premises are the most recently refurbished on the site.

The dance companies that have permanent homes at The Wharf, SDC and Bangarra, influence the type of dance activity that occurs inside the studio spaces of these visible places. I do not name these studio spaces as 'invisible' as SDC and Bangarra are predominantly repertory companies. Both companies spend a large proportion of their time remounting and touring existing works with new work developed infrequently—usually one new work every eighteen months. The majority of time spent working in the studio spaces that house these mainstream companies is devoted to rehearsing existing work within pressurised time frames in order to present it in visible places. This repeated sequence of rehearsal and presentation with intermittent development stages and even fewer, if any research phases, is particular to mainstream dance practice and dissimilar to the emphasis on investigative processes

of the independent dance practitioners working in invisible spaces discussed in the previous chapter.

Standing By!

Through a partnership initiated by Ausdance NSW, SDC has made moves to address the imbalance of resources within the local dance sector. In 2008 the SDC was in transition between artistic directors and in a position to rethink its relationship to the independent sector. Thus, a new initiative ‘Stand By!’ was trialed. Since 2008 Ausdance NSW has been releasing a last-minute call for free studio time with a week’s notice at SDC Studios. Ausdance NSW members can respond to the call, requesting their preferred time slot. The times are usually assigned in three-hour blocks. If more than one member requests the same timeslot the decision is made via a lottery draw. Studios are supplied free of charge on a standby basis. Although Stand By! cannot be used to conduct classes or workshops for income, this is a good opportunity for artists looking for a creative or rehearsal space. However, as studios are supplied on an informal basis and SDC may require them back at any time without prior notice, this is an unstable arrangement for the independent artists.

The SDC offer of free space is an excellent initiative for some artists, for example those who are able to respond at such short notice. But for those who schedule their practice around other regular commitments, and for others who wish to work independently and not be affiliated with established institutions, it is not a solution. ‘Stand By!’ is however the beginning of a dialogue between SDC and the independents that may create fruitful strategies for new approaches to working together.

A Housed Community

I return to images evoked earlier of the SOH as a giant spacecraft and The Wharf as an ocean liner. While they operate in slightly different organisational ways, the SOH and The Wharf are both relatively self-sufficient structures. One of my interests in these highly visible places is in the type of dance communities that these cultural

institutions support and the interactions that are possible between independent artists and arts precincts. The communities within these precincts are defined by place and strengthened by common interests and regular face-to-face contact between those who work there, the same as the definition of community, *Gemeinschaft*, advanced by social theorist Ferdinand Tönnies in 1887. His community was defined by kinship, by blood, by neighbourhood, by place, by friendship and of mind. Tönnies proposed that this community of mind:

[c]omes most easily into existence when callings or crafts are the same or of similar nature. Such a tie, however, must be made and maintained through easy and frequent meetings, which are most likely to take place in a town... those who are brethren of such a common faith feel, like members of the same craft or rank, everywhere united by a spiritual bond and the co-operation in a common task... spiritual friendship forms a kind of invisible scene or meeting which has to be kept alive by artistic intuition and creative will.²⁸

This late-nineteenth-century definition of community still holds appeal today as it offers a deep sense of belonging through shared values and ideas in an increasingly uncertain world. However, there are also negative aspects to this type of ‘traditional’ community. I argue that the traditional community can defend positions and the boundaries of the status quo at the exclusion of ‘others’ resulting, in this case, in the mainstream and independent dance sector segregation. Like Sennett’s purified communities, who build walls around themselves literally and metaphorically, my ‘closed community’ in the homogenous arts precinct exerts an exclusion of ‘difference’. This exclusion supports representation of a certain type of art and aesthetic and generates a lack of diversity in the artists’ practices that are possible there. The identity of these places is necessarily founded on the demarcation drawn between itself and other groups.

Communities and identities can be shaped through the maintenance of boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’ such as between the mainstream and the independent dance sectors. On the one hand there is mainstream dance, predominantly seen in highly visible places, and on the other hand, independent dance that often has a less visible

²⁸ Ferdinand Tönnies, trans. by Jose Harris and Margaret Hollis *Community and Association* (England: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1955), pp. 49-50.

public profile, and very limited places in which to practice autonomously. At first glance they appear to function separately with their own circuits of production, promotion and reception. However, this binary opposition is challenged when the space in-between is productively accessed and engaged with by the artists. A considerable number of independent dance artists are highly proficient at moving between the spheres of subsidised cultural activity and the often, under-resourced art making of the independent sector. This space-in-between is accessed less frequently, if ever, by artists who identify themselves with the mainstream. An understanding of hierarchical binaries can help one to understand funding and infrastructure imbalances, but it can also reinforce boundaries that sustain the imbalances.

The crucial points are not only the difference between the diverse identities of the nomadic independent artists and the consistent *housed* mainstream, but also the interactions that happen between them. Complex negotiations and dynamic processes occur within and across these different kinds of identities, sometimes well matched and sometimes incompatible. There are possibilities in this in-between space where the two can change and re-constitute one another, and in an ideal world, mutually enable one another. However, as the following section will demonstrate—in only small ways. The following study presents a case of a recent interaction of this type between independent and mainstream practitioners.

Case Study: Narelle Benjamin

Sydney-based independent choreographer Narelle Benjamin's engagement with the resources and processes of a strategic mainstream dance framework forms the basis of this case study. Here the focus is on her engagement in the development and production processes with two of the most visible Australian dance companies. Benjamin created *Gossamer* (2006) for the SDC presented at the Opera Theatre, SOH and for the ABCo at the Sydney Theatre, Walsh Bay she choreographed *The Darkroom* (2007). I acknowledge not only the advantages that increased profile and exposure of the work to a larger audience offer for an independent artist working in this milieu, along with the benefits gained from greater access to production resources. Nevertheless, I argue that the interaction between Benjamin's independent practice and aesthetics and mainstream production imperatives presented challenges that on these occasions outweighed the benefits. Benjamin has an interest in the intimate, organic body and a commitment to the value of sustained individual practice and innovation. These issues came into conflict with the values of these two cultural institutions, that place emphasis on creating the presentational body and which are under pressure to attain a high level of productivity at the expense of exploration. However, the potential reciprocity between independent practices and mainstream processes, through incremental interventions such as Benjamin's, may produce eventual change in the interactions between the two entities.

This case study provides a significant insight into how the cultural provisions of the major performing arts facilities and the practices and networks of the independent dance culture, might work together from an example where the relationship has been a challenging and at times unsatisfactory one. Jeremy Ahearne suggests 'Certeau himself made 'tactical' use of the 'strategic' resources he could secure in order to pursue an agenda developed in the terms of his own cultural policy thinking.' De Certeau did not reduce the relations between 'strategic' cultural institutions and their

‘tactical’ users to a clear-cut opposition but rather suggests a negotiation of the challenges of this opposition and the interactions between the two parties.²⁹

Dancer to Choreographer

Narelle Benjamin has been a professional dancer since 1985, dancing in Australian companies to widespread acclaim and recognition. She has been nominated many times for dance performer of the year in the Green Room Awards, Mo Awards, and Australian Dance Awards.³⁰ Her performing credits include small to medium dance companies D’arc Swan, One Extra and Chrissie Parrot Dance Collective, alongside flagship companies Bangarra, Chunky Move, and ADT.

As a founding member of Chunky Move, Benjamin’s ongoing artistic relationship with both Gideon Obarzanek (Chunky Move) and Garry Stewart (ADT) is a significant one as it has facilitated her access to the mainstream companies and venues as an independent choreographer.³¹ Before continuing with Benjamin’s story it is relevant to consider the origins and background of these two choreographers based in Sydney in the late 1990s, as they provide instances of how two independent choreographers each chose strategic trajectories to move from smaller independent project-based dance ensembles into larger dance company structures, as a necessary means to support and develop their work. This necessitated their looking for opportunities outside of NSW.

Chunky Move was established in Sydney in 1995 by dancer and independent choreographer Obarzanek, initially in collaboration with Stewart, another independent Sydney-based artist. In 1995 the Melbourne International Festival of the Arts presented the company’s debut performance, a mixed program of Obarzanek’s *Fast Idol* and Stewart’s *Spectre in the Covert Memory*. Following this

²⁹ Ahearne, pp. 93-94.

³⁰ When establishing the mainstream credentials of the artists in this chapter one of my key indicators has been recognition through nominations for awards. In 1995 Benjamin won ‘The Age Best Dance Performer of the Year’.

³¹ It should be noted that Benjamin is the only independent choreographer to have worked with both SDC and ABCo. Her case is atypical as an example of independent/mainstream relations.

premiere was a season of the same program at The Performance Space in Sydney.³² Prior to 1995 both Obarzanek and Stewart had worked separately in the independent scene in Sydney under often-difficult circumstances, with intermittent funds to support dancers and inadequate access to work space. With limited opportunities for sustaining an ensemble in Sydney and the desire to develop as choreographic artists and artistic directors, both looked further afield and applied for separate directorial positions.

In 1998 Chunky Move Artistic Director Gideon Obarzanek won a competitive bid to become the official contemporary dance company of Victoria in Melbourne (equivalent status to SDC in NSW). In 1999 Garry Stewart was appointed to the position of Artistic Director of Australian Dance Theatre (ADT), the flagship dance company based in Adelaide, South Australia.³³ Both companies are identified as key organizations through current funding status with the Australia Council for the Arts Dance Board and respective state arts funding investment. Stewart's ADT and Obarzanek's Chunky Move both have active national and international presence, touring widely in a variety of predominantly mainstream venues and appearing at major arts festivals. The Sydney Festival has featured each company in its program over the past three years. In addition, recognition for producing consistently high quality and innovative work has been received.³⁴ It would not have been possible for either of these artists to be supported to such an extent if they had remained in Sydney. It is important to note that opportunities in their respective states, that would not have been available had they stayed in NSW, include impressive purpose built studios providing home bases from which to run their companies and support the many interactions with other mainly independent artists that each artistic director values.

³² Dancers in the inaugural season were Narelle Benjamin, Victor Bramich, Brett Daffy, Janine Dijkmeijer, Kathryn Dunn and Luke Smiles.

³³ Ironically Stewart's first work as Artistic Director of ADT was *Housedance*, which brought the company back to Sydney for the Millennium Broadcast in 2000, with the dancers performing on the sails of the Sydney Opera House.

³⁴ In 1997 Gideon Obarzanek was awarded 'Outstanding Achievement in Choreography' at the Australian Dance Awards and Chunky Move's production *Tense Dave* received a New York Bessie Award following a US tour in 2005. ADT has been a regular recipient of Australian Dance Awards for 'Outstanding Performance by a Company' in works choreographed by Garry Stewart; *The Age of Unbeauty* (2002), *Held* (2004) and *Devolution* (2006), and for 'Outstanding Choreographic Achievement' for *The Age of Unbeauty* (2002) and *Honour Bound* (2008).

Finding a Body of Her Own

Narelle Benjamin's performance persona as a dancer collaborating with choreographers Obarzanek and Stewart was unique, with her contribution including an extraordinary range of flexibility and artful acrobatic prowess. Many dancers develop parallel careers as choreographers, often mentored by the choreographers they work with, and also symbiotically influencing them in return. Benjamin's interest in making her own work, however, came after her time as a full-time dancer. It was not until 2003 that she publicly presented a choreographic work with her own original movement aesthetic. Quite different in style and aesthetic to the dancing she was previously involved with, this work expanded her personal fascination with yoga practice and commitment to an exploration of her interest in working with a more grounded, organic body than the trained dance technique she had utilized previously. Benjamin's early choreographic work was nurtured by One Extra, a dance producing organization (explored in earlier chapters) that provided space, time and presentation opportunities for a diverse group of independent artists in Sydney from 1997-2006. One Extra was especially supportive of small-scale exploratory work and provided a nurturing environment for Benjamin's early explorations.

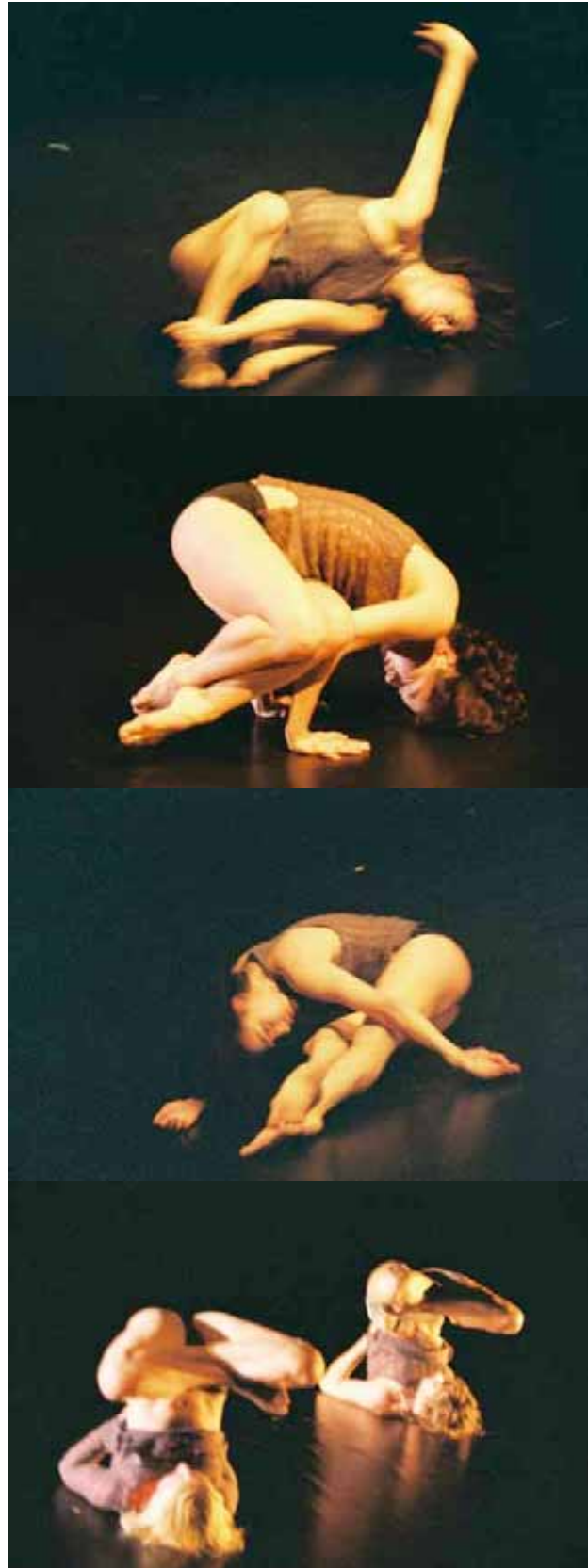
Benjamin's first choreography *Inside Out* was a duet that explored yoga practice as an aesthetic form, from a dancer's perspective.³⁵ The choreographic investigation focused on the structure and shape of the body and the possibilities that the physicality of yoga could bring to a dance work. This first work did not appear to be concerned with the structural composition of the dance itself. Rather, the choreographer's interest was in generating a distinctive movement vocabulary. *Inside Out* concentrated on the two bodies moving in unison, with a consistent movement dynamic for most of the work, on a blank stage inside the confines of the delineated floor space. This lack of acknowledgment of conventional theatrical dance concerns of structure, form and dynamics was challenging for an audience, even one accustomed to the new dance forms presented at Performance Space. Much of the movement material was executed close to the floor, with limited use of

³⁵ *Inside Out* produced by One Extra Performance Space, Sydney, 3-14 December, 2003. A duet for two dancers, Kristina Chan and Clare Holland. Also in the same program *Waiting for Michael* choreographed and performed by Michael Whaites and Michael O'Donoghue.

levels and little direct eye contact with the spectator. In the independent dance context the fusion of extreme yoga moves and contemporary dance, juxtaposed with the introspective, reflective tone, was appreciated by audiences and critics alike and Benjamin was nominated for 'Outstanding Choreography for Independent Dance' in the Australian Dance Awards, 2004.

Benjamin's second work *Out of Water* built on the movement material and vocabulary of her first *Inside Out* and introduced a third performer.³⁶ Within the trio format Benjamin began to explore the scope provided by three bodies, incorporating solos, duets and some contrapuntal movement sections with all three dancers moving individually. The dancers used the space more freely than the predominantly static yoga-inspired spatiality of her first work. While still frequently utilizing the standing body, *Out of Water* also incorporated a flowing contemporary dance vocabulary moving through and accessing the entire stage space.

³⁶ *Out of Water* produced by One Extra at Performance Space, Sydney, 29 June-10 July, 2005 was a trio for dancers Kristina Chan, Lina Limosani and Kathy Cogill. In the same program *Grounded on Air* choreographed and performed by Dean Walsh was also presented.



Figures 11-13: Kristina Chan
Figure 14: Lina Limosani and Kathy Cogill,
Out of Water, Choreographer Narelle Benjamin, Performance Space, 2005
Photographs by Heidrun Löhr

Opportunity Arises

Following these two choreographic works Narelle Benjamin was awarded the inaugural Hepzibah Tintner Fellowship for creative artists.³⁷ As a result of the fellowship she was commissioned to choreograph a short live work *The Darkroom* for the Australian Ballet Company's *Bodytorque* season.³⁸ In addition to this, the fellowship facilitated her engagement by the Sydney Dance Company to make two new films with the dancers of the Sydney Dance Company.³⁹ This commission built on her already successful body of work in the genre of dancefilm.⁴⁰ Both films for SDC, *Pod* and *The Shape of Water*, contained sophisticated sensory elements of nature and were dedicated to a further investigation of Benjamin's interest in the combination of yoga and the dancing body. *Pod* explored the transformation of the body through a series of abstract seasonal changes and *The Shape of Water* used the flow of the sea and watery images to reflect the interior workings of the mind. On completing the films Benjamin was invited to choreograph a short live work for the SDC *Director's Cut* season in 2006, *Gossamer*.

Gossamer and *The Darkroom* posed similar opportunities and challenges for Benjamin, as she applied the tenets of her independent choreographic process to the different circumstances of these mainstream processes and stages. Both mainstream

³⁷ The Hepzibah Tintner Foundation promotes opportunities for Australian artists in the field of opera, music and dance through its \$40,000 p.a. Fellowship. Applicants propose a program of work to be developed with the Sydney Dance Company, the Australian Ballet, Opera Australia and/or the Sydney Symphony Orchestra. Narelle has had a long relationship with the SDC, having taught yoga and contemporary dance classes to the dancers of the company for at least ten years so her approach to them was as someone they were familiar with in a particular role.

³⁸ The Australian Ballet Company's *Bodytorque* season is another instance of mainstream/independent interaction with a program of emerging choreographers selected to choreograph short works on members of the Australian Ballet. There is usually one independent contemporary choreographer along with three or four emerging classical choreographers from within the company.

³⁹ Both films made with dancers from the Sydney Dance Company were nominated for the ReelDance Awards 2008. *Pod* co-directed by Samuel James and Narelle Benjamin and choreographed by Narelle Benjamin and *The Shape of Water* directed by Cordelia Beresford and choreographed by Narelle Benjamin (first prize ReelDance Awards 2008).

⁴⁰ Benjamin choreographed and performed in Cordelia Beresford's short film *Restoration* (Short Film of the Year, Sydney Film Festival 1999, Best Film Australian Dance Awards 2000.) She then went on to choreograph, perform in and co-direct *Arachne* (second prize ReelDance Awards 2002) and direct, choreograph and perform in *On a Wing and a Prayer* (second prize ReelDance Awards 2004). Her dance film work has been invited to screen in international film festivals around the world. Narelle also choreographed and performed in *I Dream of Augustine*, devised and directed by Cordelia Beresford, which was awarded Best Film at the Australian Dance Awards 2004, and was nominated for the Dendy Awards, 2005 Sydney Film Festival.

companies had more production resources than Benjamin's previous project-funded presentations. The opportunity for both works to use projection and film in a way that Benjamin hadn't explored before in her live choreography was a considerable benefit. On a larger scale she was able to create a highly evocative, immersive space for the dancers to inhabit, which she had not considered possible at Performance Space, working with much smaller production budgets. She was given absolute freedom with the content of both works with little interest from either artistic director in discussing the ideas with which she was working. The production meetings focused on the practicalities of the technical requirements and available resources leaving Benjamin able to remain true to her conceptual and aesthetic choices.

In this highly visible context Benjamin continued her investigation of the often intentionally brittle quality and delicate dynamics of the dancer inhabiting the sensations of their body as an exploration in real time, as opposed to constructing it in a more dynamic way to satisfy an audience. This aesthetic posed challenges for audiences in this mainstream context who were more accustomed to virtuosic displays of physical prowess. Another difficulty posed by this mainstream setting was the reality of the physical training and bodily habits of the dancers. The dancers all took ballet class each day and this training prepared their bodies for inscribing a particular balletic quality of line and muscularity, concerned with 'what it looks like', which was often at odds with Benjamin's unique yoga/dance approach to movement which has an internal drive focused on 'what it feels like'. Benjamin's movement vocabulary and choreographic method challenged the classically trained dancers and their traditional expectations of flow and dynamics through her adherence to an internalised performance focus.

Gossamer and The Darkroom

I first saw *Gossamer* on the opening night of the premiere season of SDC's *The Director's Cut*, a triple bill featuring two works by Artistic Director Graeme Murphy, a retrospective piece *Glimpses* and a new work *Cut*, alongside Benjamin's

Gossamer.⁴¹ Melbourne *Age* Reviewer Chloe Smethurst responded to it as ‘a timely program, both looking to the future and recognising the past as the Sydney Dance Company celebrates 30 years under Murphy's directorship.’⁴² The focus in the promotion of *The Director's Cut* was the celebration of Graeme Murphy's 30-year reign as Artistic Director of the company. The program title ‘director's cut’ implies that the artistic vision of the Director is being honoured and the critics framed their reviews accordingly. Jill Sykes, dance critic for the Sydney Morning Herald wrote:

While it is exciting to see *Gossamer*, a new piece by Narelle Benjamin, given full rein to combine film and dance on a big stage, and to savour the delightful *Glimpses* of 1976, the big drawcard is inevitably *Cut*, Murphy's latest creation.⁴³

Sykes rather dismissively referred to Benjamin's twenty-five minute new work *Gossamer* as a ‘curtain raiser’⁴⁴ to the main event, which was the ‘new work’ from Murphy, albeit a cut-and-paste of his favourite and popular past moments that was more a remount of existing work than creation of a new work.

Gossamer begins with a projected sequence on a scrim across the front of the stage to a soundscape of water and wind. A larger-than-life female body revolves horizontally in slow motion with her head turned to the camera, her entire body suspended in the air above the stage. An image of her face with eyes closed fades in and out on the scrim along with another projected layer, of an image of a watery surface. As the filmed body recedes revolving into the distance the lights rise on four bodies on stage rolling close to the ground appearing very small in scale. This first movement sequence of *Gossamer* consists of a quartet for two couples, performing in unison, on one side of the stage. They remain on the spot for quite

⁴¹ *Gossamer* choreography by Narelle Benjamin, music by Huey Benjamin, costumes by Justine Seymour, lighting by Damien Cooper, projection design by Samuel James, projection imagery by Samuel James, Narelle Benjamin and Cordelia Beresford, sound system design by Tim O'Neill. Sydney Opera House, Opera Theatre, May 30–June 17 2006, followed by seasons at the Playhouse, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Brisbane and State Theatre, Arts Centre, Melbourne.

⁴² Chloe Smethurst, ‘Dance Master Murphy's Cut The Best of Three’, *The Age*, 10 July 2006, p. 14.

⁴³ Jill Sykes, ‘The Director's Cut’ *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 June 2006, p. 15.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

some time and the audience has little direct contact with the faces or the personalities of the dancers.⁴⁵

This is the same format that Benjamin employs for the opening sequence of *The Darkroom*, commissioned by the ABCo. For the first minute and a half of the eleven-minute work, three ballet dancers lie close in a line on one side of the stage, rolling and unfolding in unison and in silence. Once standing, the trio continues to move with no direct acknowledgement of the audience, absorbed in a similar inward focus bent forward from the waist. This has become a signature movement motif of Benjamin's, also used in *Gossamer*. In both works the dancers are engrossed in a self-involved way with small detailed movements and the body returns often to fold forward in on itself, so direct eye contact with the audience is avoided. Another of Benjamin's signature moves used in both these works involves reaching the arm high above the head out of the shoulder socket, turning and twisting the arm inside out and then releasing it in one move. This is a simple move to watch and its dynamic is found in how the dancer engages with the weight of the bones in the arm. For an uninitiated audience member this movement looks deceptively simple but its execution and the detail in much of Benjamin's movement vocabulary is in the unassuming integrity of its execution even when executing an extremely difficult move. This presents quite a different movement aesthetic to SDC and ABCo audiences who are accustomed to a more dynamic dance style with extreme moves that display a higher, more extrovert energy level.

In *Gossamer* the dancers move from position to position with a heightened brittleness, the shape of their bodies suggesting transient, organic forms from nature. Benjamin's sculptural approach to the dancing body is distinct from the physically active choreographic approaches of other SDC and ABCo productions and provides an invitation for the audience to engage in a new experience. The classical ballet dancers of *The Darkroom* appeared to enjoy the sensuality of Benjamin's movement, unfolding out from unfamiliar crouching poses and floorwork sequences into the

⁴⁵ The dancer-as-celebrity has been promoted by SDC since the 1980s and been endorsed by the Friends of SDC and subscribers who have followed the company for the past two and a half decades. In *Gossamer* no special attention is given to any individual as a personality performer, although one female dancer Alexa Hickman features throughout.

familiar technical clarity of high leg extensions and arabesques with pointed toes, sustaining a concentrated attention to detail. Neither *Gossamer* nor *The Darkroom* push Benjamin's aesthetic to an uncomfortable extreme for the audience, nor does either work push to the point of extreme duration or introspection.⁴⁶ Projections of fluid bodies, rolling and falling from different viewpoints in *Gossamer* and time lapse roses opening in *The Darkroom* provide a large-scale filmic counterpoint to the more challenging sections wherein the live bodies focused inwards which require the audience and the dancers to engage in a more reflective way than they are probably used to.

Throughout *Gossamer* the staging creates a two-dimensional effect with the dancers working within a beam of light that effectively flattens the stage space, in order for the dancers to be clearly seen without disrupting the screen images. It is an expectation in mainstream dance that the entire stage will be used. The large-scale stages of the Opera Theatre and the Sydney Theatre for *Gossamer* and *The Darkroom* challenged Benjamin's choreographic vision as she had little interest in utilising the full stage.⁴⁷ As with her previous pieces seen in more intimate venues, a commitment to her idiosyncratic choreographic craft, which involves an interest in the small intricate details of the dancers' bodies through a combination of yoga and contemporary dance language, remained at the heart of the work. In these large theatres the dancers' bodies were considerably reduced in scale from the audience's perspective.⁴⁸ This loss of proximity to the body was a disadvantage in comparison to the experience of viewing Benjamin's previous work in the more intimate Performance Space venue. This was also a different perspective compared to the detailed knowledge attained when viewing her dancefilm works, made specifically for the screen. At both the Opera House and the Sydney Theatre the height of both

⁴⁶ I am thinking here of the BodyWeather performances of artists such as Tess de Quincey (see Chapter Five) where a bodily state and its associated bodily form can be sustained for an extended length of time. Since 2006, Benjamin has been working with de Quincey Co, participating in durational improvisation sessions with Body Weather practitioners.

⁴⁷ The Opera Theatre is the second largest theatre in the SOH. 1,547 seat theatre, stage dimensions: 316 square metres with stage depth of 25 metres and depth of performing area 16 metres. The proscenium is 12 metres wide and 7 metres high. Sydney Theatre is a 896 seat theatre, with stage dimensions: 12metres x 9 metres adjustable proscenium 5.5–7 metres high, 10–14 metres wide.

⁴⁸ Whilst there is a smaller studio venue at the SOH, the SDC and the ABCo do not use this theatre as the audience capacity is not adequate for their box office expectations.

prosceniums framing the stages and the increased width and depth of both stages, made the bodies appear ungrounded, suspended in a large void. Hence it became necessary for Benjamin—especially in the Opera Theatre—to rely on a more conventional use of the whole stage space than she had previously done. However, Benjamin did challenge this aesthetic expectation with a number of stationary sections in both *Gossamer* and *The Darkroom*.

There are a number of moments in *Gossamer* where the expectations of the mainstream dance audience were not met. For the duration of the twenty-five minute work the audience was separated from the dancers by a scrim. At the back of the stage there was a cyclorama onto which images of the body, natural organic forms and water were projected. This design attempted to create an immersive environment for both dancers and audience, which is a familiar aim for many live dance video productions presented in smaller venues. However, due to the large scale of the proscenium framing, the stage space, and the often-lengthy distances from stage to audience in the Opera Theatre this was not entirely achieved. Isolated images floating on the front scrim high above the dancers on stage were sometimes lost. There were moments when the stage space was full, such as when an image filled the entire screen—for example, images of legs moving in the current like a forest of seaweed, simultaneously reflecting the movements of the live dancers. Occasionally the bodies in the projections—fragments from Cordelia Beresford's *The Shape of Water*—may have overwhelmed and distracted the audience away from the performers on stage. This was an audience used to being directed where to look by a carefully constructed stage picture, with bodies and lighting in balance. Rightly or wrongly Benjamin did not compromise her aesthetic or adjust it for the mainstream stage and audience.

There is a moment toward the end of *Gossamer* where a sudden switch of focus is made to the back projection screen and the filmed image is framed tightly as opposed to the previous immersive world. The effect is cinematic and the hard frame signals where the audience should look and read more clearly than the multi-focus immersive world in this mainstream stage setting. The dancers occupy the lower level of the stage picture for a long stretch of time as they move on a horizontal

plane. The live bodies at times are contorted and look awkward but the aerial shots on the back projection showing bodies in shallow pools of water are beautifully shot and have the most dynamic movement of the work with large circular sweeping gestures of torsos, hair and trails of water. The camera's voyeuristic close-up gaze over the body provides the audience with an insight into the detail they may have missed from the live performance.

Benjamin's motivation to create an atmosphere out of her movement investigation rather than a literal meaning or narrative is central to the construction of her work. This can be seen in the ending, or rather lack of a final moment in *Gossamer*. It is as if the world keeps on going even as the audience's view is obscured by the slowly descending curtain hiding the action as the music and lighting fade. It is not very often that the audience in the Opera Theatre is uncertain about when a performance has finished. Usually the action stops, the lights and sound go down, there is a rustle in the blackout and then the audience applauds on cue. On the night I attended the performance of Benjamin's work the audience's uncertainty about whether the work had finished or not, indicated by initially very hesitant applause, reiterated the out-of-place-ness of Benjamin's concerns as an independent artist. However, with opportunities for audiences to be exposed to the notion of difference in such ways there is potential for them to have a greater understanding of the diversity of the sector.

Reviewer Chloe Smethurst struggled with 'the meaning' intended by the choreographer: 'Benjamin is able to seamlessly combine the filmic and physical aspects of the work, yet her intention is at times so subtle as to appear abstract.'⁴⁹ The lack of identifiable classical dance signs, such as the display of prowess through turning and jumping along with Benjamin's reference to elements of nature within an abstract and often organic aesthetic, was not resolved for this critic. This comment suggests that the SDC audience may also have had to deal with something different to their usual fare, an 'out-of-place' aesthetic, with abstract references in the stage set and costumes, a carefully reduced choice of dynamics and no demonstrative virtuosic displays. *Gossamer* was a work that remained true to the intimate body aesthetic and

⁴⁹ Smethurst, *The Age*.

investigative dance processes of its independent choreographer, within the more overt and clearly defined mainstream dance expectation. Benjamin believes you should remain true to your artistic integrity and acknowledge where you are on your artistic journey:

[...] and I guess when I went into it - you're at the point you are and you can't go 'I'm doing this totally differently now and I'll just change my approach to suit'. You have to be true to where you're at! The volume of dancers and scale of projections... I've never worked in a theatre this big before, I've never worked with this many dancers, so I don't know what it will be like, what the response will be like [...]⁵⁰

The presentation of these two works shifted Benjamin's choreographic profile from medium to high and provided her with a repertoire of work that overlapped from small independent companies to large company programming. However, the arts precinct audiences at the Sydney Opera House and The Wharf came with particular expectations for the dance and their experience of the theatre. In addition, Benjamin and her film and production collaborator Samuel James found the processes of rehearsal and presentation, engaged with within these mainstream company settings, challenging.

Different Practices

When I interviewed Benjamin about her involvement with both SDC and the ABCo it became clear that her experiences with both companies were similar to each other and very different from her independent practice. In the case of the latter, she spends time in the studio with the dancers exploring the movement in a collaborative way. In the precincts, by contrast, she had to engage in a high degree of pre-rehearsal preparation to create the movement material for both the SDC dancers and the ABCo dancers especially given the tight time constraints:

You go into the studio on your own and work on your own body because then when you come to work with the dancers it has to be nearly ready. I even find with the Australian Ballet [...] I sort of potter away over a few months just with some ideas and I work with my own body and choreograph it and even

⁵⁰ Narelle Benjamin, Interview with the author, 21 August, 2008.

work out the counts [...] with the Aussie Ballet I have rehearsals for an hour and a quarter and an hour and a half every second day or so spread over a few weeks. You've got to go in and it's like, one... two... you can't even [...] 'let's just work the material and then work out the counts' you don't have time for that.⁵¹

Her collaborator, independent filmmaker, Samuel James was concerned by the treatment of Benjamin as a guest choreographer and shocked at the lack of respect within the structures of the companies for the choreographic process.

For James, this was his first experience of working within mainstream dance companies in highly visible places:

I was really surprised at how hard Narelle had to work as a choreographer [...] She got an hour and a half with dancers, so she would work out the whole piece in her head at home and then just go in for the hour and a half, pay all the expensive parking and everything and then bam this move this move this move and then ten minutes later they were in a different rehearsal. I mean the piece didn't have to mean anything to the dancers or anything like that. It's pretty cold, they are like the technical people in a way - tell them what to do and they will do it. I couldn't really understand how those dancers could be satisfied doing it that way [...]⁵²

As Benjamin expresses it: 'as an outside choreographer it's pretty tricky. You've got to basically know exactly what you're doing [...]'.⁵³ In other words there is no opportunity to explore new ideas and the time in the studio must be spent working towards a finished and polished product. The *Bodytorque* season is the part of the ABCo's program that supports emerging choreographers and new work. However, the actuality of making 'new' work is difficult within the structures of the ballet company.

This highlights a fundamental difference in the way mainstream rehearsal process and independent dance practice operate and how there is a need for an awareness of this difference from both sides when working between the two milieus. The independent process usually involves collaboration between the choreographer and

⁵¹ Benjamin, interview.

⁵² Samuel James, Interview with the author, 16 August, 2008.

⁵³ Benjamin, interview.

the dancers with the dancers often making a significant contribution to the process and the end product. The product evolves through a lengthy process with a number of small research and development stages that can sometimes stretch over years.

In contrast to this, Australian Ballet rehearsals for Benjamin's new work and the other four short works on the *Bodytorque* program, by dancers from within the company, were squeezed into an already dense rehearsal schedule including current repertoire for ongoing evening performances as well as rehearsals for the following season:

But the way they work and when you watch them work, it's really even the rehearsals they do when they are learning new ballets, they just learn it, they learn the material. I don't even feel like within their process of making new ballets they have that culture of discovering things and that's why I think being an outside choreographer coming in if you want to embody something a little bit different or move in a different way, have the time to explore, even just physically, something a bit different for them, there's no real time for them as performers. It's on a really superficial level and that's their understanding of creating dance. The choreographer guru figure who says do this and the dancers do it as best they can, it gets shaped a little bit and that's it. Maybe a ballet vocabulary is more straightforward? An arabesque is an arabesque you can do it with that feel - or that feel - or that feel - you know, so it's a bit more straightforward but if you want to go in and do something a bit different [...] ⁵⁴

Benjamin did bring something different to the ballet company. Her relationship with the ballet dancers in *The Darkroom* proved to be extremely positive, considering that this work was such a small part of their busy rehearsal and performance schedules at the time. For the dancers this process was a kind of time out to experience something different from how they usually worked. As Benjamin elucidates:

[...] those girls really wanted to do it and really wanted to do it well and they would practice it. They put in extra time when they could and you could see that they really wanted to do it [...] and all those little simple things like turning their heads and seeing things and sensing people, we really worked on all those layers and things like that, they really wanted to get it, they were so nice to work with. Whereas the culture in the dance company (SDC) [...] there was a group of them that really put the effort in and then there was a

⁵⁴ Benjamin, interview.

group that were just ‘it’s a job’ they just go in and are just not interested really [...]’⁵⁵

The pressure of having a tight rehearsal schedule and dancers not specifically chosen by the choreographer, presented a challenge for Benjamin, especially when the opportunity to utilise a larger cast, as with the SDC, was an opportunity that does not present itself often, when working from independent project to project with smaller cast numbers.

An ensemble section for ten dancers appears towards the end of *Gossamer*. As pointed out above, the experience of working with a larger dance ensemble that was selected for her was new to Benjamin. Her preference is for choreographing with dancers of her choosing. In her interview she recalled that she had felt an obligation and pressure to utilise all ten dancers at once at some stage of the work. This was in contrast to her comfort with the ABCo trio in *The Darkroom*. It was possible to see, especially in the unison and repeated canon sections of *Gossamer*, that some of the SDC dancers had difficulties with Benjamin’s idiosyncratic approach to movement. Benjamin’s movement approach is a result of her investigative and experiential independent practice, which is quite different to the process of watching, copying, learning and rehearsing the work within the SDC rehearsal process.

Adding to this is the difficulty of the dancer who is attached to a particular way of working and is resistant to any different approach. As Benjamin points out, her particular interest in a bodily regime based on yoga, presents a foreign and sometimes difficult challenge for some balletically trained dancers:

I’ve only got 2 weeks and I know with my stuff it won’t *feel* great straight away, it takes a little while for it to feel [...] to understand it you know, to embody it, feel it from the right place, rather than feel superficial or awkward. But I think with most dance it’s a bit like that [...]’⁵⁶

Due to a rehearsal process that emphasises immediate results, and the pressures of the high rate of output and turnover of performances, the ‘job’ of dancing and

⁵⁵ Benjamin, interview.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

making dance within highly visible precincts, requires an attitude where it is better to know something straight away than be uncertain or admit that it is not working.

Otherwise you are making uneconomical use of resources—both time and space:

Working with the Sydney Dance Company, working with people like ‘B’, who was used to being so in control, being the lead dancer, then being out of your comfort zone, you don’t want to go there because you don’t want to put yourself on the line like that, with the simplest things like lifting your arm and dropping it, because they are so muscular. Trying to get those sorts of things took ages and ages and ages because they are ballet dancers they don’t work like that (their training and preparation) all those simple, bony things and where their weight is, those are the things I found really hard. I had to drill and drill and drill. You know there’s some people who got it straight away and there’s some who had a block and couldn’t and I’d give the note a million times [...] ⁵⁷

Benjamin’s practice when choreographing within the independent framework begins from a very different starting point. After a smaller amount of time working in the studio experimenting on her own body she enters the development and rehearsal process with her ideas a little more articulated and begins the exploration in collaboration with the dancers. Many of the dancers Benjamin chooses to work with have experience working in the major companies and they are often a little older and at a mid stage of their careers. This means they contribute ideas to the process and have a work ethic that extends beyond the notion of a nine-to-five job.

In tandem to the challenges of the independent dance artist, filmmaker and technician Samuel James spoke of his own experiences working on the film elements of these two pieces. In comparison to his previous processes with independent dance practice where there is little apparent hierarchy and a preference for collaborative processes, the overwhelming impression for James within the mainstream context was of the separation and lack of communication between people working towards a common goal:

There’s a huge difference between the artists or the creative people and the technical people and the production people. They don’t seem to overlap at all and it really seems like it’s set up so the artist can say ‘I want this’ and then

⁵⁷ Benjamin, interview.

the next day it's there. They don't have to clutter their minds with how am I going to do it? Or is it too expensive? [...] it's like that with set design [...] in big companies you go and see these massive spectacular sets but there's something missing, it doesn't feel engaged, because the person who thought of it didn't actually make it [...] design is massive and expensive and impressive, but somehow for me not interesting, there's no human touch it's always so professional it might as well be like an advertising company.⁵⁸

James's experience with SDC gives a clear picture of the delineation of roles for those working within the large established dance companies:

It was things like the lighting designer 'DC' would say 'Ok I want, have to have, this huge yellow beam of light come out and just be revealed somehow from upstage. And all those technical people and production people would have to work out how to do that. It's an artistic vision that 'DC' has and the production people make it happen. He might have a couple of ideas and it's up to the others how to do it [...] the production people would go 'That's what you want that's the end of the story.'⁵⁹

Although James didn't have to worry about the kinds of problem solving that was normally part of his independent practice—such as we can't afford that so how else could I make do—he was always aware that solutions were often arrived at because there was always contingency money in the budget to solve any difficulties or fix mistakes.

This is a situation that is uncommon in the small to medium sector. James saw it as leading to a waste of resources and a lazy quick fix attitude. During the production problem solving of *Gossamer* there were difficulties with the timing of the projections on the large screen/cyclorama. To James's surprise the problem was fixed through more labour and material costs:

Often I didn't have to worry about all of that, but what it meant was they go away and they hire a second cyclorama for the projection so that that comes in quickly and is gone in 2 seconds while the other comes in and that means 5 riggers have to do it.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ James, interview.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Within these companies and places there is a hierarchy of working relationships between the creative personnel. The dancers are applauded and the choreographers acclaimed. While this sort of respect for the artists is deserved, the other side of this is the marginal recognition of the production and technical team:

There were the speeches on the opening night and the production people just aren't thanked they are just not recognised. It's all, 'Oh congratulations to this artist and that artist and that artist you're all [...] I don't know how you did it but it was a miracle and you're all just genius'.⁶¹

In contrast to the smaller independent artistic and production teams these demarcations are rarely so defined. Part of the appeal of working independently for many artists is working across different disciplines and tasks and the challenges of problem solving that come with collaborative ways of working, often outside the comfort zones of the individual workers. This produces a different personal investment in the process and the end product.

I think it's definitely easier on artists who don't have to work out how to do it but I don't think that's very ethical [...] I think a lot of making work is to do with finding out how to do it and you make that journey then you understand what that place is that you've arrived at. That's kind of missing in those big companies.⁶²

James talks of what he perceives as the gulf between the two worlds of the invisible innovators (independents and small-to-medium sector) and the visible producers (mainstream) and their opposite relationships to and understandings of notions of practice, innovation and art form development in relation to dance process:

It's totally separate, the artists who are making new work are not seen by the public and then when they establish these new ways of doing things, SDC will say 'Oh we'll have a bit of that' and they just stick it in the show and then their translation of it's not there, it's not the actual artists who are making it so it doesn't make any sense, it doesn't read as anything except for a style or fashion or something [...]⁶³

⁶¹ James, interview.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

Whilst James articulates his frustrations, difficulties and challenges as an independent artist working within the processes of highly visible companies and places, this case study has also suggested that there is value to be gained from collaboration between the two worlds. The value is not only in augmented budgets and increased access to resources for the independent artist, but also exposure to, and understanding of mainstream and independent processes that can provide new insights for both. Of equal importance is the way the dance work presented is reframed, through exposure to a broader audience who may experience it as new or something different from what they are used to and equally for the independent artist this new arena provides a fresh perspective and different audience responses and feedback. However, ultimately, this thesis shall conclude that these benefits are outweighed by the incompatibility of the processes of the independent dance artist and the mainstream arts precinct.

Conclusion

This chapter has investigated the connections between place, identity and dance processes for the independent dance artist working in the hegemonic structures of arts precincts. The SOH and The Wharf Precinct both produce and foster closed communities, highly visible from the outside yet homogenous and often inward looking. These precincts contribute to a dominant dance aesthetic and are attributed a high public profile and cultural value. This makes it difficult for independent artists to make and present work within precincts, by means of a diversity of investigative practices and ‘other’ dance aesthetics.

Nevertheless, mutual benefits could be gained for both independent artists and mainstream organizations, by forging more carefully constructed partnerships. This could be done by means of a realistic understanding, by the independent artist, of what dance-making processes precincts are able to support—that is rehearsal and production—and, by developing models of production within the precincts that have some degree of flexibility in order to accommodate the independent artist. This approach would require an understanding of both strategy and tactics by both parties and a rebalancing of the power relationships if collaboration is to occur.

If a more connected and inclusive relationship, with greater understanding of each other's processes was fostered, a richer, bolder dance environment and dance community would be generated. If the dance activity within these visible places and mainstream dance companies is responsive to change and new influences, and mainstream artists experience other ways of working within their traditional frameworks, the value and understanding of a diverse collection of independent dance practices could increase.

At the time of writing the flow between independent and mainstream dance in Sydney is predominantly one way, with occasional profile for independents in the mainstream arena, and little interest in and understanding of how the independent sector works from those in the mainstream. This thesis attributes this imbalance to the spatial hierarchy in Sydney and to funding structures favouring organization partnerships and audience development. As long as the financial pressures placed on visible places and mainstream commercial imperatives and dance aesthetics are in operation, these arts precincts will continue to be inappropriate places for most independent artists to work. However, for some independent dance artists such as Narelle Benjamin who choose to work within these precincts, it is necessary to accept that the dance processes and artists expectations are different from when they work in the independent studios.

Given that the arts activity in these well-resourced institutions is looked on favourably by funding bodies, it is fair to assume that these precincts should be opened up to include a greater variety of practices including the independent artist who brings an 'otherness' to this milieu. However, as this chapter has demonstrated, the question remains as to 'how best can these independent artists and processes be supported in their engagement with these existing arts precincts?' This brings me to propose that the dance-making processes of independent artists cannot be fully supported in these precincts as they exist at the present time. Precincts are best suited to providing a very different and necessary role with their focus on production and presentation.

Chapter Five

The Shelter in the Edifice: Performance Space at CarriageWorks

This chapter builds on the investigations in the previous two chapters into how independent dance practices and dance community networks utilise and are informed by place and space. This is an analysis of how over the past twenty-six years, Performance Space (PSpace), the Sydney-based national contemporary arts producing and presenting organization, has played a vital role in the making of new dance works and innovations in dance in Sydney, and how it has provided crucial support for practice and presentation in a studio and theatre space that serves artists, and the community and related networks that constitute the independent dance system.

In January 2007 PSpace relocated from its iconic, autonomous home in an old run-down railway dance hall on Cleveland Street, to the newly refurbished arts precinct, CarriageWorks (CWorks) at the Eveleigh Railyards.¹ One of the state government's main objectives for CWorks was to develop an alternative to the existing precincts and venues in Sydney. According to architect Tim Greer, the government's vision for CWorks in relation to the monumental Sydney Opera House (SOH) was as follows:

¹ The NSW Ministry for the Arts (presently called Arts NSW) spent an initial 15 million dollars to purchase the site from State Rail and later a further 34.8 million dollars was spent in developing the Centre. The CWorks precinct continues the development reconceptualizing and occupation of found places for the performing arts in Sydney, as with The Wharf discussed in Chapter Four. In this case, the found place is not a disused wharf but rather a derelict railway yard, re-imagined now as a dedicated arts precinct specifically for contemporary art practice.

If you put at one end of the book shelf the Sydney Opera House, this building was conceived as very much the other book end and in some way they frame all the other performing arts venues that exist in Sydney. Arts NSW saw CarriageWorks as the missing piece within the performing arts of Sydney. We wanted it to be the antithesis of the Opera House... we didn't want to mimic conventional theatre. We wanted it to be this alternative venue in all senses of the word.²

Located in the inner west, CWorks provides an alternative location to the existing CBD arts precincts on Sydney harbour (SOH and The Wharf). It also provides an alternative experience for audiences with its emphasis on presentation of a vast array of contemporary arts practices, not regularly programmed in the mainstream arts precincts. Therefore, the relocation of the alternative, interdisciplinary PSpace as anchor tenant inside the redevelopment of CWorks appeared to be an appropriate match.

In this chapter I explore the nature of PSpace and CWorks and the implications of their intersection for the independent dance sector in Sydney, to which end I draw on theatre director Antoine Vitez's 1978 conceptualization of two types of theatre entity: the shelter and the edifice. Vitez spoke from experience as he worked extensively in both types of theatre, as do many of the independent dance artists featured in this thesis. He defined a theatre-edifice as one that 'imposes from the outset a certain kind of mise-en-scène [...] The edifice says, "I am a theatre"' in ways like the SOH and CWorks. Vitez proposed that the theatre-shelter, by contrast, is one where, as an artist, 'you can construct whatever kind of spaces you like' in relative safety, much like the organization of the independent studios of Chapter Three and PSpace at Cleveland Street. The shelter is somewhere that 'points up the transitory nature of all codes of representation'.⁴ In doing so, the shelter supports tactical practices that respond easily to change, engaging on the one hand with spontaneous diversions, quick response short cuts, and 'making do', and on the other hand taking time for extended investigative meanderings and development of idiosyncratic practices. Shelters and edifices have their own set of requirements,

² Tim Greer, TZG Design Director for the CarriageWorks speaking at the forum 'Designing the Space', hosted by Performance Space and Critical Path Choreographic Centre, Bay 20 CarriageWorks, August 2008.

³ Antoine Vitez, cited in Gay McAuley, p. 38.

⁴ Ibid.

advantages and disadvantages depending on what you want to produce there. I posit the tactical networks and activities of artists and organization at PSpace as shelter, and the material place, infrastructure and management structures of CWorks as edifice.

Chapter Five is organised in five parts. The first is a description of PSpace at Cleveland Street. I define PSpace in its 'home' on Cleveland Street (from 1983 to 2006), as a theatre-shelter, applying the notion of shelter to both physical aspects and scale of the building, and to the operating structures and philosophy of the organization that facilitated co-operative working relationships between artists and organization. In the second part, I draw on a case study of independent dance artist Dean Walsh, which explores his experience of transposing work developed in the shelter of PSpace to other mainstream performance contexts. This case study highlights the importance of the shelter for the development of independent artists making innovative and challenging dance works and demonstrates the difficulties experienced when this work is transposed from alternative to mainstream spaces, crossing the frequently large divide between the two milieus.

The third and fourth parts of this chapter examine the development of the CWorks precinct from the consultation process with potential tenants to the conceptual design aims for the building. I identify CWorks as a theatre-edifice. This is because it is a large scale imposing building that encourages and has been animated by a type of institutional management approach and operational objectives that seek to ensure continuity and status. These sections give an understanding of the changes that have impacted on the independent dance sector in this relocation from a makeshift, responsive, tactical shelter to a strategic edifice with relatively inflexible structures devised for maximum efficiency and high public recognition.

In the final part of this chapter I analyse the repositioning of PSpace within CWorks and explain how it has been difficult for PSpace to remain true to its long-established value systems, which in turn has challenged the principles and practices of many of its associated local independent dance artists. PSpace has readjusted and realigned its value systems and organizational priorities as dictated by the new building and the

funding and management practices of CWorks, resulting I suggest, in some necessary compromise of PSpace's philosophy and a reduction in the diversity of practices and processes it is able to support.

Gay McAuley has recognized that successful theatre buildings 'incorporate within themselves indications of the practices which they are designed to house'.⁵ She suggests that problems occur for practitioners when 'there is too great a distance between the practice of theatre as predicated by the building and the practices deemed appropriate to the present by the artists'.⁶ With CWorks, the performance activities most compatible with the building are considerably more regulated and necessitate more compromise on the part of independent dance practitioners than those compatible with and nurtured by the building on Cleveland Street in Redfern. Due to these changes in practices, the loss of Cleveland Street has further fragmented and destabilized the independent dance community in Sydney.

Nonetheless, reconceptualizing the shelter of old within what I am defining as the new edifice, while restricting and inhibiting the development of some artists, has provided opportunities for other artists in the independent dance sector in Sydney to extend or develop their aesthetic activities. The 'tactics' employed by individual artists to create space for themselves within the potentialities of the scale of the building are explored in the artist case studies of this chapter. Martin del Amo, Alan Schacher (Gravity Feed), Tess de Quincey (de Quincey Co) and The Fondue Set, have all found themselves navigating this new place and new processes for making work and presenting public performances due to the move from the autonomous PSpace at Cleveland Street, to PSpace within CWorks.

Despite the benefits of the CWorks precinct for increasing the visibility and accessibility of mainly independent contemporary artwork to a broader audience, the building itself presents considerable challenges for independent artists with limited financial resources. Indeed the costliness of working at CWorks challenges the investigative and tactical practices of PSpace and the community of independent

⁵ McAuley, p. 37.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 37-38.

artists it supports. In addition, the inaugural management model of CWorks, with its emphasis on commercial sustainability, has yet to incorporate an understanding of the contemporary arts practices that it aims to support. CWorks as a precinct is yet to develop an alternative identity for contemporary arts in Sydney, as was the vision of the government and the architects. Here I argue that this incongruity has occurred because the new precinct has not accommodated the types of approach to practice that nurture investigation and innovation. Crucially, the relationship between PSpace and CWorks has become a critical catalyst in the current phase of a prolonged *crisis of place and space* where a lack of suitable places for independent dance practice and community is exacerbated. A transformation in independent dance processes, more suited to the shelter, is required to address this new way of working within the edifice in Sydney, albeit an arts centre that was originally created to connect ‘making’ spaces with ‘presenting’ spaces.

Performance Space, 199 Cleveland Street, Redfern, (1983-2006)

For twenty-four years Performance Space presented a rather modest, low-impact façade as its public face. The double-storey, brick building, painted silver and black fronted onto Cleveland Street, a notoriously busy arterial road. With two narrow lanes in each direction Cleveland Street acts as a path, connecting the edge of the eastern suburbs with the beginning of the inner west.⁷ PSpace was centrally located opposite Prince Alfred Park, in close proximity to Central Railway Station and the inner city suburbs of Redfern, Chippendale, Strawberry Hills and Surry Hills. A large billboard with interchangeable letters heralding ‘What’s On’ was the only evidence presented to passers-by of what went on inside the building. While traffic delays along Cleveland Street allowed commuters the opportunity to read the signage, many more would have been travelling past too fast on the narrow road, unable to look sideways to observe the details of what the building at no. 199 housed.

⁷ Lynch, pp. 49-62.

When performance-maker Mike Mullins discovered the building in 1980 it had been unoccupied for over two decades. Previously the Australian Transport Headquarters (NSW Branch) and a dancehall, it was the ideal building for Mullins whose intention was to use it as a venue for his performance work *New Blood*. Despite the neglect and disrepair of the building Mullins realised its potential as a place in which to conduct experiments for his own theatre practice and also as a space to provide opportunities to support the work of his peers. Mullins set up the building as The Performance Space, living on the premises and taking on the responsibility of caretaker.

Officially opened in 1983 with Mullins as co-ordinator, PSpace operated as a managed and curated space focusing on what was then described as ‘new form’ work. On this site, over the next twenty-four years, PSpace became the key national centre for contemporary performance and hybrid arts practice. Over that time PSpace functioned as:

a hub for thousands of artists and their work, for hundreds of thousands of audiences, and most significantly created a profile for hybrid arts practice and offered endurance to the obstinately ephemeral.⁸

Dance as an ephemeral art form, with practices and performances that frequently incorporate hybrid art form collaborations and a performance language that (as discussed in Chapter Two) is often indecipherable to uninitiated audiences—contributed to a large part of the program at PSpace. Many independent dance artists and small-to-medium dance companies were drawn to this creative hub, partly because of the diversity of the artists who worked there, and partly due to the organization’s commitment to innovation which defined the work made and presented there as something ‘other’ to the mainstream processes and aesthetic. It was both the symbolic and physical presence of the PSpace building at Cleveland Street that made it an important gathering place for the independent dance and contemporary performance community.

⁸ ‘Performance Space 21st Birthday Program’, (2004), p. 6.

More than a Building

PSpace at Cleveland Street was more than just a building, it was a vital community meeting place and shelter for the complex networks of the independent dance sector. Whilst supporting a localised dance culture, that was linked by place and locality, PSpace was also part of a larger network of artists and organizations (and still is in its new location) providing a valuable interface between local, national and international contemporary art networks and sustaining an artistic community and its activities that extended well beyond Sydney.

Many artists have developed a strong personal and emotional attachment to PSpace over more than two decades in the building on Cleveland Street. For those artists based in Sydney, the building at Cleveland Street and the organization of PSpace within that building provided a physical place to call home where a diversity of physical practices were welcome. Here it was possible for PSpace to nurture investigative arts practices such as dance and new-media experiments and to respond to artists' needs by providing accessible and affordable space, and connecting like-minded artists, in an easy, swift manner associated with tactical practices.

The shelter at Cleveland Street housed the organization of PSpace and its associated artists. Gaston Bachelard names the chief benefit of the house as a place that 'shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace'.⁹ A dancer's daydreaming occurs through activities and investigative processes that elicit no public outcome. Daydreaming for the dance artist provides time for possible innovation, time for inspiration, and experimentation without fear of failure. For many artists the house of PSpace became a home for their artistic practice. Bachelard tries to account for the ways in which certain places and spaces are valued over others and indeed why they need protection. He proposes that because some places and spaces express the 'being' of those who occupy them, as a place 'in which we have experienced day dreaming' they must be defended from seizure, which would represent the occupants' symbolic death. Vitez's 'shelter' and Bachelard's 'house' are both associated with notions of self-protection and self-

⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. by Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), p. 6.

reproduction and are the spaces of refuge through which a necessary sense of ‘well-being’ is reproduced. In this case I use notions of home and notions of shelter as guiding metaphors for PSpace at Cleveland Street to express what is at stake for the well being of the independent artist and the dance art form affected by the loss of a place that provides a vital space for dancers’ daydreaming.

Tactical Practices: Making the Most of ‘Making Do’

The building at Cleveland Street provided PSpace and its artists with a place to call their own. In this respect it enjoyed a national profile as a home for innovative contemporary arts practice in Australia. However, the decrepitude of the building and the ‘ways of making’ and ‘making do’ of the artists at PSpace, defined by de Certeau and his use of the term *tactics*, meant that artists were able to ‘use, manipulate and divert’ the space in myriad tactical ways.¹⁰ PSpace was a theatre-shelter where experiments could be undertaken in both form and content with no financial pressure that they succeed. Many of the local, national and international independent dance artists who worked in various collaborative projects at Cleveland Street identified themselves as practitioners working as researchers. These artist-researchers benefited from PSpace’s commitment to nurturing a fuller ecology of practices than that provided by other arts organizations in Sydney. This included the development of specific mentoring projects and presenting opportunities for new artists, and training and discursive contexts for dance practices that were not reliant on public outcomes. Overall, PSpace endorsed a commitment to research and development and provided sustenance for a supportive creative environment and community. This was achieved by way of an understanding of the time it took to make work, a respect for the value of dialogue between artists and audiences, and a multiplicity of opportunities for rich questioning engagement.

For a short time from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s a number of small-to-medium local companies flourished within the PSpace theatre-as-shelter environment and many important new dance and physical theatre works were premiered at PSpace including One Extra Dance Company, Dance Exchange, Entr’acte, The Sydney

¹⁰ de Certeau, p. 30.

Front, Legs on the Wall, Gravity Feed, de Quincey Co, Ros Crisp's stella b company and Chunky Move. One characteristic that these companies shared was their commitment to an ensemble of performers working together in a studio, meeting regularly and developing their own idiosyncratic physical practice and performance language base. This ensemble company structure no longer exists for any of the small-to-medium and independent dance companies in Sydney but was supported during this time by government program funding and the capacity and diversity of the PSpace theatre-shelter.

Another significant factor that contributed to the unique identity of PSpace as a place for tactical practices was that much of the dance work supported and presented there incorporated overt influences from somewhere else. From the mid-1980s Australian dance artists and physical performers were returning from Germany, Japan, France and America with new ways of moving and thinking about moving. During this time dance in Sydney was frequently defined by fresh interpretations of the Australian national identity from these returned travellers and inevitably these artists found a home at PSpace. When Tess de Quincey returned from Japan, she appeared with her long matted hair and white face, drawing on elements of both eastern and western dance, sports training and martial arts, shifting the terrain to gradually accommodate and embrace a first generation of Australian BodyWeather performers.¹¹ A few years later, in her solo performances de Quincey morphed into a figure with short spiky hair and strident presence in satin striped gown and boots. Those who had been following her work suspected that she was now firmly grounded in Australian culture; a departure from the strong pull of Japanese culture in her earlier works had occurred. The opportunity to witness this transformation was made possible by PSpace's commitment to her practice, providing time and space within the shelter and supporting the presentation of different stages of de Quincey's work, and a new artistic form for an Australian audience.

¹¹ Tess de Quincey worked as a dancer with Min Tanaka and his Mai Juku Company in Japan for six years. She first started working in Australia in 1988 while still based in Japan and was the first artist to introduce Body Weather to Australian artists and audiences. de Quincey continues to be an active member of the independent dance sector in Sydney and directs a project-based ensemble of body weather practitioners.

In 2005 the move of the One Extra office and presentation operations from the Seymour Centre to PSpace consolidated the nature of both One Extra and PSpace as shelters for independent dance practice. The two organizations entered into a mutually beneficial partnership in which the dance expertise of One Extra fed into the strong engagement and commitment to dance of PSpace. This enabled a sharing of resources, information, ideas and audience development strategies across their respective dance programs and facilitated more substantial involvement and participation in the local independent dance community. Both organizations played a role in providing crucial infrastructure to the resource-depleted local independent dance sector. They provided services and facilitated interactions for artists including advising and auspicating projects, providing in-kind technical and other resources, developing co-productions and co-presentations and generally increasing vital support to small project companies and independent dance artists. Due to the close personal and professional relationships between the independent artists and arts workers of both One Extra and PSpace, the possibilities for support were above and beyond that which is usually available in a larger impersonal structure.¹² The open plan office that PSpace and One Extra shared made it possible to ask a quick question or get immediate feedback on an idea. The sharing of information, including feedback on the latest show that someone had seen, was part of the office culture. Many of the dance artists during this time (2001-2006) were able to retain relationships with both PSpace and One Extra and allegiance to both organizations without risk of competition.¹³

In the final year at Cleveland Street, PSpace acknowledged the value of their community of artists and noted that the multi dimensionality and fluidity of their practices had shaped the organization: 'Unique models of thought and practice and unique experiences for audiences' were generated by a multiplicity of skills, experiences, ideas and perspectives that merged, collided and cross-pollinated within

¹² Support such as personalised informal mentoring and intersecting professional and social links generated a source of resilience. The One Extra and PSpace structure enabled and supported the sustainability of a close community of like-minded artists, which importantly provided a sense of well-being by means of a sense of belonging for otherwise disenfranchised independent artists.

¹³ During this time Kay Armstrong, Narelle Benjamin, Martin del Amo, Nikki Heywood, Liz Lea, Julie-Anne Long, Fiona Malone, Vicki van Hout, Dean Walsh, Michael Whaites and The Fondue Set all presented work, co-produced by PSpace and One Extra.

this community.¹⁴ It was an artist community and creative organization not found anywhere else in Sydney at the time.

A Tour of the Building

In the final physical configuration of the building on Cleveland Street, PSpace housed a theatre with a flexible seating system for a maximum of 120 spectators, two galleries, a bar and foyer area, two open plan offices, a small studio and kitchen and various storage areas. Although PSpace was a place with a recognizable public profile and a clear strategic position as a National Organization for Contemporary Arts in Australia, the style and state of the building and its operational structures were more aligned with flexible, tactical practices that adapted easily to changing circumstances. Access to the building was available twenty-four hours a day seven days a week dictated by what the user needed. Support from technical and administrative staff and access to production resources was easily negotiated and shared.

The entrance from the street was unassuming: a small flight of concrete stairs in the centre of the building, followed by a small vestibule and stairway, giving overall a rather rundown impression. This suggested that it was not so important what the PSpace home looked like from the outside, but rather, it was what was *happening* inside that mattered. If you were coming to see a show in the theatre or to visit the exhibition spaces you entered down a central corridor with domestic sized doorways to the two small gallery spaces on either side. At the end of the corridor on the ground floor level, you arrived at a small cubicle, which was the box office, somewhat awkwardly located next to the ladies' toilets. Having picked up your tickets you then proceeded through a set of glass doors and found yourself in the open-air foyer and adjacent bar. Large gas heaters burned in the winter with a canvas awning providing protection from the elements in both winter and summer. The concrete courtyard was scattered with small tables and chairs, potted palms and strings of coloured fairy lights adding to the overall impression of a makeshift

¹⁴ 'Performance Space, NSW Ministry for the Arts Multi-year Funding Application', (2005-2006), p. 2.

aesthetic. The aesthetic of the theatre was similarly makeshift, which suited most of the artists. If you needed to bang in a nail or repaint a wall it was possible. The lighting rig was suspended from iron beams inside the roof and attached by metal chains through holes drilled in the ceiling. The stage became showered with dust whenever anyone worked on the rig or performed suspended from above.

Upstairs were the offices: a large open office, which had previously been utilised as two adjoining galleries, and, alongside this large space, a small studio for residencies and rehearsals for itinerant performers. The building was rambling yet compact and not sound proofed, so it was possible to have an idea of what was going on over the entire building when sitting at your desk in the office or with just one easy walk around. PSpace programmed the entire collection of gallery and theatre spaces for the majority of the year but when there were gaps in the PSpace annual program the theatre was available as a space for hire for small companies and independent artists. This provided a continuous ongoing presence and public profile for independent artists and the organization, and a clear vision of who and what PSpace and its associated artists were.

For anyone who has not experienced behind-the-scenes at 'the old' PSpace it is hard to know where to begin, but all you need to know, perhaps, is that there were no toilets backstage. If you remembered to race to the toilet before the audience came into the theatre, you were fine. But if you had made a fatal miscalculation and the audience was seated and you did not fancy filling any of the emergency vessels at hand in the dressing room, you realised that you would have to perform - those amazing feats of virtuosity that dancers are known for - with a full bladder. In effect, this was another example of making do and making it up as you went along. On a number of occasions the discomfort of the full bladder defined tactical behaviours of dance practitioners at PSpace in the Cleveland Street building.

Whilst walls and ceiling and dressing rooms were decrepit, the crowning glory of the theatre was the floor. The floor is a dancer's best friend - the spring, the grain, the feel, and the slide, protect bare feet from blisters and grazes. It is a very intimate relationship that the dancer has with the floor. In the early-1990s the wooden

floorboards in the PSpace theatre were painstakingly re-laid by choreographer Russell Dumas and the dancers from his company Dance Exchange. These artists donated their time, spending many gruelling hours cleaning, sanding, coating, and polishing the floor of the theatre at PSpace to make it smooth and glowing. This was an act of dedication that demonstrated the level of personal investment that many artists felt for PSpace as a home for their work. There were a few accidents on the floor over the years, with water and bodily fluids being the biggest culprits, but unlike the patchwork walls of the theatre space with the nails and hooks and holes and gaps, the floor was sacred. Cursed was anyone who disrespected or damaged the floor in the otherwise-decrepit PSpace theatre.

Other than the theatre floor, there was nothing remarkable about the physical characteristics of the PSpace. However, there was an environment and an atmosphere generated that were far greater than the material features of the building. PSpace provided a shelter for artists and audiences alike, not only in the theatre but equally importantly in the foyer. This was not the foyer of the edifice, with staff wearing uniforms and a bar selling expensive refreshments, governed by strict closing times. This was a foyer where the staff working the bar were most likely artists themselves and who joined in post-show conversations. The drinks were sold at affordable prices and it was even possible to negotiate staying on in the courtyard after the staff had locked up:

The tiny concrete courtyard at Cleveland Street had seen many a good almost-all-night party, plenty of friendly exchanges and intellectual stoushes about politics and art and what everyone had just collectively experienced in the theatre or the gallery or the spaces in-between. In all the audience research, this was the highest rating factor in both people's motivation to attend and in their qualitative reflection on the experience of attending.¹⁵

I propose that we are dependent on the post show drink in the performance space foyer for the health of our practice.¹⁶

¹⁵ Fiona Winning, 'Creativity & Flexibility: the nexus between infrastructure space & art', *The Rex Cramphorn Lecture*, 2 March 2009, Seymour Centre, University of Sydney.

¹⁶ Julie-Anne Long, 'Defining Moments', paper presented at *Performance Space: Politics and Culture Symposium*, Museum of Sydney, 5 November, 2004.

It was my experience that the post-show drink in the PSpace foyer supported the opportunity to ‘bump into’ peers, to catch-up and share professional information as well as being a purely social space. The foyer provided a place for the various networks of the dance community to meet and overlap. This generated a sense of identity for many members of the community through face-to-face interactions. It was a place for information and opinion sharing, audience-feedback time, informal casting even, and many other things that are not possible in the foyer of the edifice:

We knew from our experiences of attending performances at the venue over the years... that The Performance Space is a hub for contemporary performance-makers in Sydney. We had a sense that circulating through the venue, from production to production, over the years, we would find a large, well-connected network of artists.¹⁷

Whilst the intimacy of the foyer space may have been intimidating for some and interpreted as a private club, the close proximity and informal atmosphere encouraged dialogue between performers and audiences. The foyer also made possible an easy familiarity between those present:

It is likely that most people who performed in or attended two or more performances at The Performance Space – especially those performers and spectators who mingled in the courtyard-foyer after shows – will have acquired some knowledge of the network.¹⁸

There was no better evidence of this knowledge of the network than during the during key dance projects that were initiated by PSpace that included the biennial *antistatic* festivals and workshops (1996, 1998, 2000, 2002)¹⁹ *Parallax* (2004)²⁰ and the *Mobile States* touring contemporary performance programs (2002-03-04-05).

¹⁷ Jonathan Bollen and Glen McGillivray, ‘Networking in Ausstage: e-research’, *Australasian Drama Studies* 54 (April 2009), pp. 178-194 (p. 185).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

¹⁹ The biennial dance research workshop and performance festival *antistatic* was originally curated by Sydney based practitioners Sue-ellen Kohler, Matthew Bergan, Eleanor Brickhill, Rosalind Crisp and Angharad Wynne-Jones and produced by PSpace in response to the dearth of discourse around contemporary dance practices in Australia. *antistatic* encouraged an intense scrutiny and investigation into the body as intelligence with two weeks of forums, performances, workshops and dialogue facilitated by local, national and international dance practitioners breathing life into the whole of the PSpace building.

²⁰ *Parallax* (May, 2004) was a series of new commissions by NSW-based independent artists Martin del Amo, Lizzie Thomson, Nalina Wait and Elly Brickhill.

Case Study: Dean Walsh and CLUB bENT

My intention for including the following case study is to present an example of how PSpace created a theatre-shelter environment that not only provided development opportunities and exposure for independent dance artist Dean Walsh but also enabled him to explore social issues and a body aesthetic that were alternative to the mainstream dance aesthetic presented in Sydney during the 1990s. Walsh is now a mid-career independent dance artist in his forties, who has lived in Sydney all his life. Central to the concerns of his solo dance practice is his identity as a gay male. Images of his experience of growing up gay in a highly dysfunctional family, in a violent macho world, are often never far from the surface of his work. His solos provoke social comment with a sharp wit and sense of relevance to the times and place, the here and now, of Sydney. Walsh deals with blatant gender trouble and often-recurring personae. He is a naked man in an apron, wig and high heels struggling with the relationship between a mother and her gay son. He is a dissident drag act outrageously campy and losing composure by false starts and self-consciousness. He is enthusiastically applauded at club bENT.

cLUB bENT was the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival's first late night arts club. It occurred at PSpace for three consecutive years 1995-97. It provided a space where gay and lesbian community nightclub performers met with their theatre performer peers. From its first year in 1995 cLUB bENT attracted a substantial following of artists and audiences. It showcased queer performance, alternative drag, dance, aerial acts, circus, cabaret, film, video and computer art alongside more subversive performance art practices involving body cutting and playing with excrement. It was provocative, sometimes glamorous, at other times feral. The programming of underground artists alongside independent and occasionally mainstream artists added to the inclusive, celebratory atmosphere and provided an intersection of performance worlds not frequently presented together in Sydney.²¹

²¹ Jan Pinkerton, a featured dancer in the SDC performed solo at cLUB bENT.

cLUB bENT was a radical theatre space working outside the dominant modes of gender representation and was primarily created by and for a queer audience. Most of the artists involved were concerned with deconstructing identity and sexualities and genders, and challenging notions of performativity. Dean Walsh was a regular performer in the cLUB bENT program appearing in each of the three years. In 1995 he premiered his solo work *Porcelain Steel*. This was followed in 1996 by *Lipservice* and *Camp as Hell*, a duet with Chris Ryan, and in 1997 *Sparrow Guts* and *Ain't Misbehavin*.

Sparrow Guts

A man enters the space from upstage prompt. He wears a halter neck leopard spot leotard, a platinum blonde mid-length bob wig, high heels and a snarley pout. The hairy muscly legs could pass for a woman's at a pinch, but we know he is a man by the undisguised chest hair. He stands upstage centre (on this rather small stage) and the tribal audience hoots. Those in the audience who recognise the tinkling opening bars of 'I Don't Know How to Love Him' from the musical *Jesus Christ Superstar* signal their appreciation with a knowing titter. The set up is all feminised walks and poses. It begins with conventional drag gestures and mannerisms—we think we know where we are. Walsh mimes the words illustrating them with literal gestures and suitably coy facial expressions. A suggestive body roll gives a hint of things to come. Breaking out of this drag character with a moment of convincing butch, macho posturing, the performer then shifts to comment ironically with an abstracted 'hard on' gesture. This is followed by a moment of camp melodrama as Walsh falls to his knees—not entirely unexpected, as we see that he wears kneepads. Next, he is up and running in a grotesque female caricature. After he mockingly regains composure, he adopts again the traditional drag mode. Not long after the beginning of this new phrase the performer does an athletic walkover and splits his legs. This breaks our expectations of what it is we are watching: one-minute cute camp, bitchy and wry, the next, moving with feminised delicacy and then with skilful athletic physicality and a blatant machismo.

Sparrow Guts discloses a number of characteristics common to much of Walsh's work: subverting representations from camp drag queen to aggressive macho posturing and as Brannigan describes: '[Walsh] neatly choreographs himself in between the *femme fatale*, the comic drag queen and hyperbolic masculinity.'²² *Sparrow Guts* explicitly displays the aesthetic and cult of the body in this area of gay/queer performance where elements of vaudeville and burlesque are mutated to appeal to a predominantly gay/queer audience. Theatre critic, James Waites, warmly received Walsh's bold performance at the 1997 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras gala evening, *The Stars Come Out*:

In these over corporatised and politically straight-jacketed times, Walsh reminded us that being gay or even queer is barely a risky business these days. To be truly camp, an exercise in grand posturing contempt for the given, even before this overwhelmingly gay and lesbian audience, can still be a genuinely audacious adventure.²³

Criss-crossing between Mainstream and Independent

In 1996 Dean Walsh continued his 'audacious adventure' in a new context when the producers of *Bodies*, a semi-curated independent dance collection, invited him to perform two existing solos at the Newtown Theatre (1996). This was an opportunity for Walsh to connect with the wider dance community and to present his work to a broader audience. It was a two-way arrangement advantageous to both parties:

[T]hey wanted me as a draw card you know... the naked thing... and we can put you in the gay press and I was like uh ok whatever and I've got a piece which will probably work and it's in high heels and it's naked and they said yes yes!²⁴

Hardware 1 and *Testos/Terrain* were the two works selected for inclusion in the *Bodies* season. Both had been performed in previous incarnations at cLUB bENT. In *Testos/Terrain* Walsh is an extreme 'yobbo', an overtly male character with an

²² Erin Brannigan, 'Highheels and Tracksuits: apparel and the apparent, or the boy, the show and the jellybean', unpublished paper delivered at *April Fools Fetish: (De)constructing Contemporary Performance, Theory and Texts(s)*, University of New South Wales, April, 1999.

²³ James Waites, 'Back from the Edge', *Sydney Morning Herald*, Monday 3 February, 1997.

²⁴ Dean Walsh, Interview with the author, 26 August 2002.

awareness of his theatrical machismo. In a state of paralytic drunkenness, he performs a version of macho drag, enjoying being punched and getting punched. Eventually this yobbo discovers a more sensitive side, exploring his toolbox and applying make-up; a pair of pliers to pluck the eyebrows and a screwdriver to apply the lipstick. Campness and kitsch humour abound but Walsh frames the work with a more serious and challenging note, with his use of expertly crafted moments of arrested movement. In the culminating moment of the companion piece *Hardware 1*, Walsh balances on his head, naked, and spreads his legs in a side split. This position is sustained for quite some time, as he explains: ‘Within the context of the work, it is the final unveiling of the tender parts of the male anatomy, revealing the male body in physical states of fragility, vulnerability, openness, exposure.’²⁵

In the context of the theatre-shelter of PSpace this moment had been greeted with laughter, admiration and approval, whereas at Newtown Theatre, which operates as a small scale venue-for-hire with no overt overriding artistic ideology, the *Bodies* context presented Walsh with a dilemma. When the producers viewed the solos during the dress rehearsal their response was reactionary:

[...] ‘MC’ came up to me and grabbed me and pulled me and he said ‘I have to talk to you Dean [...] I just have to bring this to your attention - are you aware that your anus is quite bulbous’ and I said ‘yes because you know when you’re opening up your legs like that and you’re pushing down with all the force you can, of course your perineum is going to go ‘poop’ but you know what, I’m so glad you noticed ‘cause’, I said ‘that’s what the piece is about’ and he said ‘We can’t have it [...]’ They didn’t count on me going upside down and splitting my arse open [...] I guess that it was just really confronting [...].’²⁶

Concerned about a negative backlash from their anticipated conservative dance audience, the producers demanded Walsh edit his trademark split from the existing work, or as a compromise when Walsh refused, to at least reposition it from centre stage to a darker spot in an upstage corner. But Walsh was adamant: ‘I insisted I was

²⁵ Barbara Karpinski, ‘Interview with Dean Walsh’, Capital Q Weekly, Friday 8 November, 1996, p. 9.

²⁶ Walsh, interview.

going to do it as it was or not at all!’²⁷ And he got his way, agreeing to a warning about male nudity being posted at the door.

Conversely the press supported Walsh’s work with informed interpretations of the context and an understanding of the complexity of the issues²⁸:

But here’s an interesting example of censorship! Dean Walsh with his riveting comments on male physicality, in *Hardware 1* and *Testos/Terrain*, was obliged by the management to warn the audience to leave if they might be offended by his “male nudity” which included the riotous sight of his anus.²⁹

Jill Sykes, the dance critic for the Sydney Morning Herald, offered praise for the venture but hedged her bets:

Walsh’s solo is blatantly and deliciously outrageous. Clad in nothing but his marvellous musculature and a pair of high-heeled shoes, he dances and postures in a comic routine that probably deserved the solemn warning of nudity at the door.³⁰

The performance presentation and reception at *Bodies* was quite different to the context of delving into the underground at cLUB bENT, where an expectation of explicit nudity was a given. In the PSpace program for cLUB bENT reference was made to the influence this alternative work could have on the mainstream when it proposed: ‘This is the place to find out what will be happening in the mainstream gay and lesbian community in five years time.’³¹ Following the first season of cLUB bENT Walsh acknowledged the freedom of the PSpace environment: ‘With cLUB bENT you can work with as many queer and aesthetic sensibilities as you like with a sense that they are going to be understood and not censored’.³² Walsh’s naked

²⁷ Walsh, interview.

²⁸ This can be attributed to the fact that both reviewers had seen much of Walsh’s work at PSpace and witnessed its reception in the context of the shelter.

²⁹ Eleanor Brickhill, ‘Journeys through Frames, Across Dance Floors’, in *RealTime*, no. 16, December 1996-January 1997 (Sydney: Open City Inc.), p. 10.

³⁰ Jill Sykes, ‘Showcase for Choreographers’, *Sydney Morning Herald*, Wednesday 30 October, 1996.

³¹ TPS issue no. 8, summer 1995-96, p. 24.

³² Karpinski, 1996, p. 9.

headstand splits got a mighty round of applause at cLUB bENT but created a disgusted stir when performed outside PSpace. Walsh explained:

Being able to explore this subject matter on stage and test the edges of performance was very important to my growth as an artist and I owe a considerable amount of my present success to cLUB bENT and Performance Space.³³

In the radical safety of the often-challenging cLUB bENT theatre-shelter, performers interacted with a visible, active audience, and the constituency was predisposed to subversive entertainment where risks were possible. This was unlike most spectator/performer relationships in the local theatre-edifices and precincts, where the audience sits at a safe distance most frequently in the dark. It was also in this alternative setting that it was possible for Walsh to take risks with his dance practice and to push the boundaries of form and content not possible in the mainstream spaces.

cLUB bENT heralded other significant, high profile queer performance initiatives, all of which Walsh participated in, including: a successful UK tour (Manchester, Brighton, London) of *It's Queer Up North* (1996), and *Taboo Parlour*, an event held during the 1999 Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi Gras Festival. Not as up front as its predecessor cLUB bENT, *Taboo Parlour* did, however, continue the tradition of a performance occasion from and for a gay, lesbian and queer audience. Three subsequent productions also produced significant developments for artists and audiences: Co-productions by SGLMG and One Extra Dance; *Foursome* (2000), four solo works by Walsh, Brian Carbee, Trevor Patrick and Philip Adams and *Stretching it Wider* (2001), a collaboration with Brian Carbee. These productions introduced the work of these queer dance artists to a more conventional theatre space at the Seymour Centre, albeit during the Mardi Gras Arts Festival with a program focused on gay and lesbian performance.³⁴

³³ Barbara Karpinski, 'Life Dancer', in *RealTime*, no. 52, December 2002-January 2003 (Sydney: Open City Inc.), p. 22.

³⁴ Walsh premiered *Flesh: Memo* as part of the 2002 Sydney Gay Games Cultural Festival at the Seymour Centre, produced by One Extra.

Dean Walsh is one of a few independent dance artists who has successfully made the crossing between mainstream and alternative:³⁵

I guess it's about keeping true to what you believe to be your own creative strengths but also instigating shifts to set up challenges, something that has been very difficult out there in the independent arena without financial assistance.³⁶

To a large extent Walsh has been able to engage with the mainstream, encouraged by the knowledge that he could keep returning 'home' to the shelter of PSpace, where he could explore his personal interests and develop his performance practice, including his queer-focused work, parallel to and informed by other experiences, processes and perspectives. So what will become of the transgressive practices of artists such as Walsh that were once nurtured in the shelter of PSpace at Cleveland Street and are now found to be without a home?

³⁵ 2002 was a successful year for Dean Walsh with a number of opportunities and recognition for his work from many quarters. Early in the year Walsh received a Skills and Arts Development grant from the Australia Council to work on a number of strands emerging through his work with improvisational techniques and his interest in live action animation dance film. In this same period of time he was awarded the Robert Helpmann Dance Scholarship by the NSW Ministry for the Arts to travel to London and Europe to work with Lloyd Newson (DV8) and Paul Selwyn Norton. During 2002 Walsh was a guest performer with Adelaide-based Australian Dance Theatre. For his role in Garry Stewart's *The Age of Unbeauty* Walsh was awarded the 'Outstanding Male Dancer' at the 2002 Ausdance Australian Dance Awards. Two weeks after completing his contract with ADT at the Sydney Opera House, Walsh appeared at Performance Space in *Cross Cuts*, a mixed program of contemporary performance works. This provided a contrasting experience with a very different venue, audience and dramatic shift in performance genre. For *Cross Cuts* Walsh presented a structured improvisation suggestive of directions for his next highly personal work, *Ex-serviced*, inspired by his grandfather's experience of war on the Kokoda Trail.

³⁶ Walsh, interview.



Figure 15: Dean Walsh, cLUB bENT, Performance Space, 1996
Photograph by Heidrun Löhr



Figure 16: Dean Walsh, Sydney Opera House exterior, 2002
Photograph by Sydney Morning Herald, Photographer unknown

Moving House

Since the mid 1990s PSpace had been in search of new premises, at times working with the State Government to locate a new home. This search was in response to two main factors: one, the rent paid on the commercial lease at Cleveland Street took a substantial portion of the operations budget and two, the challenges of relentless maintenance requirements for an old building in disrepair, with an unsympathetic landlord, made it difficult to sustain ever-increasing demands from occupational health and safety (OH&S). Added to these reasons for moving were the demands of an expanding program of curated performance, time-based art (sound, screen and video), new media events and installations for a diverse range of practitioners and audiences that was becoming compromised by the size of the Cleveland Street premises, with no prospects of being able to increase the size of the building and its site:

Our home of twenty-one years at 199 Cleveland Street has served our needs well, but we have now outgrown it. The limitations of the space are compounded by ever-escalating rent and the inflexibility of our lease. Furthermore, our audience development strategy, our profile and our capacity to seek corporate partners is seriously hampered by the decrepitude of the building.³⁷

Conscious of the imperative to expand audience development and marketing strategies, it had been clear to the Board of Directors and the Director of PSpace for some time that an increase in public profile through a refurbished home and image would be beneficial. PSpace Director, Fiona Winning, advocated an additional advantage for PSpace in relocating: 'It makes good sense in terms of audiences for us to be in the same precinct as other arts organizations'.³⁸ This suggests a desire for spatial legitimacy. Simultaneously excited and confronted by the need for change, Winning acknowledged that the government's development of CWorks as the major venue for contemporary performance in NSW presented PSpace and the sector generally, with the greatest of opportunities and challenges, requiring careful

³⁷ Performance Space, NSW Ministry for the Arts Multi-year Funding Application 2005-2006, p. 4.

³⁸ Fiona Winning interviewed in 'Building the Future Performance Space', *RealTime*, no. 47, February-March 2002 (Sydney: Open City Inc.), p. 10.

negotiation between the two cultures of mainstream and alternative, and associated privilege and marginalisation.³⁹

From early on in the planning of CWorks, PSpace was involved with the proposed development through consultation with the NSW Ministry for the Arts, Root Projects Australia and the Architects, TZK Tonkin Zulaikha Greer. Six companies along with PSpace were invited as potential tenants and/or regular users of CWorks, to be part of the Key User Reference Group (KURG), namely: full-time companies Legs on the Wall, Stalker/Marrugeku and eRTH, and project-based performance companies Gravity Feed, and Theatre Kantanka. All companies identified themselves as having the potential to embrace the impressive physical scale of CWorks with their mix of physical theatre, and large scale object works. It was also recognized that being a part of this precinct would extend the possibilities of their existing situations - an ad hoc collection of workshops and studios, with relatively makeshift conditions, located around the inner western ring of Sydney suburbs, where the companies were working at the time. Sydney Festival was the seventh member of the reference group. With its annual festival presenting large-scale international dance and performance companies, and a shortage of suitable places in Sydney, the Festival management were eager to negotiate a regular block booking at CWorks.

Meetings of KURG involved detailed discussions of the practical and conceptual ways in which contemporary performance practices could engage with the building. These discussions extended to how the reference group artists might inhabit and share CWorks for successful future development. In addition to engagement in this formal process PSpace also kept its broader constituency informed, via informal community meetings, updating the artistic community with the government's and the KURG's visions for development of the new precinct. It was recognised that the move could potentially have a destabilising effect on the already fragile performance community and there was a mix of expectation, anticipation and anxiety about the change.

³⁹ Winning, p. 10.

PSpace accepted the offer of tenancy from the state government and expressed a strong interest and commitment to managing and programming the entire new arts centre of CWorks. In a formal tender they presented their case for the importance of linking artistic, technical, management and financial considerations to create a cohesive, secure and stimulating artistic culture. Following a lengthy negotiation process the PSpace proposal for management of the precinct was unsuccessful and a top-down vision for the management of CWorks was selected, more in keeping with the structures of government. The management structure and vision for CWorks was entrusted to Sue Hunt, who was appointed by Arts NSW as Chief Executive Officer six months before the scheduled opening of the building. Not only is Hunt responsible for a large administrative and production staff and producing the environment for artists and audiences, she is also in charge of the commercial aspects of sustaining the precinct, including the teams of contractors who handle every facet of the building from cleaning and maintenance to the box office, bar and café.

CWorks management, essentially acting as the chief tenant, is accountable to the state government, the landlord, with the proviso from government from the outset that the centre should become commercially viable and financially independent of state support by 2010. This pre-condition has since been reassessed as unrealistic, however, this directive significantly affected the governing style and choices of artistic product in the first two years of CWorks' operation.⁴⁰ As anchor tenant, PSpace was implicated in this commercial environment and charged high rates for rental of office and theatre spaces and hire of technical equipment, based on the economic imperative for CWorks to be commercially viable. I propose that one of the fundamental problems with interactions between PSpace and its networks of diverse artists incorporated within the edifice of CWorks, is that these high costs are passed on to the under-resourced independent artists. In addition to this, management of CWorks operates independently from and at times in opposition to the key artistic activities of producing and presenting, namely the activities of the independent arts sector associated with PSpace.

⁴⁰ Despite this reassessment of CWorks management, whereby they were no longer fully responsible for the commercial viability of the precinct, there has been neither reduction in costings, nor increased access to theatres and rehearsal spaces for PSpace and its community of artists.

CarriageWorks, 245 Wilson Street, Eveleigh (2007-)

The CWorks contemporary arts precinct occupies the northern five bays of the CarriageWorks building at the Eveleigh Railyards in Redfern. The cultural plan for CWorks is part of the State Government's Red Square Strategy that is slowly shaping urban renewal of a large part of the Alexandria, Redfern, and Waterloo area. This is a highly charged, politically generated project with plans to revitalise the previously derelict industrial site and its surrounding working class suburbs, which were hitherto home to many artists and artists' studios, now destined in the short term future to undergo significant and large scale residential (re)development.

Eveleigh's spatial reappearing act, ushered back onto the city map by a public centre for contemporary arts, is now the subject of intense community debate about the exact nature and intention of its redevelopment, and the kind of neighbourhood that will eventually arise from its built environs.⁴¹

The community has been uneasy with the government's motivation for this development, with neighbours and the local residents greeting it with suspicion. This pattern of cultural precinct development accompanied by extensive and expensive residential redevelopment follows that of The Wharf precinct discussed in the previous chapter.

As with the edifices of the SOH and The Wharf located on the edge of Sydney harbour, CWorks also occupies what Lynch describes as an edge.⁴² However, the edge that the Eveleigh Rail yards and train tracks form, separating the suburb of Newtown from that of Waterloo and parts of Redfern, is a tract of rather inhospitable, underdeveloped land, inaccessible to traversing pedestrians. As with PSpace at Cleveland Street, the street front of CWorks on Wilson Street, similarly serves as a path, but without the heavy flow of traffic. Wilson Street is a quiet residential thoroughfare with a well-used bicycle track. Both streets encourage the movement of people along them but neither makes it appealing nor necessary for travellers to stop. It is as if CWorks on Wilson Street (and PSpace at Cleveland

⁴¹ Bec Dean, 'Where Goes the Neighbourhood', p. 8, published in tandem with the exhibition *There Goes the Neighbourhood*, Performance Space, Sydney, May 2009.

⁴² Kevin Lynch, *The Image of the City*.

Street) are located on the way to somewhere more important, unlike the CBD precincts on the edge of the harbour, which are destinations in themselves.

Marvin Carlson has pointed out that in the Western urban environment the building ‘necessarily exists in relation to other buildings and is placed in relation to centre and periphery. The location of the theatre building necessarily makes some statement about the way theatre is perceived by society more generally and by its practitioners’.⁴³ So, what are we to make of the development of the CWorks precinct off the street front, on the edge of the railway tracks, as the state government’s aspiration to create a prestigious Sydney cultural icon for contemporary art? The relationship of CWorks as a bookend to the Opera House, as suggested by the architects, is not immediately obvious due to its location adjacent to the somewhat notorious suburb of Redfern.⁴⁴

Added to this incongruity in its identity, is the attitude of mainstream journalists who suggest that contemporary arts are indeed an essentially unconventional and risky venture. This attitude feeds into the public perception of the artists and the organizations outside the establishment or mainstream who are associated with CWorks being less disciplined, less predictable and suspiciously ‘other’ or alternative. Valerie Lawson, arts reviewer for the Sydney Morning Herald informed the reader in the months leading up to the opening that CWorks was: ‘[...] not a conventional city venue. CarriageWorks will specialise in contemporary arts.’⁴⁵ She went on to write that: ‘*Rather than* hosting mainstream companies, it will be home to *troupes* such as Performance Space.’⁴⁶ It is clear from the previous section of this chapter that PSpace is not and never was ‘a troupe’ and that this rather ill-informed description serves as an indication of the attitude to and status of contemporary arts practice in Sydney, specifically a misunderstanding of the complexity and value of the work of PSpace. Aside from this, it is probable that the relocation of PSpace

⁴³ Carlson, p. 46.

⁴⁴ Redfern is a complex and conflicted suburb. Known as a place for drugs and crime, with a ghetto environment bordering Sydney University and the second largest railway station in Sydney. It is a place of racial tensions and opportunities for gentrification and an important place of cultural pride for Indigenous Australia.

⁴⁵ Valerie Lawson, ‘Edgy venue forged from gritty past’, Sydney Morning Herald, October 2, 2006.

⁴⁶ Ibid. (Emphasis is mine).

from its dilapidated Cleveland Street premises to the new and architecturally impressive CWorks building signifies to a broader public, ascendancy in status and spatial legitimacy for PSpace.

CWorks has the potential to be a significant cultural landmark. The building makes an impression with its imposing exterior façade and sizable scale, generating expectations of large-scale highly produced work inside. The government-owned CWorks has been imagined as a top-end institution with permanent infrastructure to develop lasting and ongoing communities and audiences. The CWorks branding has given PSpace the ability to look up and out from within this new, world-class facility, with more confidence. The shift in identity has provided an opportunity to increase the visibility of the contemporary art practice that PSpace has nurtured for three decades now. This has occurred on both a local and international level and will endeavour to do so whilst continuing, ‘to back radical artistic experiment in a changing world.’⁴⁷

At the time of writing, in the first stage of the CWorks arts precinct development, two theatre spaces have been built—one that has a capacity of eight hundred and the other a capacity of two hundred and seventy. Also, within the CWorks edifice there are three rehearsal spaces, two training rooms, expansive foyer areas, a café, and administrative spaces for six resident companies and other casual or project-based administration spaces suggesting a well thought-out plan. The sheer scale of the building and the raw beauty of its intact industrial features make CWorks an impressive architectural statement. Reflections and shadows create a poetic gesture integral to the character of the imposing foyer as light reflects through a series of skylights onto the concrete at various times of the day. CWorks is a beautiful, creatively remodelled building. However, as a large-scale edifice, it does present challenges to the user. I will proceed to discuss the ways the building and its organizational structures do not serve the requirements, canvassed in the preliminary discussions, of the artists and the art that is produced within.

⁴⁷ Ian Maxwell, ‘Performance Space Symposium Politics and Culture, Museum of Sydney, 5 November’, *RealTime*, no. 64, December 2003-January 2004 (Sydney: Open City Inc.), p. 14.

The Past and The Present

In line with the architectural vision for an alternative arts precinct, the design of CWorks sought to subvert the hierarchy of the conventional theatre by means of an overlap within the building between factory and culture. In the mid 1890s five hundred men worked at the CWorks, Eveleigh. At its peak in the 1970s about 1200 men were employed on the engineering and machinery, along with women who worked in upholstery, fittings and stores. John Willis a former railway worker evoked it as a frightening place ‘because there was so much going on. So much movement [...] you thought “Oh I’m going to get run over”.’⁴⁸ As well as the action of people streaming in and out of the place, a loud steam whistle heralded the shift changes. The distribution of the offices, rehearsal rooms and theatres built around the scale of a railway carriage and the naming of the various areas as Bays and Tracks relate to the original use and constantly remind the artist and the audience of what this place was and the importance of the relation between workplace/everyday life and art/culture.

Many industrial features have been left visible within the building to allow people to experience an historic reading of the building. For example, there are historical multi-lingual signs that function as reminders of the European migrants who started their new lives in Australia. Three materials have been consistently utilised. In the past it was brickwork, wrought and cast iron. Work was hard, dangerous and dirty. The contemporary materials are concrete, hot rolled steel and aluminium with traces of both generations visible together. The work is still hard, dangerous in a different way but not nearly as dirty.

Architect Tim Greer explained that the core concept of the project was to keep a connection between its previous use by hundreds of railway workers and its current use by hundreds of theatre workers:

Then to effectively turn the foyer into a large performance space, we were meshing the two lives of the building. We thought this would work well for

⁴⁸ John Willis quoted on a panel of historic information in the CarriageWorks foyer.

the types of performances here and also for the historic ‘reading’ of the building.⁴⁹

Today a sign on a wall reads ‘Dance 450 Volts’. On closer inspection one sees that the ‘r’ is missing and half of the ‘g’ has been worn away. Once this sign warned ‘Danger 450 Volts’.

Inflexible not Fluid

The interior foyer is the most challenging of the spaces within CWorks. Its scale excites the imagination and as a non-specific public space it allows artists to see opportunity and possibilities for site-specific engagement. The aim with the layout of the building is that there be no fixed boundaries between audiences and performers such as proscenium arches and stage doors, to physically subvert the barriers between artists and audiences.

In a public lecture presented by Fiona Winning in 2009 she described this as permeability with reference to the foyer of PSpace at Cleveland Street:

From Performance Space’s perspective, one of the key qualities of our old space that we needed to re-create in the new – was the permeable relationship between artists and audiences, not only in the performance spaces themselves, but also in the social spaces of the building.⁵⁰

As previously discussed the activities that had occurred in the unassuming courtyard foyer at Cleveland Street, had been proven in all the audience research, to be ‘the highest rating factor in both people’s motivation to attend and in their qualitative reflection on the experience of attending’.⁵¹ In architectural terms the proposition for the use of CWorks by artists was compatible with one of the key qualities of the Cleveland Street PSpace building, namely, the permeable relationship between artists and audiences, not only in the performance spaces but equally importantly in the

⁴⁹ *Imagining for Space on Design Issues, Possibilities and Challenges for Bay 20 and the Foyer.* hosted by Performance Space and Critical Path Choreographic Centre, Bay 20 CarriageWorks, 26 August, 2008.

⁵⁰ Winning, Rex Cramphorn Lecture 2009.

⁵¹ Ibid.

social spaces of the building. However, because of the scale of the foyer at CWorks it is impossible to achieve the intimacy of atmosphere and scale for which PSpace at Cleveland Street was renowned. With its concrete and steel surfaces and high ceilings, the building can be intimidating for both artists and audiences.⁵² In addition, the rigid rules and restrictions placed on post show gatherings at CWorks mean that those who want to continue conversations after a show are forced to relocate to the local pub.⁵³ Many an evening has been cut short by the closing of CWorks shortly after the show curtailing the potentialities of face-to-face interactions between artists and audiences.

The restrictions of CWorks and its need for a highly controlled environment and recognisable profile are of concern for the contemporary performance and independent dance sector in Sydney that has previously positioned itself to work on the periphery in the more makeshift invisible spaces. This current situation creates a significant gulf between the values of the largely independent artist community of PSpace and the logistics and management of the building. Very few of these independent artists prioritise working in an impressive building over a place where they can take risks. As discussed in Chapter Three, for many independent artists' dance-making is a fluid practice, and the dance community is often created in spaces through processes which are not necessarily fixed and governed. The commercial imperatives and the rigid infrastructure that dictates and maintains CWorks and also dictates its conditions of use are at odds with contemporary dance practices and thus with the needs and values of these independent artists.

⁵² The Foyer covers 1005 square metres and has a ceiling height of 8.2 metres.

⁵³ The bar is often closed when the audience exits from seeing a performance at CWorks. When both theatres are in operation simultaneously the bar may stay open following the performances, however, it is not uncommon for the foyer to be shut down within a short time-frame of the end of the performances. In addition to this, the bar prices are high and the Opening Night party in the foyer that was a feature of PSpace at Cleveland Street and an important networking and community mechanism, is being phased out at CWorks.

The Place of the Space: Performance Space at CarriageWorks

A reciprocal relationship between the places that PSpace has made home, both at Cleveland Street and at CWorks, and the practices of the independent dance artists associated with PSpace, is needed for a sustainable dance sector in Sydney. I have previously explored how PSpace was organised and energised by dance artists at Cleveland Street and now look at how since early 2007 the 'new home' has been harnessed at CWorks, to support and represent the independent dance community and its work. For many artists working in the CWorks building there is an undeniable separation between the values of the artists and the characteristics of the building and its organisational structures. This chapter asks the questions: Has the space of CWorks been animated by PSpace, and if so, how? Have the tactical activities of moving bodies, dance processes and practices, including the crucial administrative infrastructure of PSpace, had any affect on the strategic place of CWorks?

Readjusting and Realigning Value Systems

Every theatre building is unique and offers both opportunities and constraints. The dimensions of the building at Cleveland Street and the theatre that was created within it were established in an almost domestic relationship to the performance, in comparison to the more grand edifice proportions of CWorks. This new theatre space requires artists to shift their understanding of scale when working with the scale of the human body, in order to negotiate the challenges of the height and depth of the theatre spaces, as well as the foyer space. Artistic projects recently made for CWorks have begun to address issues of intimacy, alienation and vastness. In the seating bank at Cleveland Street most of the audience was positioned close to floor level and near to eye level with the performers. This provided an intimate perspective and was ideal for the performance of dance. In the new configuration of seating at CWorks the majority of the audience looks down from steeply raked seating onto the floor of the theatre. This gives a very different perspective and influences the experience of the spectators, fundamentally affecting the relationship between the performer and the audience member. For example there is more

emphasis focused on floor patterns and spectacle rather than attention to proximity and connection between performer and audience.

Much of the research and development business of PSpace was played out primarily in ‘invisible spaces’. As asserted in Chapter Three these invisible spaces are important for sustaining vibrant and challenging practices within a physical place for the independent dance sector and for providing conceptual space for new forms to germinate and contribute to the development of dance in Australia. PSpace also functioned as one of those ‘invisible spaces’. Time and space was a negotiable commodity between artists and organization at Cleveland Street as it was also at Omeo and Queen Street Studio. The possibilities for finding space (and time) at CWorks for the independent artist, that is both flexible, in terms of duration, and affordability, are severely reduced. As a consequence of this relocation to an edifice there has been a significant increase to PSpace’s expenditure and a reduction in control over how they structure their program. Previously PSpace was able to contribute some direct production costs and provide significant in-kind technical and production support. However, now in the new more expensive place, technical and production costs are charged directly to each project, meaning that projects have to acquire a significant amount of external income (usually in grant funding that the individual artist applies for) before PSpace is able to produce the performance. If the funding is unsuccessful then the project does not happen, whereas in the shelter of old, some performances were totally produced by PSpace and the artist invited to be involved. In the case of projects that did not receive funding, there was often a way to make them happen. The current model creates a significant load of administrative work for artists who present work at PSpace and is one of the challenges for all the parties involved in the reinvention of PSpace within CWorks.

The restoration of this significant heritage building is also proving incompatible with the needs of the artists. Permission to bang nails into the walls and permits to make the physical position and hours of operation of the bar area a moveable option—previously a fluid aspect of performance that challenged boundaries of expectations of theatre buildings as well as conventions of performance practice—are not open for negotiation and definitely beyond spontaneous response. The burdens of compliance

via restrictions on access to the building and formal security measures have been enforced by CWorks management onto the PSpace organization who in turn have passed them onto artists working at CWorks. This new context does need new structures and at present these are dictated by the regulations of the building. However, there does need to be a negotiation with the people who actually use the building, especially the artists. CWorks and PSpace are sharing the space and this has presented a need to maximise the use of space and be mindful of where these two cultures with different values meet. I argue that the administrative staff and artists who have worked at PSpace at CWorks over the past two years have applied closer, more organic tactical interventions to the venue than that of CWorks and its personnel, who operate by fixed rules and regulations before even testing alterations in a clearly strategic manner.

Greater financial resources than were previously available have been directed toward audience development strategies, to prioritise building a local awareness of PSpace's programs, the new building and all it has to offer. In 2007 more than 320 artists created work in the PSpace program attracting over 13,000 spectators to 60 events. In its first year at CWorks PSpace audiences grew by 9 per cent and the number of artists engaged increased by 16 per cent. From these results one can conclude that the move of PSpace to CWorks has expanded audience numbers and suggests artists' opportunities have increased comparable to previous levels at Cleveland Street.⁵⁴ However, this relocation has not been without reservations held by artists for reasons that Director Fiona Winning alludes to:

While we are very happy with the program, profile and audience outcomes for the year, it would also be true to say that we struggled from time to time with the increased demands due to scale of the spaces, to simultaneous programming with corporate events, to the developing systems of both Performance Space and CarriageWorks and to the many unknowns that emerged throughout the year.⁵⁵

The development of CWorks as a significant venue for hybrid performance in Sydney presents PSpace and its associated artists with ongoing opportunities and

⁵⁴ 'Directors Report' in *Performance Space Annual Report 2007*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 8.

challenges. From the outset it has inspired a new set of ambitions and ideas, as I will describe in the artist case studies in the following section. An interdisciplinary contemporary arts precinct, which was the government's vision for CWorks, is an excellent addition to the current range of places to present performance in Sydney. However, there are difficulties for a dance community that is best supported by a theatre-as-shelter model. CWorks is at present at odds with the vibrant, eclectic and resource-poor sector that is contemporary arts in Sydney resulting in many independent artists being unable to afford access to the new premises and resources, and many others choosing not to negotiate the strategic edifice.

Artists' Experiences

This section is guided by the following question: Has the place of the CWorks edifice been transformed over the past two years by the activities of the dance artists working in the space to create a theatre-as-shelter? The first show to premiere in PSpace's inaugural season was *Never Been This Far From Home* by independent dance artist Martin del Amo. Del Amo's solo work is often intricate and detailed in its body practice and realisation. Aware of his trademark subtle shifts of physicality, the designer for this show, Mirabelle Walters was concerned that del Amo was going to 'disappear' in the space. For Walters it was a difficult decision to compromise her aesthetic impulse to strip the space bare of any theatrical conventions. In order to create focus and intimacy for the solo performer she decided to hang the large black curtain around the theatre to frame the white floating floor. Fortunately this production was able to rehearse in the studio on-site prior to bumping-in to the theatre, a situation that was touted early on as a feature of the CWorks design and planning:

[T]he vision for this building was to create a flexible centre connecting 'making' spaces with 'presenting' spaces, in other words to house the continuum of performance practice from conceptual development through to creative development, rehearsal and public presentation.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Winning, Rex Cramphorn Lecture 2009.

Development and rehearsal of a new work in the same venue as the premiere performance season is a model of practice that many independent artists aspire to, although one that is rarely realised in Sydney for those working outside of company structures. The CWorks model is one that is becoming increasingly difficult to realise. In this instance the *Never Been This Far From Home* team used the similar scale of the rehearsal room and its proximity in the same building as the theatre to explore possibilities and discover things they had envisaged that had not been possible, prior to bumping into the theatre in production week.

In their first month of residence in CWorks, PSpace produced a number of free events to introduce themselves and the new venue to the local community of residents and artists. The year proceeded with four blocks of intensive programming each of which was to be presented over six weeks, presenting performances in the smaller of the two theatres, Track 19, and simultaneously utilising the rehearsal spaces for residencies during these six-week blocks.⁵⁷ During the first year PSpace animated the foyer, the car park and many other nooks and crannies of the cavernous space, providing artists with a scale never before experienced in Sydney. There were also months in between the programming of the ambitious projects when PSpace had no presence or visibility at all, of either artist's activities or opportunities for audiences. Whilst initial feedback from staff favours this model as a successful strategy for planning, the gaps in programming make it difficult for continuity of public profile and fewer opportunities for the dance community to meet.

Initially dance work continues to be programmed at the heart of the PSpace program with a new full-time dance producer being appointed in 2007 and the ReelDance dance screen festival and workshop organization becoming part of the PSpace. These two dance components were made possible following the amalgamation of One Extra and its resources into the organisational structure of PSpace prior to the move to CWorks.

⁵⁷ This is a very different format from the year round program at Cleveland Street and PSpace continues with such a structure at the time of writing, although there is debate about alternative presentation models.

In the second half of the second year of their tenancy PSpace facilitated a forum to discuss artists' experiences of the space.⁵⁸ Alan Schacher, a founding member of Gravity Feed and a member of the Key Users Reference Group, has said that his experience of the new institution was that it was 'like the old Performance Space but not the old Performance Space'. Schacher was taking issue with the fact that CWorks did not *belong* to PSpace. His interest was in PSpace managing and producing the entire building and hence having more input into the construction of the precinct's identity. Schacher makes large-scale movement performance, often manipulating imposing architectural set pieces. His experience of CWorks was primarily as a site of walls that dictated your choices for performance-making. Despite his concerns about a lack of *belonging* to the building he was inspired by the physical and material features of the building and interested in how the audience composes an imaginative history of the walls, with their visible burn marks and numerical markings on concrete surfaces. Schacher was one of the many artists at the forum who found it difficult to discuss PSpace and its engagement with the theatre space without discussing the foyer and the loss of qualities that the old foyer contributed at Cleveland Street.

In December 2007 Tess de Quincey's epic site-specific performance *The Stirring*, tested the boundaries of what was possible in the foyer, the unused loading docks, the roof cavities and other nooks and crannies. The initial inspiration for the work was the CWorks building and surrounds and its history. Jodie McNeilly enthused: '*The Stirring* plumbs the temporal dimension of the CarriageWorks, reconstituting its past, present and possible future ecology.'⁵⁹ Aspects of access and risk assessment overwhelmed the on-site making process and inhibited the degree to which it was possible for de Quincey and her company of dancers to inhabit the space. This inhabitation is an important part of BodyWeather practice and de Quincey set out to create a work that, as she describes it: 'was like taking hold of the building'.⁶⁰ However, de Quincey conceded that taking hold of the building was extremely difficult given the circumstances mentioned. The regulation of the edifice proved to

⁵⁸ *Imagining for Space* Forum.

⁵⁹ Jodie McNeilly, 'A Once and Future Building' in *RealTime*, no. 82, December 07-January 08 (Sydney, Open City Inc.), p. 29.

⁶⁰ Tess de Quincey, interview with the author, 29 April, 2009.

be a difficult barrier to the creative initiative of this project. De Quincey found that most negotiations with CWorks management revolved around efficiency, that is, their levels of efficiency not hers. With strict conditions imposed by CWorks on how to work in the space, de Quincey found that the relationship between the artists and PSpace changed. Even a year and a half after the event she continues to struggle with what *The Stirring* might have been and is committed to persevering with creating new site-specific works for the CWorks precinct. De Quincey is also committed to supporting a network of artists beyond the edifice, through her company de Quincey Co. She believes this community of BodyWeather artists will grow and many may prosper in the future without the constraints of CWorks.



Figures 17-18: de Quincey Co, *The Stirring*,
Performance Space at CarriageWorks, November 2007
Photographs by Heidrun Löhr

Jane McKernan from the dance trio The Fondue Set has another experience to tell. The Fondue Set was commissioned to make a new work specifically for the space in the area known as Bay 20. Their first work, *Evening Magic I*, was conceived and performed at the Hopetoun Hotel, a small corner pub and well-known live music venue in the inner city suburb of Surry Hills. Perversely the trio decided to make a sequel to their intimate first work, *Evening Magic II: Don't Stop Till You Get Enough* for the relatively large space of Bay 20. The Fondue Set had already played around with the scale and affect of the dancing human body in a short group work for *Nighttime II* a regular mixed program of short works in the PSpace program at CWorks. Their response after thinking: 'Wow! Let's fill it with people but isn't it going to be too big?' was what became 'the hooper routine', choreographed for a large number of people, spaced throughout the foyer. A similar response fuelled their vision for *Evening Magic II*.

The theatre space was stripped bare of curtains to acknowledge the largeness and expose the walls and all technical mechanisms and lighting. The stage space included three rock band set ups with drum kits, guitars and amplifiers, positioned in different areas of the space on small squares of carpet. The movable set elements were three-dimensional wooden letters in the same scale as the human body. The depth of the theatre produced a playful use of perspective. Quieter performance sections featuring the Fondue Set were juxtaposed with large ensemble sections involving forty dancers. The Fondue Set were inspired by the scale of Bay 20 and this influenced their decision to expose the space, thinking of it like a multi-purpose hall for school socials and sporting and cultural events.⁶¹

While the experience of producing *Evening Magic II* was essentially positive for The Fondue Set—as they were stimulated by an opportunity for large scale spectacle they had not previously experienced—there were however issues of limited access to rehearsal and theatre space and expectations that they would prepare the large-scale one-off event in a very short time. The Fondue Set is yet to realise any further projects at PSpace at CWorks despite the artistic and audience success of the last. A

⁶¹ Bay 20 is the smaller of the two theatre spaces. It occupies 528 square metres and has a ceiling height of 7.9 metres. Its audience seating capacity is 272. The largest theatre space, Bay 17 seats 800.

contributing factor in this lack of momentum for The Fondue Set is the decreased programming time that PSpace has in its new incarnation. Importantly, underlying all these experiences is the increase in expenses for artists and productions working at CWorks, which reduces the length of time they can afford to work there, and for some, makes it impossible to consider it as a place to create and present their work within a continuum of performance practice.

Making Room for the As-Yet-Unknown

Two years before the actual relocation of PSpace to CWorks and following the symposium on the occasion of the PSpace's 21st Birthday celebrations, Ian Maxwell proposed that:

In a very real sense, Performance Space, when it moves will end. The landscape will be fundamentally and irreversibly changed: an environmental cataclysm, perhaps, to really milk the metaphor; an errant asteroid wiping out the dinosaurs. In such times there can be no holding on. Rather, the invisible—the as-yet-unknown—will appear. In its new incarnation, Performance Space's obligation will be to allow for those appearances—and there is a very good chance that it-we-will not recognise them. That is far more challenging than holding on, requiring a rethinking of ideas about tradition: tradition not as maintenance of a status quo, but as a continuity that lets go.⁶²

Maxwell argues that with the move to CWorks, PSpace needs to change. What he calls 'the dinosaurs' I call professional memory and experience or social memory. I advocate not for holding on to tradition for its own sake but for recognition that the making and presenting processes of the independent dance sector are not being accommodated satisfactorily so as to make a significant contribution within this new arrangement. I argue for a rethinking, by both artists and institutions, of what is possible within the edifice for performance makers. Such rethinking will involve compromise by both parties, and require a revaluing of tradition where tradition is recognised as an important contributor to reinvention and innovation.

⁶² Maxwell, p. 14.

New Models for Artists and Organizations and Institutions

A model for success in dance has gained momentum over the past decade. It is one that can be clearly seen when artists work at CWorks. No longer is it enough to be just an exceptional dancer or an inspiring choreographer. The work in the dance studio is just a part of what is necessary for the continuing success of a dance career. The independent dance artist, without ongoing support of administrative infrastructure and with limited, often changeable resources, must excel in producing and presenting their work, successfully managing finances and generating economic viability for their practice and its product. In addition the independent artist is expected to identify and adopt methods for innovation, if they are to survive and remain relevant, not only in a independent setting but also when working within the mainstream structures.

The dance landscape in Sydney is largely identified by the public via the high-profile, purpose-built, public performance spaces and arts precincts where dance is presented and can be rehearsed. From these physical centres uneven flows of activity between dance artists and institutions mark the local map. The models of dance activity currently employed in these visible places dominate the dance landscape in Sydney. The centralised physical locations and the economic imperatives of maintaining their infrastructures encourage ways of working and interactions with artists that result in highly visible public outcomes inevitably resulting in production and presentation. However, these highly visible places, which CWorks aspires to be, can be limiting for independent dance artists. If CWorks is to be prioritised as a major arena for the practice and presentation of the work of independent dance artists, then the tensions of working with and in this institution must be addressed.

Significantly, in the Sydney landscape the independent artist needs to work with and through partnerships with organizations to achieve public presentation opportunities. In its incarnation at Cleveland Street, PSpace was both producer and deliverer of their own productions and identity. Current arts funding policy favours support for proposed projects that have already negotiated complex partnerships between artists

and institutions. This applies even to projects in early development stages when the production outcome is unknown. If the independent dance artist is to engage with funding structures and subsequent requirements then a great deal of negotiating of often complex collaborations and partnerships with institutions is necessary in order to secure producers and presentation opportunities before the work in the studio even begins. This preference for partnerships often comes at the expense of supporting the artists and the idea, prioritising instead the needs of the arts institution that selects cultural products for distribution.

This recent cultural policy trend has emerged in tandem with the advent of the well-resourced arts precincts and ‘requires new and more complex modes of operation, changes in old (often monolithic) institutions and new modes of thought and behaviour.’⁶³ As I have discussed, independent dancers are well placed to cope with the requirements of multi-skilling and are experienced workers in establishing and working within models of collaborative practices. However, in order for them to do this well as professional artists, they need financial support and understanding of the different needs of the different stages of the dance-making process. I have shown that these partnerships between individuals and institutions can provide significant opportunities for increased profile, access to resources and benefit-through-association for both participants. However, the pressure for independent dance artists to become part of the identity of larger institutions can be detrimental to the uniqueness of their work.

Another issue that should be considered when negotiating these mainstream and independent partnerships is each participant’s expectations of the amount of time required for preparation and rehearsal. Institutions are increasingly putting artists under pressure to work within shorter time frames. This thesis argues that if the collaborative models and interactions between independent dance artists, PSpace and CWorks are to be productive for all involved, then greater consideration must be paid to the length of time needed to build these partnership projects and to realise them. The complexity of these projects and the increased workload for individuals and institutions must also be addressed. As seen in the previous chapter hierarchical

⁶³ Maxwell, p. 14.

organizations find it difficult to cope with individuals who *criss-cross* institutional precincts, creating new relationships and interdisciplinary solutions to complex problems.⁶⁴ But in the case of CWorks, conceived to serve the contemporary arts, this must be accommodated and not negated, in order to find a way for these partnerships to reach full potential for all involved.

On the one hand these collaborations reduce risk for independent dance artists, but on the other hand they can constrain freedom of communication and action for the artist. Interactions with mainstream institutions often require that independent artists focus on short-term thinking and compliance processes (applications, grants and funding) rather than innovation (finding ways of practising and experimentation).

Conclusion

In this chapter I have given attention to an approach to contemporary arts in Sydney that has encouraged and corralled practitioners into 'arts precincts' at the expense of alternative spaces. The move of the alternative shelter of PSpace at Cleveland Street, home to many independent dance artists in Sydney, to the redeveloped contemporary arts precinct at CWorks is a timely example of this. As I have shown there are advantages for the independent dance sector in this new location at CWorks with the benefits of access to large presentational spaces and the potential to develop a broader audience base. However, this new precinct does not at the present time adequately support many processes, practices and activities that were at the core of the PSpace hub at Cleveland Street and which made it a unique shelter for independent dance in Sydney. The effect on the independent dance sector of the loss of this previous home is exacerbated by the wide-spread decreasing number of space resources in Sydney. Importantly for my investigation, this loss is intensified by the limited options of appropriately alternative places and spaces to practice and present dance.

Renowned locally, nationally and internationally, PSpace is recognised as the most established place for independent dance in Sydney, with its commitment to a theatre-

⁶⁴ Charles Handy, *The Age of Unreason* (London: Arrow Books, 1990).

shelter supporting artistic risk-taking and experimentation. As argued here the strategic edifice of CWorks, in its current structure, is not able to give priority to risk-taking and experimentation and has already obscured a number of independent ‘other’ voices, that had been well established in the tactical shelter of PSpace. I acknowledge that PSpace is gradually adapting to its new environment but I propose that for Ian Maxwell’s proposal to allow for – the as-yet-unknown – to appear, time and space need to be allocated for uncertainty and meanderings and dancers’ daydreamings. Currently these types of tactical behaviours are not possible.

As this chapter has shown, the continuum of practices of independent dance artists, from conception to presentation, are not as effectively supported by the CWorks arts precinct as they could be, with artists and organizations often hindered by the power imbalance of institutional and political forces. Independent dance artists must claim the value of their practices and stake a place and appropriate processes according to what they define as socially and culturally desirable projects. A new way of thinking about independent dance practice and the relationships it has with organizations, institutions and the city is needed to undertake this challenge. Dependence on government investment in buildings and infrastructures, such as CWorks, must be carefully considered and developing autonomy outside of the edifices must be valued and acknowledged by government funding. Arts production prescribed at an institutional level should be one of a few options and not the only one. Significantly, the relationship between PSpace and CWorks has become a focal point in the current *crisis of place and space* in Sydney.

Conclusion and Outlook

In 2002, when I began *Walking in Sydney Looking for Dancing*, causes for the state of crisis in which the small-to-medium dance sector had existed since the mid 1990s were attributed, by artists and organizations in the sector, to insufficient government funding. The approach of this thesis has been to reframe the crisis as one *of place and space* rather than simply financial structures and to describe and analyse the particularities of mainstream arts precincts and independent dance spaces and their relation to the associated dance practices and community networks of the independent dance sector in Sydney.

As discussed previously, the mainstream and independent dance sectors are to a large extent segregated, which creates a relationship that is both (a) perceived, as well as actual and true, plus (b) something that is being and can be overcome. This thesis has approached the segregation with regard to how it is expressed and/or caused and/or perpetrated through the buildings and spaces that affect as well as effect independent artists and their networks. My analysis has mapped the places and spaces that encourage or inhibit contact and communications for independent dance in Sydney. Thus I have illuminated what is missing from the dance map, in the form of both physical spaces, and resilient practices and networks. In addition, I have considered the different characteristics, behaviours and objectives of mainstream and independent dance processes, focusing on those factors that reflect a way of doing as much as a way of being for the independent dance sector in Sydney.

Addressing the Tensions Between Visible and Invisible

The visible places, identified in Chapters Four and Five as Sydney Opera House, The Wharf and CarriageWorks, are high-profile, purpose-built arts precincts that occupy prominent physical locations in the CBD. The production and consumption models of dance activity supported by these visible places dominate the public profile of

dance in the Sydney cultural landscape. For many independent artists, working in arts precincts is a necessary and welcome aspect of the dance-making process. Visible places offer the independent sector essential points of leverage for presenting work; they provide access to large venues and well-resourced production services, broader audience bases, and attract critical response, thereby enabling a higher public profile and validation for independent artists within a recognised mainstream aesthetic. These factors are often accompanied by favourable funding outcomes for the artist, increasing the potential for further partnerships with similar institutions.

However, it is the contention of this thesis that difficulties are frequently experienced in the engagement between independent artists and mainstream organizations in visible places. Although precincts can be advantageous places for final rehearsal processes and public presentation opportunities this thesis has shown these visible places are unable to support the full continuum of dance processes engaged in by the independent artist, especially research, development and practice. The economic imperative for precincts and the mainstream organizations that work within them—to maintain large administrative and production infrastructures and thus generate consistent box office returns—promotes expedient rehearsal processes, predominantly orientated to public production outcomes. The pressure of brief rehearsal processes and highly visible public outcomes offers few prospects for the independent artist who prioritises experimentation, and dance-making processes that develop gradually.

This thesis has discussed how invisible spaces, often identified as peripheral to the mainstream centre, offer a fruitful alternative to visible places for the independent sector. Chapter Three provided case-studies of successful alternative dance space models such as Omeo, One Extra and Queen Street Studios and Chapter Five discussed the home of PSpace at Cleveland Street. These invisible spaces and theatre-shelters can be seen as research laboratories for the development of individual dance artists and their practices and for the development of the art form. Independent dance spaces, with transient premises and flexible infrastructures are typically characterised by collaborative, responsive interactions and dance community activities that prioritise support for experimental and investigative

practices, in contrast to the large managerial infrastructures and production-driven systems of the visible places that are defined in relation to quantifiable outcomes. Whilst not generally known to a broad public, invisible spaces are recognised within the sector as providing a vital ‘home’ for independent artists. Invisible spaces facilitate and generate artists’ networks, providing a place for crucial face-to-face interactions, which sustains a community of practice.

Co-ordination not Control

Whilst this thesis questions whether the major arts facilities provide a suitable match for independent sector practices, it does not advocate a simple rejection of institutional engagement by independent artists. More importantly I argue that increased support of invisible spaces is crucial. However, given that visible places are likely to continue to be given priority by cultural policy makers and funding bodies—if we wish to preserve a vibrant independent sector, which is in some ways dependent on the institutions—it is crucial that the tensions experienced by independent artists when working with and within these institutions be addressed.

This thesis has suggested that complexity theory offers a lens through which to address these tensions. First, both mainstream and independent artists and organizations need to acknowledge that they participate in the same sector and second, that the processes of their participating in the same sector involve exchange, interaction and interdependency. The interactions between institutions, communities and individuals, need to break down a number of barriers, particularly current institutional arrangements and habitual ways of thinking by artists, which are not keeping up with the pace of change in this complex artistic environment.

The Campbelltown Arts Centre Contemporary Dance Program (CAC) was initiated in 2008 by CAC Director, Lisa Havilah and independent dance artist and member of The Fondue Set, Emma Saunders. Its inaugural dance strategy is currently the only example, in New South Wales, of institutional engagement and co-ordination with the independent dance sector, which this thesis addresses. Campbelltown Arts Centre provides a shelter for artists’ that affords them significant time to dream, with

projects spanning a three-year period. Supported by the resources of a large institution, priority is given to development of new contexts for intercultural and interdisciplinary dance practice, without the onus on public presentation.¹

Coordination between all parts of the system, not control from ‘the centre’—that is the mainstream sector and its visible places—is needed to achieve a rich and varied dancescape. In order to realise constructive coordination between the parts, it will be necessary to develop place resources that support tactical practices and autonomous management of the independent sector. Importantly for my investigation, it is significant that viable invisible spaces are missing from the current map of dance in Sydney. If these invisible spaces are ‘located’ and ‘materially recognised’ as vital contributors to the entire system, then the diversity of practice, quality and future growth of the dance sector as a whole will be positively effected.²

FraserStudios

Located just around the corner from Queen Street, Chippendale in Kensington Street, FraserStudios is one new inter-disciplinary arts initiative that has managed to garner such recognition, operating successfully as an invisible space with occasional strategic approaches similar to the visible place. FraserStudios is an initiative of the Queen Street Studio management team who continue with their principle ‘run by artists for artists’. The location of FraserStudios, on a narrow lane in inner-city Chippendale, suggests a place that is located in the ‘cracks’ of the city. Its identity has been characterised by a diversity of independent artists’ practices that favour innovation and experimentation over production, and its reputation has been upheld by artists’ positive experiences of support and connection to other artists, promoting a ‘sense of belonging’ and well-being among the sector. FraserStudios is a place where diverse clusters of artists are able to interact and create links with other clusters, form networks that enable self-organization, and where the capacity for artists to respond to change is generated. The location and identity of FraserStudios

¹ Since November 2009, when Saunders took time out to have a baby, I have been working in the role of Dance Curator at Campbelltown.

² Ahearne, p. 100.

is in stark contrast to the prominent locations and flagship role of the precincts and the institutions housed within them.

The once derelict two-storey building is located on the edge of a large construction site the size of one whole city block that was once the Carlton United Brewery site. The multinational company Frasers Property sponsors the FraserStudios building and the agreement will continue for the duration of the redevelopment of the brewery site into an inner-city village. FraserStudios houses a visual arts residency program and multi-purpose performing arts space. Strong support from the City of Sydney and the State Government has been brokered for the artistic programs at FraserStudios.

This thesis posits FraserStudios as an exemplary model of a place that provides a shelter for independent artists and houses an invisible space, by means of financial and in-kind support from business and government as well as from the local artistic community. In so doing, this model for invisible space employs both strategies, demonstrated by its working partnerships with the Sydney City Council and Frasers' multinational company, and tactics, including its regular informal performance forums that provide a platform for artistic exchange and community, which is what is needed for independent dance practice to prosper in Sydney.

Complexity for a Dynamic Future

Complexity theory has been used in this thesis as a means of discovering ways in which the independent dance sector as a self-organizing system, adapts, survives and repositions itself in times of crisis. This thesis has demonstrated that the application of complexity theory for dance practice has a close connection with Goodwin's summary of business and management thinking:

The suggestions of complexity theory for business practice are a flattening of the management hierarchy, distribution of control through the system with fluid networks of interaction between the parts, and the necessity of periods of chaos for the emergence of appropriate new order. The move towards a more anarchic, spontaneous dynamic is clearly threatening to the controlling managers, but it appears to be the path to creativity and diversification. This in no way guarantees survival just as there is no long-term survival

guaranteed to adopted, adapting spaces in evolution. What it allows for is innovative expression, which has intrinsic value for the members of the enterprise, as well as providing the best chance of the organisation's persisting in a constantly changing corporate world.³

With regard to the dynamic networks of the independent dance system, my discussion of the value of coordination rather than control, which Goodwin calls 'fluid networks of interactions', promotes an appreciation of the vital contribution the independent and small-to-medium dance sector makes to the health of the entire system. This understanding could prove essential in order to move forward and provide the right opportunities for independent artists and their practices and community networks to flourish in the future.

The practice of the independent artist outside the mainstream precincts and institutions explored in Chapter Three demonstrated that to be successful at creating original dance work, discovering new things and engaging in evolving artistic problems, requires constant practice, long training, intense focus and perseverance. An assumption can be made that 'the real work' happens 'on the floor' in the dance studio. In a perennial dance-making process, as discussed in Chapter Two, periods of seemingly unproductive time, often manifested as periods with deficient funding or without employment, gives the appearance that the artist is inactive because no visible creative outcomes are produced. This thesis has shown that these low product output and low profile periods can be extremely advantageous in establishing possibilities for future activity if artists have access to places where face-to-face connections can be made. These periods in a perennial process provide opportunities where communication, altruistic behaviour and building relationships with other artists and organizations can occur, ultimately strengthening the dynamics and organization of the sector.

In addition, without the pressure and expectations of public outcomes there is time for experimentation (most often unpaid) and for innovation, which can be shared at informal studio showings, offering intrinsic value for all members of the independent dance sector. Involvement in the sector that occurs in the 'fallow' period is largely

³ B. C. Goodwin, 'Community, Creativity and Society', in *Soundings* 5, 1997, pp. 111-122, p. 117.

through activities that are not controlled by economic and market forces, and which contribute in a favourable way to the well-being of the artist. These activities may include active participation in committees and connections to professional and social networks associated with but not necessarily directly related to the work in the studio. For most artists the fallow periods are off-set by periods of production and engagements with mainstream organizations in the sector. This cycle of intermittent small and larger-scale production outcomes facilitates relationships between artists, and between artists and institutions, and gives shape to the flows of the perennial pattern. Although this process does not guarantee survival, it does provide an optimal model for independent artists. This thesis has argued that artists may experience a higher quality of practice, and sense of confidence, if they accept and maximise this pattern of perennial production. It also allows time to develop a sharing of control through the system with an ebb and flow of connections between independent artists and institutions. Multiple networks and inter-relationships can be engaged with in different ways at different times and can provide more opportunities for collaboration through creative play and the consolidation of these interactions.⁴

Outlook

As a means to address *the crisis of place and space* and acknowledge the value of the self-sufficient nature of independent artists and give credit to their aptitude, this thesis proposes that a government policy initiative for managing space ‘by and for artists’ that reflects the unique identity and needs of the independent dance community could be established. A policy-level intervention could support independent artists, both individuals and groups, with the money and other resources needed to become more fully involved in the shaping of their own artistic workspaces, thereby prioritising ‘a culture of development over a culture of consumption’.⁵ Ideally, government involvement could be kept to a minimum and government direction resisted, as ‘top down’ institutional management does not

⁴ Goodwin, p. 117.

⁵ Ahearne, p. 97.

fundamentally attract independent artists' participation.⁶ An initiative such as this would require government to seek guidance from independent artists on criteria most applicable to the artists.

This 'decentralising' approach could support a range of invisible spaces to operate autonomously as dance hubs in a spatial mosaic dispersed throughout the city. These hubs could be initiated by artists outside government designated arts precincts, making it possible for independent artists to develop meaningful links with local communities and businesses, and hence gain a public profile through association. This principle of subsidiarity, whereby the local artist is allowed power over her or his own decision-making processes, could turn the current dance landscape inside-out so that artists and their networks of relationships and immaterial resources could, where desired and appropriate, be privileged over buildings, infrastructures and audiences. At the same time, this thesis argues for development of an inclusive dance landscape where the precincts coexist with the wider ecology of dance activity. One should not preclude the other, but rather each should complement the dance landscape through their differences of size and purpose. By supporting a variety of invisible spaces independent artists could be afforded the opportunity to prevail and be positioned more strongly in the dance landscape.

This thesis has demonstrated that the rapid diminution of affordable and appropriate places for independent dance-making gave rise to the perception of 'crisis' in the independent sector in Sydney: a situation that needs to be reframed as a crisis of place and space. It has also explored how the application of complexity theory, which illuminates the role of self-organization and the interdependent dynamics of the sector, can assist in the maintenance and sustenance not only of the independent dance community but the dance sector as a whole. Interactions between independent artists and the mainstream companies, by means such as exposure to different practices and sharing of resources, can, even if in only small ways, nourish each other, strengthen the sector and realign the current polarised positions of mainstream dance and independent dance. As an active member of the sector, it is my hope that

⁶ The discussion of CWorks in Chapter Five provides an instructive example of a situation where a government provided a building and imposed upon it organizational structures incompatible with the contemporary performance sector that the building was re-designed to house.

these insights will contribute to further serious discussion at local, national and international level regarding how best to nurture a place for experimentation and diversity that is crucial to excellence in dance.

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Appendix A

Mystory

Mystory

#1

Myspacestory

a recollection of dance studios

text: Julie-Anne Long

I was born in Auckland in 1961 and from the tender age of seven and a half, learnt ballet at The Jill Proudfoot School of Dancing. Proud foot, no kidding!

Initially I attended ballet class one afternoon a week after school. Then two, then three, then four, then weekends as well. My Mum would drive me to St Pius School in Glenn Innes, a suburb in east Auckland characterised by its government housing and large Maori and Islander population. Dance classes were held in a large, dark brown, brick, school hall with perpetually dusty floors, long rows of stacked chairs against the walls and a little stage at one end. To me, the cavernous space was a magical place. I enjoyed feeling small in the large space I enjoyed the buzz that moving amongst a flock of bodies gave me. The space felt unconfined, as I waltzed down the diagonal and circled the room with run-run-jeté, run-run-jeté, run-run-jeté, run-run-jeté ... I looked forward to the end of the class the most, because this was when we improvised to music. You could do whatever you liked and go wherever you wanted, even if you felt the urge to get up onto the stage behind a proscenium.

As I moved through the grades of the Royal Academy of Dancing and progressed to the position of one of the senior students in the school, classes moved to a smaller, cleaner hall beside a church in the same suburb. The rectangular, prefabricated building sat perched on a street corner and was used on the weekends for Sunday School and church functions. Net curtains on all the windows kept out the prying eyes of passers-by on the footpath. Perversely as our bodies took up more space our studio got smaller. All the better for concentrating on line and technical details and leaving behind the free form and expansiveness of improvising.

Around about the age of twelve or thirteen the family room downstairs at my house was fitted out with a full-length mirror and barre screwed into the wall in one corner; my home studio. I would regularly get up before school and practice in front of the mirror, with especially feverish sessions around exam time. On the weekends, a little stable of private students who attended the same ballet school as me came for one-on-one tutoring and mentoring with their competition/Eisteddfod dances. It was here that I first started choreographing dances for students a year or two younger than me and got paid for it, a cottage industry that fitted the scale of my own home.

As my desire to become a dancer progressed, a ballet dancer mind you, I took classes with a number of other teachers as well as Miss Proudfoot. Mrs Murray had

a large established school in Western Auckland quite some distance from the eastern suburbs where I lived. She and her team of teachers taught at her family home in Mangere. To enter you walked up a long driveway to the front door. Off to the left through the laundry, was the dance studio; a long extension that stretched away from the house like an extra appendage. Mrs Murray had six sons and I remember there was often smelly football gear at the entrance to the dance studio and the boys were often loitering around the door of the studio. While we were warming up Mrs Murray even popped out to put on a load of washing or put the dinner in the oven in between classes. This was a studio connected to the everyday.

Dance studios in domestic settings became a feature of my latter years in New Zealand. I also went for private lessons to Mrs Halberg. Her studio was in the basement of her double storey home in Epsom. You entered through the garage. The room had almost square proportions, which is a little bit disconcerting for a dance studio as it's hard to get a sense of a horizon line out and beyond where you are facing. I often had to backtrack, pull up short of finishing a move, or hold back and just mark it at Mrs Halberg's. I used to quietly cry at Mrs Halberg's lessons because I badly wanted to 'get it right,' but it was never quite good enough for her. She was a stickler for detail. Maybe this was because it was difficult to see the big picture in her intimate studio?

Towards the end of my time in Auckland, a totally different type of studio and ballet teacher, entered my life. Dorothea Ashbridge chain-smoking cigarettes, in her pink terry towelling tracksuit and neatly heeled dance shoes, advocated freedom of expression and letting-go, in her rented studio in Karangahape Rd. K. Road was at the top of Queen Street, the seedier end of the city. This was the first studio where I had to cross out of my everyday existence through a grittier foreign public world in order to get to the familiar confines of the dance studio. Along the stretch of street where Dorothea's studio was were shops that were strange to me. Grocery stores selling foods like taro and salted shrimp, that smelt like nothing I knew and department stores with super cheap piles of clothing and cosmetics. I used to admire from the safe distance of the window, the exotic fabrics of the Indian sari shop. Dorothea's was for me the first of many dance studios in many cities where arrival was marked by a seemingly endless climb to the top of the stairs. Away from the home turf and scale of the studio in the backyard or basement this was my first grown up studio.

In 1980 I crossed the Tasman to study at the Victorian College of the Arts, School of Dance.

The Victorian College of the Arts was my first experience of dancing full-time. When I auditioned for the College in 1979 and commenced studies in January 1980 the dance school was located in temporary accommodation, in an old factory converted into dance studios, in a working-class part of the city, on Nicholson Street, North Fitzroy. My three years at the VCA were marked by a progressive loosening and opening out of my previous teenage life in New Zealand. In Melbourne I lived in a share house with fellow dance classmates. This was the beginning of a merging of my private and professional lives, with friendships and intimate bonds forged in the dance studio that survive to this day, some with and some without the space of the studio. Rehearsals would finish at college and then continue into the wee hours of the night in some form or another in the lounge room or kitchen at our neat terrace house in Richardson Street, Albert Park or a bit later on the ramshackle villa on Marine Parade, St. Kilda or the final student abode on High Street, Prahran directly in line with the busy tram intersection. Six months into my first year the dance

school moved to take possession of the newly completed, purpose- build studios on St Kilda Road. The dance school was situated between the stately old buildings of the College main offices and the National Gallery of Victoria, on a highly visible stretch of the main avenue in and out of the city. Every day flocks of young dancers walked in convoy to Flinders Street Station, creating an obvious presence and connecting the precinct of the College to the city and its diverse workers. Floor to ceiling windows in Studio One faced the street and enabled people passing by to see what was going on inside. When standing at the barre for lengthy periods of time the view to the outside world provided a distraction from the task at hand – my own body, its pleasures and its limitations.

Having stuck-out the institution till the bitter end, I was fortunate to walk away with my first professional dancing ‘gig’ – a two year contract with Human Veins Dance Theatre. The only problem was, it was in Canberra.

Following college I relocated to Canberra and moved into a room in a house with a policewoman and her boyfriend who worked in IT. That didn't last long. Within a matter of three months I had moved out and into a house with two dancers from the company and an actor from the local theatre company, a rather closeted and incestuous world albeit a fun and stimulating one. Human Veins Dance Theatre was the resident dance company at the Gorman House Arts Centre, a collection of single story buildings that housed arts administration offices, a gallery and artists' studios, for visual artists, as well as a youth theatre company and the dance company. Human Veins had two specially fitted studios with dance floors, office space, change rooms and a green room. In this small arts precinct there were often public activities; dance classes in the evening run by members of the company, exhibitions in the gallery and performances in the modest studio performance spaces of both performance companies. An overwhelming memory for me, of my two years with Human Veins is informed by spending so much time in a studio that felt like a bunker. With windows high up in the walls it was impossible to look outside from inside the studio. I remember feeling suffocated and cloistered the more work I was involved in that was made in this place. I believe that the inward looking space of the studio in Canberra, lead me to yearn for a new place to work and so...

Just when my contract expired and I was eager to be leaving Canberra, I received an offer to work with Kai Tai Chan and his One Extra Company in Sydney [...]

Mystory

#2

Meeting MissXL

an interview

text: Julie-Anne Long (2002)

In March 2002 I performed my first full-length solo show *MissXL: A Contemporary Burlesque in 3 Acts*. The evening consisted of three short works *Mrs Whippy*, *Cleavage* and *Leisure Mistress*. The three works were performed by myself, Julie-Anne Long in the persona of MissXL, with MissXL playing three different characters; Mrs Whippy, Miss XL and the Leisure Mistress.

This vignette consists of an interview conducted by myself as the interviewer, in dialogue with myself as MissXL. It was written as part of the publicity for the performances. It is one part fictitious interview, one part ironic 'take' on the dance scene in Sydney, one part truth, and all parts vital to the building of mystory in this thesis.

In his chapter on performance texts, Norman Denzin draws attention to the so-called objective methods of truth seeking and illustrates the mystory as texts that "invoke and then criticise standard social science methods of research, including doing parodies of the interview as a tool for gathering objective data about the world of the other."¹ In *Meeting MissXL*, JAL the interviewer, meets MissXL the performer. Disarmed by MissXL's manner and temperament, JAL, the interviewer, in her nervousness speaks over the interviewee and expounds her own agenda and pre-determined interpretation of the artists work.

¹ Norman K. Denzin, *Interpretive Ethnography: Ethnographic Practices for the 21st Century* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1997), p. 115.

Meeting MissXL

Dance artist Julie-Anne Long meets associate MissXL for a cool drink and a quiet chat about XL's upcoming show.

THE SCENE: Hotel Hollywood, downtown Surry Hills, a balmy summer afternoon.

THE DRINKS: Shandies for two.

JAL: MissXL you are a performer whose work fell out of favour in a time of extreme physicality...

MissXL: Was that a compliment? *Dazzling smile.*

JAL: I remember your days as a mover and shaker and participant in uplifting art.

MissXL looks right, left and right again.

MissXL: Thank you. *Fierce handshake.*

JAL speedily sips from her shandy.

MissXL: *dreamily* I fell from favour in an up-decade. My movement attempted to reach its former heights. In recent years I have been overtaken by fears of gravity. *MissXL sips slowly from her shandy.*

MissXL: In a time when youthful vigour and emerging talent is greatly valued and encouraged I find myself drifting with intent.

JAL: That's good... isn't it?

MissXL: Never again will I be young and emerging, though I don't care much for a return to those times *drifting away* they were hard, terribly hard. But there have been harder *coming back*. Regrettably I find myself in a rather unfashionable spot for a dancer: I'm a submerging artist.

JAL: Yes, I see. But then you've never been one for fashion or trends when it comes to dance. Tell me, what of your current relationship to 'the dance'?

Lengthy pause.

MissXL: I am interested in a dance style that is grounded in the aesthetics of transgression, inversion and the grotesque. A contemporary burlesque.

JAL: A wayward attitude to dance perhaps?

MissXL: Perhaps.

JAL: Perhaps because your concerns in movement over the past years have been heading towards the miniscule, the particular, the pedestrian, the qualities of dance for which the audience must scan closely.

MissXL: Mmmm.

JAL: Tell me about your impending solo show. In making solo work, utilising yourself as the raw material, you inevitably construct a character, which is larger-than-life. The persona appears to be a composite of reality and artifice.

MissXL: And...

JAL: Your performances challenge the audience/performer relationship by being both intimate and theatrical, upfront and introspective.

MissXL: Do they?

JAL: Your performance style is both detached and on display, juxtaposing grand theatrical manners and gestures with an unnerving intimacy and pseudo familiarity.

MissXL: I suppose so but...

JAL: You appear to be interested in the slippages between different genres and styles and you enjoy employing shifting methods and changing frames of reference.

MissXL: I do?

JAL: Most of your work plays with the dichotomy between humour and sadness. But excuse me I must stop, you have a show that you need to publicise, please...

MissXL: Picture this: an evening with MissXL – revealing her *Cleavage*, reducing dance to a minimum as the *Leisure Mistress* and lurking in the streets as the mysterious *Mrs Whippy* in her ice cream van. With assistance from my clever collaborators the theatre space will be transformed into an intimate installation, moving from the curved walls, undulating floors, nooks and crannies of *Cleavage* to the hyper-real domesticity of *Leisure Mistress*.

JAL: Sounds positively perverse and I mean that in the best possible way. But back to 'the dance'. Is it through dance performance that you can express yourself most succinctly?

MissXL: Well you know what Martha always said "Once a dancer always a dancer..."

JAL orders another shandy.

MissXL: Let the dance speak for itself

A film by Julie-Anne Long and Samuel James

Aust, 2002, 7 min, BW DVD

Performer/Choreographer: Julie-Anne Long

Filmmaker: Samuel James

As a result of a serious injury, MissXL has been missing from the dance scene for quite some time. During her confinement some ideas for a final performance begin to take shape. She scribbles a few moves – but nothing to excite a dance critic... In this rare footage we see MissXL reach terpsichorean heights in a dancer's demise. Following years of stressful rest her body only momentarily remembers the previously rigorous demands she once made on it.

In the final dance (“the first I ever performed”) the Leisure Mistress undertakes a costume change which proves disastrous. In a hair net and an undersized dress which gapes at the zipper, she cavorts about the stage performing derivative contemporary dance movements in an attempt to remain relevant to her audience (having described herself as a “submerging artist” in the age of the emerging artist). Somehow this final image captures what Julie-Anne Long is so good at conjuring and performing in dance: the weird and wonderful world of the grotesque and the anxieties that form it.”

Kerrie Schaefer²

In a faded pastel dress, with bare feet, MissXL as the Leisure Mistress walks along a catwalk to a set of stairs [stage left]. She negotiates each tread just slowly enough to let us take in her descent, to really see each moment of negotiation. She's hobbling, ever so slightly, catching the weight of her transference from one foot to the other in her hip. (I think she's trying to save her 'bad knee'.) Step after gingerly-negotiated-one-at-a-time step, she reaches the bottom, pauses, then makes her way (more confidently) to centre stage. She breathes in. Executes a series of steps, an enchantment. (The bits she can no longer manage – the triple pirouette, the cabrioles³ – are replaced by finger 'turns' and scissor arms with an ecstatic tossing of the head.) Returning to centre stage she breathes in, again. Her chest inflates and expands, breath moving out through her long-expanding reach. Arms outstretched, she begins to spin – not a fast spin, not a slow spin – but a spin of moderate speed. As the rhythm of her padding, turning feet settles in and the skirt of her pastel dress billows out, we see her ample legs and we watch her spin. Her soft turning is permeated with the past: the spin that she just did and all her other spins and the spins of others. With time to watch I am made aware of her soft focus, her eyes downcast, her still head, her fleshy knees. Then almost inaudibly, a small voice emerges from the spinning: 'help' (spin ... spin ... spin) – the light fades. Shameful, shameless, pathetic, poignant, I am moved to tears for all that is lost and remains in the repetitive action of this dancer's spinning.

Amanda Card⁴

² Kerrie Schaefer, 'Life-sized dance' in *RealTime* no. 49, June-July 2002 (Sydney: Open City) p. 38.

³ A cabriole is 'an allegro step in which the extended legs are beaten in the air': <http://www.learntodance.com/online%20ballet%20lesson.hm>.

⁴ Amanda Card, "Temporal Surrender" p. 29 in Lisa Haviilah, Emma Saunders Susan Gibb (Eds.), *What I think about when I think about dancing* (Sydney: Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2009), pp. 29-35.

Mystory

#3

Project *WORKSPACE*

an application for funding

text: Julie-Anne Long (2001)

Part one of *Mystory* is a proposal I submitted for Project *WORKSPACE*, in 2001. Project *WORKSPACE* was a funding initiative from the Dance Board of the Australia Council, instigated as a response to the challenges that independent dance artists were facing in finding appropriate and affordable dance space. The money available to each artist (\$1,000) was relatively modest but it was recognition from the Dance Board of the importance of space and the difficulties independent dance artists were having securing it without adequate finances.

My application was written at a time when I was developing choreographic ideas for a solo work *Leisure Mistress*. I was 'making do' working mainly in the evenings in my lounge room.⁵ This schedule was due, partly to the paid work and family responsibilities that I was involved with during the days, and partly because I didn't have adequate financial resources to hire a studio for my unfunded dance practice. Prior to this I was interested in pedestrian, everyday movement and the communication potential of gestural languages in dance performance. So, working in my lounge room served to stimulate further these choreographic concerns and deepen my investigation into minimal movement scores for *MissXL*. The movement sequences I created for the performance *Leisure Mistress* were directly influenced by the domestic scale: an eye dance, performed sitting⁶; a gestural arm dance, performed in a horizontal position; a dance from my youth, recollected through 'marking' the turns, jumps and extensions with my hands.⁷


Despite having adapted to 'making do' by working on *Leisure Mistress* in my lounge room late at night. The situation was a compromise that did restrain my ideas for the new work. I identified that I also required time and space outside of my home setting, in order to spend periods of time with uninterrupted focus and to allow other performance possibilities to develop, as I articulated in my proposal to the Australia Council's Project *WORKSPACE* initiative that follows. The benefit of Project *WORKSPACE* rent subsidy was short term, and the support to finance hire of rehearsal space suited my needs at the time. However, it was by no means a solution to the larger crisis of space, at the heart of this thesis.

⁵ Please refer to 2001 Project *WORKSPACE* Proposal for Julie-Anne Long page 3.

⁶ This *mystory* should be read in conjunction with viewing the short dance film *An Old Australian Folkdance* (attached as Appendix One). This film was made using archival footage from a performance of *MissXL: A Contemporary Burlesque in 3 Acts*.

⁷ *Miss XL: let the dance speak for itself* was a film I made, with video maker Samuel James, using archival footage from the dress rehearsal of *MissXL: A Contemporary Burlesque in 3 Acts*.

INFORMATION



A U S T R A L I A
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Dance Board 2001 Project **WORKSPACE**

when?
Deadline for proposals: 31 May 2001
Activity can commence from: 15 July 2001
Activity must be completed by: 31 December 2001

how?
 Refer to the attached proposal guidelines.
 Applicants are advised they must speak to the assistant program officer, Kelly Marshall on 02 9215 9164 or toll-free on 1800 226 912 prior to submitting a proposal.

who?
 This initiative is open to all individual choreographers, dancers/movement artists, as individuals only. Monies will be paid to individuals only and shall not be auspiced by a third party.

what?
 There has been a concern for some time about the availability of affordable and appropriate workspaces for dance activity.
 The Dance Board will provide up to 24 space grants of \$1000 each to individual dancers and choreographers. The focus of this project is to provide a key resource to individual artists rather than an assessment of the work being developed.

Proposals will be considered within their State groupings and grants will be offered to the three proposals in each State and Territory that meet the criterion to the highest degree. Twenty-four grants will be awarded.


This initiative takes place in addition to the regular grant programs of the Dance Board and in no way interferes with the ability of individuals to submit other applications to the Australia Council.

What the grant can be used for

- The grants may contribute to any stage in the life of a dance work and there is no obligation for a public outcome.
- The grants may be used towards studio time for developing work processes or choreographic material where the 'work' or production is not yet finalised.
- The space can be used for any dance purpose such as rehearsing work, informal showings or as space for filming work.

372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills NSW 2010 Australia PO Box 788, Strawberry Hills NSW 2012
 Phone (02) 9215 9000 Toll free 1800 226 912 Fax (02) 9215 9111 www.ozco.gov.au

The Australia Council is the Federal Government's arts funding and advisory body.



Australia Council
for the Arts

2001 Project WORKSPACE Proposal for Julie-Anne Long

The Work.

Over the past five years I have shifted my focus to incorporate making solo work for myself. To date I have worked in my own lounge room and occasionally at the Randwick Literary Institute, when I have been able to afford it. Upstairs there is a large, warm, oval shaped, carpeted room and downstairs there is a small, cold hall with a wooden floor. Neither spaces are conventional dance studio spaces (reflected in the community hall rates) but they suit my purpose perfectly! (Inexpensive rates and easy access).

Obviously my lounge room and these workspaces have greatly influenced the working processes of my most recent work, notably the gestural nature of the movement material and its spatial relationship to a more domestic scale. This has been a conscious choice, and I am committed to pursuing this way of working for at least one more body of work – who knows, by the time I hit my mid-forties, I may be keen to “eat up the space” and jete again! But that mode of physicality is not relevant to this present work.

I am now at a stage where I would like to embark on a new series of solo work beginning with Nun’s Picnic in collaboration with painter Lucy Culleton, inspired by the Jeffrey Smart painting of the same name. As part of my initial research and development period I would like to spend some time alone in a space to investigate my initial ideas for this work. By the end of this year I would hope to be in a position where the concept would be clear enough for Lucy and I to begin the more intensive stage of our collaboration. To find the space for Nun’s Picnic I need to move out of home. I want to rid myself of the distractions and interruptions that come from working at home and I need to have access to a larger, uncluttered floor space.

The Space

To state the obvious: affordable and appropriate workspaces in Sydney are difficult to find. \$1,000 would rent a studio space in Sydney for approximately one and a half weeks full time based on the current rates around town, eg:

The Edge: \$25 per hour/\$10 per hour subsidised “Dance Support” rate

Gala Studios: \$675 per week plus GST.

Addison Road: \$500 per week

Hiring of space in an intensive block is not of great interest for me in relation to my solo work process. Firstly it is too expensive and secondly I have arrived at a process where I prefer to work for a couple of days a week, over a longer period of time. This schedule enables me to continue my freelance paid work (in order to subsidise my largely unpaid solo work) and it allows for unexpected family and personal commitments.

Request

I propose to work at the Randwick Literary Institute, 60 Clovelly Road, Randwick, for 2 days per week over a 15 week period, beginning 4 weeks in August and continuing 11 weeks during October-December.

*15 weeks x 2 days = 30 days of workspace @ \$33 per day = \$990 (includes GST)

In reply please quote

Project Officer: Kelly Marshall
Ph : 02 9215 9164
Email: k.marshall@ozco.gov.au

28 June 2001

Ms Julie Anne Long
 64 Great Buckingham Street
 Redfern
 NSW 2016



AUSTRALIA COUNCIL
 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills
 Sydney NSW 2010 Australia
 Postal Address
 PO Box 788
 Strawberry Hills NSW 2012
 Telephone (02) 9215 9000
 Toll-free (1800) 22 6912
 Fax (02) 9215 9111
 www.ozco.gov.au

Dear Julie Anne,

Re: Project *WORKSPACE*

I am pleased to advise you that, having considered your proposal to Project *WORKSPACE*, the Dance Board of the Australia Council has approved \$1000 for the following purpose:

to work at the Randwick Literary Institute.

This grant is subject to conditions as outlined in the attached Conditions of Grant.

Project *WORKSPACE* is an initiative run by the Dance Board in response to the critical need for access to studios and workspaces. Thirty six proposals were received and the final selection was made by a subcommittee of Dance Board members.

As you may know the Dance Board made a special allocation of \$24,000 for this initiative. While all the proposals demonstrated the need for rent subsidy, successful applicants articulated more clearly the benefit to their project or their practice. The panel were pleased to support 24 artists under this initiative. These artists are listed on the following page.

If you would like to accept this offer you should read and sign the attached Letter of Agreement, and return it to me at the address above. If you have any questions please contact Kelly Marshall, Assistant Program Officer at the Australia Council on 02 9215 9164.

On behalf of the subcommittee, I would like to thank you for responding to the invitation to submit a proposal to the initiative.

I wish you every success with your activities.

Yours sincerely

Rosalind Richards

Rosalind Richards
 Manager
 Dance Board

An Old Australian Folk Dance

Archival footage of “Eye Dance”, a performance by MissXL
Australia, 2002, 3min, Colour DVD

Performer/Choreographer: Julie-Anne Long
Camera: Sherridan Green

Leisure Mistress: I'd like to perform for you an old Australian folk dance. No no no, not that one... the other one... And I'd like to dedicate it to an old friend of mine; he was a marvellous actor, a wonderful dancer and a rather silly singer... Sir Robert Helpmann... here's to you Bobby...

Filmed at the Seymour Centre, Downstairs Theatre, Chippendale, Sydney, 6 April 2002.

Long's world weary Leisure Mistress, modelled in part on Marlene Dietrich in her later performing life, is wheeled into the performance space by a faithful assistant (Victoria Spence). Dressed in blue chiffon with oversized faux diamond rings dripping off her fingers, the Leisure Mistress repeatedly tucks a wayward section of blonde bob behind her ear. Her first dance (she announces each one numerically) is performed lying on her back. Only her hands and feet move in repetitive phrases in time with a perky musical track. The other dances are similarly compressed variations of the Diva's once famous dance pieces now performed in absurdly reduced form.

Life-sized dance' Kerrie Schaefer RT49 June/July 2002 p. 38.

IN SEPTEMBER 1975, MARLENE DIETRICH PERFORMED AT
HER MAJESTY'S THEATRE, RAILWAY SQUARE, SYDNEY,
AUSTRALIA.

Monday, September 29... “[t]here were signs of movement at the left of the stage and everyone started intently in that direction. Then, suddenly, a hank of hair fell into view from behind the curtain, followed by a glimpse of clutching hands, and sounds of scuffling, and Marlene stumbled backwards to the bare wooden floor. There was shocked silence for a moment, broken by a cruel round of sarcastic applause. Then the curtain descended and the show was over... It had been obvious from press reports that Miss Dietrich had experienced unsteadiness on her feet during recent performances and that her right leg, broken some eighteen months before, and the steel pin in her right hip were troubling her. On that awful night something evidently gave.” (C. Higham, *Marlene*, NY, 1997).

TONIGHT, YOU THE AUDIENCE, ARE SITTING ON THE VERY
SAME SEATS THAT ONCE GRACED THE AUDITORIUM OF HER
MAJESTY'S THEATRE, RAILWAY SQAURE.

(Program Notes: *MissXL: A Contemporary Burlesque in 3 Acts*)

Mystory

#4

THE PROJECT

a manifesto

text: Jenny Newman-Preston, Lisa Ffrench, Kay Armstrong, Dean Walsh, Narelle Benjamin, Julie-Anne Long, Rosetta Cook, Erin Brannigan, Sue Healey and Michael Whaites (2001)

THE PROJECT was a group of established, like-minded Sydney based independent dance practitioners; Jenny Newman-Preston, Lisa Ffrench, Kay Armstrong, Dean Walsh, Narelle Benjamin, Julie-Anne Long, Rosetta Cook, Erin Brannigan, Sue Healey and Michael Whaites. We first met as THE PROJECT on 3 March 2001. Having known each other for a number of years⁸ through professional dance networks as well as social circles, this group of ten dance artists came together at a time when we were each struggling with sustaining our individual dance practices in Sydney and felt that we had nowhere to come together where we could be part of a dance community of like minded artists. For the first six months we met about once a month over afternoon tea or evening drinks in our homes. We relished the opportunity to get together socially as well as sharing our professional frustrations.

THE PROJECT members identified a shared need to create a way of working which provided both practical and creative support for ourselves as 'emerged' independent choreographers, with the aim being to establish better conditions for maintaining practice, developing discourse and exchange between independent artists, and to present new dance. In our first of two grant applications to the NSW Ministry for the Arts we wrote:

Sydney is the base for a wealth of highly experienced independent artists and is in need of a permanent space for such practitioners. Our main directive is to obtain continual access to a space for classes, rehearsals, meetings and performances, perhaps with potential as a base for administrative, promotional and production support for the above named choreographers. Once established, THE PROJECT will be open to the needs of other interested choreographers and dancers...⁹

⁸ I have known Sue Healey since we were teenagers at Jill Proudfoot's ballet school in Auckland. Narelle Benjamin and I had danced together in the One Extra Company in the mid 1980s and have been friends and artistic collaborators ever since.

⁹ THE PROJECT 2002 Dance Program application, NSW Ministry for the Arts, p. 3.

Applicant's name:

THE PROJECT**3.4 Report on applicant's 2000-01 activities**

Give details of your activities for 2000 and to date in 2001 and outline plans for the rest of 2001. (This information provides the Ministry with an overview of your organisation's activities and a framework for assessing requests.)

In March 2001, members of THE PROJECT met officially for the first time. This group of Sydney based independent dance practitioners hatched a plan, which had been brewing, and disrupting our informal discussions, for some time. The key need identified by the group was to create a physical space which provided both practical and creative support for 'emerged' independent choreographers. We identified a common desire to establish better conditions for maintaining practice, developing discourse and exchange between independent artists, and to present new dance in Sydney.

Members of THE PROJECT approached the following organisations and studios regarding available space; One Extra Dance, Sydney Dance Company, The Edge, University of NSW and the Opera House. The responses were much the same - each of the venues was supportive and sympathetic to our needs and SDC and UNSW have been able to provide subsidised, short-term use of their available spaces. Classes established at Sydney Dance Company studios have been enormously successful partly assisted by General Manager Brett Davidson's discounted studio rates. However, it becomes problematic when a space is shared as classes cannot be regular and it can become difficult to make bookings for rehearsals. We intend to maintain a close relationship with One Extra Dance which has been supportive of many members of the group under Amanda Card's management.

Recently we have secured Rehearsal Space Studio One at UNSW for three days a week, to be used by members of THE PROJECT at a rate of \$16.50 per half day. This enables 6 individuals, a half day per week, at an affordable rate. This schedule commenced on Monday June 4th and we will continue this association for the duration of 2001.

Meetings are continuing on a regular monthly basis and we plan to launch THE PROJECT by presenting an evening of strong, singularly creative and exciting solo works, in mid October, 2001 at IO Myers Theatre. Members of THE PROJECT presenting solo work at the launch are: Jenny Newman-Preston, Dean Walsh, Lisa Ffrench, Julie-Anne Long, Kay Armstrong and Michael Whaites.

The performances are a necessary stepping-stone to establishing our presence as a pro-active, united force that aims at changing the current environment for dance practitioners based in this city. The season launching THE PROJECT will establish the group as a significant and vital new entity within the NSW dance scene. The aim is to make our presence known and to encourage support and interest from fellow practitioners, the public, sponsors and funding bodies. We will provide audiences with a grab bag of the high calibre, experienced, sophisticated yet almost invisible dance work of mature practitioners living and working in Sydney.

Applicant's name:

The PROJECT**3.5 Proposed activities for 2002**

Provide an outline of your proposed activities for 2002. Attach a list of works planned for performance, if applicable. Applicants for **projects** will be asked details of specific projects in section 4. The information collected here helps the Ministry assess a project request in the context of an overall program.

Applicants for **general running costs** should include:

- aims and objectives;
- relevant background information;
- how the activities meet Dance Program criteria (see Guidelines pages 34–36);
- CV's of key artistic personnel;
- a budget for 2002 in the format submitted to management committee or board of management.

Attach more pages as necessary.

The PROJECT will focus on developing a strong and vibrant community - and 'place of practice' - for independent choreographers in Sydney, with an eye on national and international associates. Our aim is to dispel the idea that Sydney lacks an active and vibrant community of dancers and choreographers, presenting work that tends to fall between the focus on new and emerging artists and the 'inclusive' programming of some other mixed dance collections.

SHORT-TERM OBJECTIVES

- * To curate performance programs by the group according to the individual practitioners needs, including collaborators and associates, approximately every 12 weeks. The aim is that such programs would become financially self-sustained.
- * To provide ongoing professional classes open to all interested dance artists.
- * Rehearsal sessions will be timetabled into an interim space where we receive reduced hiring rates. Any administrative duties will be rostered and shared by the 10 core group artists.
- * Collaborators associated with the artists will be encouraged to contribute to the various activities of the group.
- * Satellite events may include film screenings, research presentation, public forums and collaborations with other artists.

LONG-TERM GOALS

- * To have continual access to a space for the above outlined objectives. This space would eventually be financed by permanent professional classes, projects, workshops, performances, sponsorship and funding.
- * To attract, or develop from within the group, a producer who would 'manage' the artists and research national and international touring possibilities. To create a fertile space for artists to practice, exchange and communicate locally, nationally and internationally.

The PROJECT member Erin Brannigan believes this space's driving force can be:
'practitioners curating practitioners'.

Applicant's name:

THE PROJECT**SECTION 4 PROJECT APPLICATIONS**

Copy the section for each project you are applying for and fill in the details separately.

4.1 Project description

Describe the activities/events involved in your project. Include:

- aims and objectives;
- how the project meets Dance Program criteria (see Guidelines pages 34–36).

Attach more pages as necessary.

THE PROJECT proposes to secure Rehearsal Space Studio One at UNSW for 5 days a week for 6 months in 2002. We are requesting the rental costs and a small administrative fee in this application. At the end of July 2002 we will be in a position to reassess our needs and the demands on the space.

Project Budget

- * A request for rehearsal space rental costs.

\$33 per day @ 5 days per week @ 26 weeks	\$4,290
---	---------

- * Plus sundry administration costs

\$35 per week @ 26 weeks	\$ 910
--------------------------	--------

IE: \$200 per week @ 26 weeks	\$5,200
-------------------------------	---------

- * Plus 5% Auspicing Fee
- | | |
|--|--------|
| | \$ 260 |
|--|--------|

TOTAL Requested:	\$5,460
-------------------------	----------------

* Please refer to 3.5 for aims and objectives in reference to Dance Program criteria.

The PROJECT
c/-Erin Brannigan
PO Box 1292
Potts Point NSW 2011

Dance Board
Australia Council
372 Elizabeth Street
Surry Hills NSW 2010

12 December 2001

To whom it may concern

In response to a concern about the lack of affordable dance spaces available in Sydney, we, the undersigned, have been meeting as a group since March 2001. We wish to create a space which provides both practical and creative support for 'emerged' independent choreographers. We believe that this will establish better conditions for maintaining practice, developing discourse and exchange between independent artists, and to present new dance.

Yours faithfully



Erin Brannigan



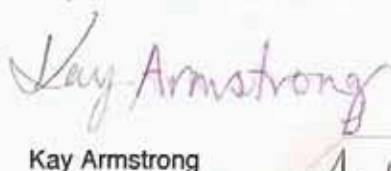
Julie-Anne Long



Jenny Newman-Preston



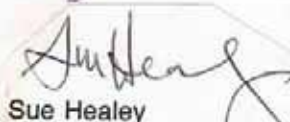
Lisa French



Kay Armstrong



Narelle Benjamin



Sue Healey



Rosetta Cook



Michael Whaites

The PROjECT was successful in their funding applications to both NSW Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council Dance Board. These funds enabled them to establish a residency at University of New South Wales for a year, which provided subsidised dance studio space for the group. While in residence they produced two public presentation seasons.¹⁰ By the beginning of 2003 the urgency with which the group had come together had dissipated and the personal and professional circumstances of individual artists had changed.¹¹ Of all the artists involved in THE PROjECT Sue Healey is probably the one who found a way to consolidate and continue the relationship with UNSW:

The Dance Project got together thinking we needed to find a space. Without that I imagine I would not be generating the amount of work I am generating now. Because of having that base at UNSW and access to space there, there's no doubt about that. Having come to Sydney with zero history having never worked here before - I didn't fit into the Omeo thing, I didn't fit into the Sydney Dance Company (SDC) thing and One Extra at the Seymour Centre well I did have a relationship with them but they didn't have a space that you could have access to ... It was a very different set up than Melbourne, I had the VCA (Victorian College of Arts) as a space resource - because I was teaching there. Other people had Dancehouse and DanceWorks and Chunky Move that is the central place for everyone now. It's quite invigorating to meet, 'do' class, it's a daily schedule, even if you don't connect with the work of the company that's being made there, the Chunky Move studio is the absolute hub of contemporary dance in Melbourne, it's so exciting to be there. Whereas even with the resources at the Wharf it doesn't feel open or accessible for artists outside the companies. I started teaching at SDC and Bangarra to try to find where I might find a niche to get access to some space. You very quickly get a sense that that is not going to be an option. It's not open to the teachers to use it in any way other than teaching those strict classes ... The connection with UNSW has been great for me with teaching etc... In fact I'm like a space vulture my name is on every page of that timetable. I felt really bad yesterday I had to write on it *I can be flexible* and I left my phone number for them to ring if a student needs it. I grab little pockets of time at UNSW (semester breaks and outside of teaching hours). I know the space is just for myself and I use it for planning a whole host of things, or for not trying to plan anything, just being in the space not doing anything. While it can be excruciating because you think you should be achieving something, it's vital to have that time and that quiet space where you know you won't be interrupted... Also, through the ongoing teaching commitment you can use class work to develop some material and ideas ... that's always been part of my work I do like the teaching and the way it forces you to formalise some of the ideas into phrases and into sequences ...

Sue Healey¹²

¹⁰ Presented at IO Myers Studio, UNSW, the Launch season, 18-20 October 2001 included solo works by Jennifer Newman-Preston, Dean Walsh, Michael Whaites, Kay Armstrong and Julie-Anne Long. At the end of the year-long residency, a second season, 24-26 October 2002 presented a showing of works for stage and screen by Narelle Benjaimn, Sue Healey, Julie-Anne Long, Jennifer Newman-Preston and Rosetta Cook.

¹¹ Michael Whaites accepted a job as Artistic Director at LINK in Perth, WA. Rosetta Cook moved with her young child to be close to her family and regular teaching work at the Queensland Ballet Company where she had been a prima ballerina for many years.

¹² Interview with Sue Healey by Julie-Anne Long, 7 November, 2005, Sydney.

On 7 April 2009 a symposium was convened at University of New South Wales attended by Sydney dance artists and arts workers facilitated by Daniel Brine, Director of Performance Space and Dr. Erin Brannigan, Lecturer in Dance, School of English, Media and Performing Arts, UNSW. The six-hour meeting was titled:

Where is Independent Dance in Sydney?

“The broad aim of the symposium was to create an event where the community could “connect with peers, identify strengths and gaps in provision, and take a proactive role in determining the future of independent dance”. With many people commenting on the novelty of all being together in one room (highlighting the absence of effective social and industry events for Sydney dance), and some concrete actions and plans resulting from the day, the event was successful if only in providing a sense of focus.”

Erin Brannigan¹³

One of the outcomes of the symposium included the setting up of a volunteer working group of five artists: Alexandra Harrison, Nikki Heywood, Sue Healey, Julie-Anne Long and Martin del Amo. Under the name IDA (Indie Dance Alliance) the group has met in each other's homes, as well as at Fraser Studios, with the support of Sam Chester (Queen Street Studios) in providing free space for meetings and some administrative support. Like THE PROjECT this group has social and personal connections between them, and professionally they identify with quite diverse movements practices.

The adaptive capacity of a social-ecological system is related to the existence of good social networks. These often emerge as self-organizing processes (i.e., not guided by external pressure) involving key persons who share some common interests although they represent different stakeholder groups.¹⁴

Social networks play a crucial role in the activities of IDA as they also did with THE PROjECT. These clusters provide opportunities for dance artists to share knowledge and build trust and support. The sharing of organizational roles affords these cluster groups flexibility in organization, making it possible for people to come and go according to their availability. Those of us in IDA who were also involved with THE PROjECT bring a collective memory of experiences to the current concerns, with issues of sustainability and limited access to places for independent dance artists to work, still on the agenda.

This memory provides context for social responses to ecosystem change, increases the likelihood of flexible and adaptive responses, and seems to be particularly important during periods of crisis, renewal, and reorganization (Folke et al. 2005).¹⁵

¹⁴ Thomas Hahn, Lisen Schultz, Carl Folke, and Per Olsson, ‘Social Networks as Sources of Resilience in Social-Ecological Systems’, in *Complexity Theory for a Sustainable Future*, ed. by Jon Norberg, James Wilson, Brian Walker, Elinor Ostrom (New York Chichester, West Sussex: Columbia University Press, 2008), pp. 119-143 (p. 122).

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 140.

Mystory

#5

Picnic at Hill End

an artist's account and diary

text: Julie-Anne Long (2003-2005)

The following Mystory presents a case study of a project entitled *The Nuns' Picnic*.¹⁶ For me, this was an extremely valuable opportunity to engage in dance-making processes that occurred predominantly away from my everyday life and established ways of working in Sydney.

The Hill End Artist in Residence Program¹⁷ provides opportunities for artistic creative development, in the historic village of Hill End and the surrounding region. Hill End is accessible by car from Bathurst, either via Turondale–Eglinton or Sofala, approximately five hours from Sydney and an hour's drive on a road that includes substantial dirt track sections. It's a singular destination. You don't pass through Hill End on the way to anywhere else. It is the final stop at the end of an isolated road, on the edge of a very large hill. The aesthetic possibilities and 'the power of place' of the evocatively barren and abandoned landscape have inspired an extraordinary group of Australian visual artists, both past and present.¹⁸ Like Friend, who was seeking "a suitable environment for contemplation and mature expression... and a complete escape from the treacherous pools of hedonism and temptations of urban Sydney",¹⁹ artists over the past decade, myself included, have also engaged with "the stillness and sense of history pervading Hill End (which) provided a productive reprieve from the over stimulation and demands of the Sydney scene."²⁰

¹⁶ *The Nuns' Picnic* was a full-scale work, encompassing a regional artist's residency at Hill End, resulting in a gallery-based video installation, Bathurst and Sydney, two site-specific performance events at Hill End and a solo performance in Sydney.

¹⁷ The program is managed by Bathurst Regional Art Gallery (BRAG) in partnership with Parks Services Division, Department of Environment and Conservation (PSD) and independent curator Gavin Wilson.

¹⁸ Initially Hill End attracted painters and visual artists: Donald Friend, Russell Drysdale, Jeffrey Smart, Brett Whiteley, John Firth-Smith, Garry Shead, John Olsen, Wendy Sharpe, Peter Kingston, Tom Spence to name only a few.

¹⁹ 'Foreword' by Edmond Capon in *The Artists of Hill End*, Gavin Wilson, (The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 1995, p. 7.

²⁰ Ibid. p. 114.

Devonshire Tea

Day 4 Tuesday

Betty asked me what day it was today and already I'm having trouble remembering myself - is it necessary to keep track of time?

Bloody phone card! Now I've got one there's always people to ring and things to organise - at least I haven't given the number out to many people, RW, M+D, Lucy, Sam, Heidrun.

All rugged up 2 pairs of socks / slippers
tradesuit pants

Head +
feet + lower
back warm

Skirt
Stripey jumper over spotty spencer
woolley hat
Shawl wrapped around waist

Difficult to move with all this stuff on

Day 5 Here be dragons (the end of the road
Hill End)

Day 6 Suddenly the time is speeding by

Walking running... afternoon to night

Don't forget

Workshop @ School 2pm

Freedom and the lack of distractions is paralysing!

My engagement with Hill End occurred over three visits. Firstly, I spent a month in residence with visits from three of my collaborators. Secondly, I was invited to return to work on a community project with fifty local residents and finally, I chose to return with a group of collaborators, including six independent dance artists, a production manager, a composer, a video maker and a photographer, to produce a site-specific performance event in and around the village.

Before I began my first residency I had already begun thinking about what my relationship to this historically charged landscape might be. A dog eared newspaper cutting of Jeffrey Smart's 1957 painting *The Picnic (Nuns' Picnic)* painted in Hill End had been among my collection of loose ideas for future work for many years. Two nuns in upturned white wimples and heavy black gowns sit perched like strange birds in the burnt orange dust of a Hill End gully. An ominously dark sky hangs above them illuminating the church on the horizon. I was initially attracted to the sense of displacement of the human figures in the landscape, solitary in spirit and in place. I decided to use Smart's painting as my starting point for this new work, and to engage with the site and its cumulative histories. I asked myself what might the nuns' relationship to this landscape be compared with my own? How might this place dictate and influence my experience and processes of developing new work?

For me, the attraction of the city used to be that the canvas was infinitely detailed. Everywhere I looked there was detritus to stimulate and recharge. My work was made in and of the city. In the city the lines are clearly delineated between a place for work, a place for leisure, a private place, and my identity adjusts accordingly with even a different persona for walking the street. My working processes and artistic practice are part of this fractured landscape. When I began the Hill End residency, I had mixed feelings about setting up camp with so much space and solitude and few distractions. Allowing time and being patient seemed strangely overwhelming.

Making dance has its moments of inspiration but mostly it is 'just work'. And to produce thoughtful and interesting work you need time. 'In residence' you have time, as you are always working. Being away from home and your everyday life the focus is on the work even when you're relaxing. This allows space for a reinvention of the very idea of working. It is here that process becomes shelter, a fluid living environment that supports the artist and the work. In the first stage of the project I collected ideas for the new work, like a vagrant, wandering around the village. My collaborators visited: photographer Heidrun Lohr, filmmaker Samuel James and painter Lucy Culliton and we spent our time guided by themes of shifting identity, transportation and transformation within the landscape. At the end of the first week on my own at Hill End I wrote in my diary: "Freedom and the lack of distractions is paralysing!" Four weeks later I mused "...it feels a lot like being in love... obsessed, consumed, energised..." I was surprised by the way I allowed myself to fall into the experience of space and solitude. By week four some of the complexities of the process were beginning to reveal themselves:

Week Four

Lucy has an urge to have something to show for her time here - drawings, paintings, she's anxious about the initial 'lack of product'. I often think it would be easier if I made art work that you can hold in your hands. What have I got to show before the show? I'm thinking, writing odd bits, which would mean absolutely nothing to anyone else, but I feel strangely satisfied. At least I can work with Sam and Heidrun and be present in the things they make - the proof is in the photos and the video. They've got something to show and tell. Heidrun has the images captured in her camera waiting to be revealed on her return to Sydney. Sam is filming, downloading straight onto the computer to review footage at the end of each day. I'm sure I appear to be just wafting, drifting, but I sense that it is all coming together. One thing I'm sure about is that I am no longer interested in making work in singular intense rehearsal periods. If it takes stops and starts over a few years that's ok by me. It's in the gaps of my convoluted life that I make my work. In my everyday life no distractions and a singular focus is a thing of the past for me. At Hill End there are no excuses. The space is open to possibility. I'm making the most of it even if I have ^{nothing} to show.

My aim with the final stage of *The Nun's Picnic* was to generate a more communal, collaborative way of working and to provide the groundwork for some new methods of dance-making, from the initial research, through to the realisation. My plan involved inviting a group of my peers, all mature dance artists, to work together, initiating some new collaborations and strengthening existing ones. It was also a kind of social experiment as we were each connected personally and professionally in varying ways. It was an investment in personal practice that, by example, I believed would have resonance in the greater dance community, as each individual artist took a part of the process with them into their future work.

A major component of *The Nuns Picnic*, involved bringing together seven independent dance artists from Sydney; Narelle Benjamin, Kathy Cogill, Bernadette Walong, Rakini Devi, Martin del Amo, Michael Whaites and myself, all from diverse backgrounds with individual performance styles. I was interested in the differences between the artists involved. Narelle, Kathy, Bernadette, Michael and I have extensive classical ballet training and contemporary American and European modern dance influences. Kathy, Michael and I are interested in the theatrical potential of dance encompassing the use of voice and overt characterisations. Narelle, in contrast, is interested in an organic way of moving informed largely by her yoga practice. Bernadette's identity is shaped by her indigenous background, which informs her thematic concerns and movement language. Martin is trained in body weather and butoh and incorporates text in his work and Rakini is trained in traditional Indian dance and works with a movement aesthetic that is a fusion of Indian and contemporary dance.

The final performance stage involving other dance artists began soon after I had finished my first residency at Hill End. Once back in the city I returned to more familiar performance making strategies. I gave each artist an individual collection of materials and stimuli, which had been inspired by and gathered during my residency at Hill End. Each artist was responsible for creating solo material for themselves as a personal response to my ideas. This occurred over a period of six months to enable each person to work in their own way at their own pace alongside their other commitments. I spent intermittent periods of time with each of the artists to keep connected to what directions the responses were taking and to begin shaping the larger performance structure. As director, it was my role to respond to the diverse outcomes of the other six dance artists in order to integrate them within the personal vision and framework that I had been working on, alongside my own individual performative responses to the brief. The final shape of the project was created during an intense week of rehearsals culminating in the performance around the village in the afternoon and an evening vaudeville show in The Royal Hall at Hill End.²¹

²¹ The final 'live' event was a site-specific performance, on Saturday 4th December 2004, *Landed in the Landscape* – in and around the historic village of Hill End, during the day and *Trust and Try!* – a contemporary vaudeville show, at the Royal Hall, in the evening. 'The Nuns Picnic' was made in collaboration with videomaker Samuel James, photographer Heidrun Lohr and produced by One Extra.

Conventionally, with this sort of collaboration, artists come together to discuss the ideas and show where they're at, and then they go off to their own little 'dens' to work in isolation with the information they have gathered. They meet again, separate, meet, separate, and on it goes until the prospect of performance brings them together for a final burst of collaborative effort. In these situations, I know for myself, I am often working with what is familiar and with what I know will work, because of the deadline of a public outcome and the physical separation from my collaborators. Whilst this was partly the structure of the process for *The Nuns' Picnic* the added element and difference was the distinct location that we were working in response to, that was unknown to the other artists.

For the final stage of creating *The Nuns' Picnic* for an audience the entire creative team travelled away from Sydney, to live in Hill End. Dancers, video maker, sound designer, production manager and photographer all lived together in this remote village for the production week of the project. Inspired by my response to the residency and the place, a different approach to rehearsing was needed. I decided to engage with all elements side-by-side, overlapping, criss-crossing and existing at the same time and place. This encouraged us to take more risks, embrace accidents and mistakes, and revealed pleasingly unpredictable and unfamiliar processes. The dynamic of rehearsing in a paddock during the morning, walking home and negotiating access to a particular piece of land as the park ranger happened to pass by, produced a momentum for the rehearsal process that is not experienced in the contained space of the city studio. Communal acts of walking and eating together and reconfiguring the afternoon's rehearsal schedule as the summer rain fell, all contributed to an altered experience of the performance making process for everyone. One fused with chance occurrences, spontaneous results and free of everyday obligations.

In the open space of Hill End new rules arose from what was essentially a found space. Far away from the rehearsal rooms and theatres of the city that leave an imprint on the regular practice of the artists involved, the scale of the body in the working environment and ways of responding to a more fluid sense of time took over. This experience has strongly fed into my recent work. Two years later when I began to imagine and devise a new series of work; *The Invisibility Project*, I started with the questions "to what degree does the space of the place impact on the process and the performed work?" and "are there ways of working where a refuge can be established within the artistic process even if you move from place to place?"

Nuns' Night Out

A film by Julie-Anne Long and Samuel James

Aust, 2005, 11 min, BW DVD

Director: Julie-Anne Long

Filmmaker: Samuel James

Composer: Drew Crawford

Choreographer/Performer(s): Kathy Cogill, Narelle Benjamin, Michael Whaites, Rakini Devi, Julie-Anne Long, Bernadette Walong, Martin del Amo

An absurdist dance fantasy shot on Super8, *Nuns' Night Out* follows a flock of nuns 'landed in the landscape' in and around the historic village of Hill End. At the end of day they make their way to the Royal Hall for a curious vaudeville show. Through surreal vignettes the veil of propriety is slowly removed to reveal dark currents of sensuality, ribaldry and untameable desire.

Filmed on location Hill End, December 2004.

Mystory #6

Critical Path

a speech

text: Julie-Anne Long

program content: devised by Julie-Anne Long and Sophie Travers

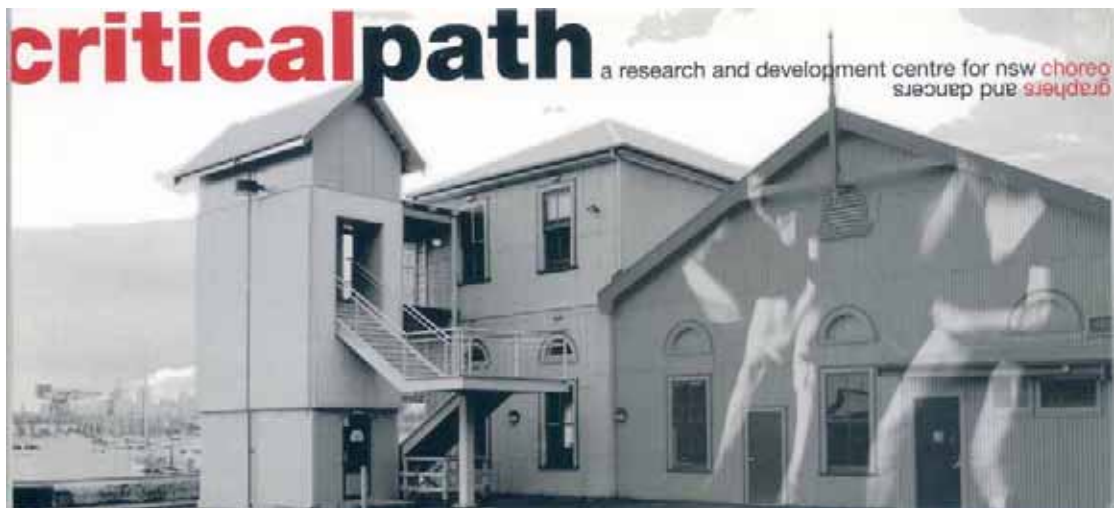
Email: Friday 28 April 2006 11:25am

From: Amanda Card

To: Dear Julie-Anne,

Hi, how are you? As you know, Sophie Travers is about to go on 12 months maternity leave from her position as Director of Critical Path ... Further to our conversations with you last week, we're now formally inviting you to express your interest in the position ... Therefore, we ask that you look at the job description and write a one-page expression of interest. Please send that along with your curriculum vitae by close of business next Monday (May 1). Fiona or I will call you on Tuesday to let you know if you've been shortlisted for an interview on Wednesday morning...

(In May 2006 I was appointed Acting Director of Critical Path).



Email: Monday 27 August 2007 11:40am

From: Julie-Anne Long

To: Dear Movers and Shakers, This is my last week at Critical Path as I am moving on to set-in-motion a new artistic project of my own, supported by an Australia Council Fellowship. It has been a pleasure and a privilege for me to engage with so many inspiring independent dance artists over the past fifteen months. I am grateful to you all for your generosity in allowing me an insight into the complexity of your motivations and processes. Best wishes for your future endeavours and enterprises! I'm not going too far afield so I look forward to seeing you soon. Warm Regards Julie-Anne

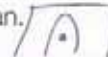
* Check Microphone Height

①

Thank you Josephine. Thank you Minister.

Don't Rush - Breathe...

Firstly I would like to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land, the Cadigal people of the Eora Clan.



I would also like to acknowledge and thank all the artists who have been involved with Critical Path over the past two years because without you we are nothing. *It is the artists' ideas, needs and desires that are at the heart of all arts organisations - we must remember that!* 😊

Tonight is an opportunity to make public what is basically a rather solitary enterprise - dance research. There is evidence that the past two years of superb investigative dance research at Critical Path is already creating a ground swell of activity, opening up dialogues between artists from different disciplines and spreading new ways of embodied thinking into nooks and crannies, locally, nationally and internationally. In such a short time the research activities at Critical Path have generated much potential for future productions and innovations in dance practice.

The heart of what we do here is the **Responsive Program**, which supports NSW based choreographers and their collaborators to realise their own research projects. In 2007 Critical Path will deliver 11 Responsive projects involving 56 artists. Local artists working throughout the year include:

Annalouise Paul investigating the 'identity' of rhythm with musician Bobby Singh and 3 dancers. **Rowan Marchingo** with writer Finegan Kruckemeyer, physical performers Alex Harrison and Kirk Page and actors Ursula Yovich and Ben Winspear, exploring similarities and differences between choreographic and actor based processes. **Vicki Van Hout** with Rosealee Pearson, Percy Jacksonia and 4 dancers integrating traditional dance forms with contemporary dance principles and aesthetics. **Emma Saunders** investigating her practice as a solo artist, utilizing her experience of sharing a group practice with The Fondue Set. **Nalina Wait** working with Jane McKernan and sound artist Gail Priest on a site-specific sound and dance installation. **Kristina Harrison** exploring the intersection of two methodologies, Bodyweather and Chinese medicine. **Lisa Griffiths** and **Craig Barry** making new discoveries in their partner work using the pressure point technique. **Fiona Malone** with sound artists including Bob Scott collaborating on sound design, interactive programming design and the relationship with live body using wireless sensor based systems. **Elly Brickhill** collaborating with new media artist Kate Richards. **Karen Pearlman** expanding her solo practice around the construction of 'self' as a dancer. **Calista Sinclair** and the group of dancers from **Dirty Feet** questioning and articulating the group's identity.

The Responsive Program has an annual call for applications selected by a panel of industry peers. I'd like to thank Deborah Pollard, Brian Carbee, Shona Erskine and Garry Lester for their contribution to the process this year. The deadline for 2008 will be early September.

So you've got plenty of time to plan ahead & put it in the diary

(2)

I would like to announce an exciting new partnership between Critical Path and the **University New South Wales, School of Media, Film and Theatre and the Production Unit at IO Myers Studio**. Artist's fees, space and technical resources will be provided for choreographers to work on campus at UNSW through two responsive projects. The UNSW Residencies for 2007 are: **Leah Grycewicz** working with digital savant Mr Snow, sound artist Rik Rue, and dancer Hebe Savidis on a multi layered process that contemplates the physical significance of the body as landscape in regards to the shifting digital environment and **Martin del Amo** investigating the collaborative relationship between himself as choreographer and 5 dancers, Anton, Narelle Benjamin, Julie-Anne Long, Tony Osborne and Kathy Cogill.

* I would like to thank the School of Media, Film and Theatre for their vision and commitment to this partnership. *Special thanks to Phillip Bell & Su Goldfish*

Breathe

The 2nd focus of our program is the **Curated Program** which involves the local dance community in workshops and laboratories lead by international and national artists who have a strong research practice. Critical Path has capitalised on interest from partners across Australia to structure a portfolio of 8 curated projects for 2007 which will involve more than 140 artists.

January is a busy month thanks to our association with the Sydney Festival. In the second week of January Critical Path will host a week of GAGA classes, for local dancer/choreographer participants free of charge, to be conducted by members of **Batsheva** with the week culminating in a Masterclass with Ohad Naharin. These classes will offer an insight into GAGA philosophy and techniques and provide local choreographers, and the dancers they work with, the opportunity to access to this innovative "operating system". GAGA encourages and teaches multi dimensional movement, efficiency of movement, the use of explosive power, texture of movement, the connection between pleasure and effort, quickness, the clarity of intention, stamina, recognizing one's own movement habits and acquiring new ones, and ways to reverse atrophy and weakness and helps dancers to maximize their training and strengths. *Sounds like something I need.*

* Following that week Melbourne based choreographer **Lucy Guerin** will conduct a 5 day workshop, assisted by long time collaborator/dancer Kirstie McCracken following her company's performances at the Sydney Festival. Lucy writes of her workshop K's Corridor: "In Kafka's book 'The Castle' there is a long scene describing in detail the comings and goings in a corridor through the many doors leading from it. Kafka's writing has always appealed to me because of his treating as ordinary, the most off kilter events. The uniqueness of his literary style is completely refined and personal, yet has a resonance that is far reaching. These are qualities I value from any artist." This workshop will provide an opportunity for participants to engage with Guerin's approach to

(3)

making work and will encourage immersion in one's own sensibility, balanced with a critical examination of the structure and outcome of the work.

Tomorrow we will be sending out information about these two open registration workshops so if you need to update your details let me know tonight.

Critical Path's dance program operates for 9 months of each year in this inspiring studio space and you can find us in the office upstairs all year round.

You can hire the space from Woollahra Council in our downtime so contact me if you want to know more.

Feb, March and April will be a dark time in the space for us. But, in May we recommence the program with New York choreographer **Miguel Gutierrez**.

Back to the Program Miguel has a solo practice that delivers a significantly innovative choreography within a trashy, throw-away aesthetic. Miguel's performative persona connects to an entire sub-culture associated with a ground-breaking studio project in Brooklyn, which has built a huge profile for independent dance in New York. Critical Path is convinced that Miguel's input into the Sydney scene will inspire local choreographers not only to embrace and challenge the dominant aesthetic of their city but also to try out fresh approaches to creating a platform for their work. Miguel will work for 5 days with 10 NSW based choreographers and also hold a talk for guests at The Drill. Miguel's visit is made possible through our partnership with Balletlab, Melbourne and Strut, Perth.

In June we have a workshop called "Being back" which is the flipside workshop for German artist **Antje Pfundtner** at Critical Path, as a development of her successful one week project in 2005. Antje says of her workshop "we will go backwards only in order to move on. And to see what moves us and to observe and discuss where we are NOW? I am really excited to be back and hope that some lovely people will be back with me. But I would love to invite anyone to be back and to move his/hers back in and into this workshop, which mainly incorporates improvisation, leading into predetermined structures". Antje will be performing at The Studio at the Sydney Opera House the week before her workshop. Thanks to Virginia Hyam and the Studio staff for working with us on this.

Another German artist on our program, Berlin choreographer **Thomas Lehmen** moves between performance and dance and asks uneasy questions about the art of dance and himself as a person. With enigmatic irony and minimalist reduction he makes his audience aware of the difference between a choreographic idea and its artistic translation. Thomas's workshop is structurally based on the rotating system "Funktionen". The system is able to work with existing themes and ideas of the participants as well as new territory being uncovered through the functions observation, material, interpretation, mediation and manipulation. Thomas will work for one week with 10 NSW choreographers. The process will be opened up to an invited audience at the conclusion of the workshop. Thanks to the Goethe Institut for their support with Antje's and Thomas's visit. Goethe Institut Sydney will also present performances in Sydney by Thomas as part of an arts festival in October 2007.

(4)

Continuing our Curated workshops line up:

- * In response to demand from the sector for projects addressing the built environment, UK based choreographer **Carol Brown** will work with collaborator architect Mette Ramsgard for one week with 10 NSW choreographers on a project involving media to address architectural concerns. Carol writes of her workshop; "The new work fuses thinking about the environment with digital processes through a program which creates a playful environment for dancers and participants. It merges fields of dance, architecture and computer science. Performers and participants playfully draw spaces through their interaction with digital agents. From our research workshops this is a very engaging space in which to interact and understand agency which is both human and nonhuman, it also creates new possibilities for choreographic thinking". Critical Path greatly appreciate the support of the British Council with this project. *
- * Ongoing **Impro-Lab** laboratories, residencies and performances in 2006 form the basis for a new program of exchange in 2007 which builds on the exchange by Tess de Quincey with Japanese artists and residency in Tokyo in 2006. Impro Lab 2007 will be a 5-day research laboratory led by pre-eminent Japanese butoh dancer Yasunari Tamai. Hosting an exchange between different traditions of dance, with a focus on exploring improvisation, Impro-Lab has a strong focus on improvised dance practice which is based in a hybrid of asian and western disciplines, maintaining a markedly different conceptual approach to the body and to space than traditions of western dance. It culminates with performances for an invited audience at The Drill.
- * In November we have the **UK-Australia Research Exchange** in partnership with Dance4 National Dance Agency in Nottingham UK. This exchange involves independent choreographers with a strong research based practice, working between sister organisations in Sydney and Nottingham, UK. The project empowers the independent choreographer to act as the producer of their own and the other artists' research in ways that benefit the local independent dance scene in each country and further the practice and networks of that artist. Each host partner has a slightly different context and agenda, however the common thread is the focus upon research and the independent choreographer and their networks. Australian independent choreographer, Martin del Amo, * travelled to UK in October 2006 to work with local artists Traci Kelly and * Richard Hancock. Martin was hosted by the British artists and they will visit Australia in November next year and work on a program at Critical Path hosted by Martin and involving 5 local choreographers. There is a third aspect to this exchange planned for 2008 involving Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

Participation in the Curated strand is open to NSW artists and occurs in two ways. Some projects are open to general registration and will be closed off once maximum numbers are reached. Critical Path will put out a call for registration in mid December. Participation in the remaining Curated workshops will be by invitation and the Director will contact artists directly. *Please call and make a time to come in and have a chat about what you're up to, what workshops you're interested in... How can I invite you if we don't know you (or what you want/need)*

*first in
first
served*

5

I would like to acknowledge the inaugural Director of Critical Path **Sophie Travers** who initiated this program structure and had commenced negotiations for this curated program before I came on the scene. Sophie is currently on maternity leave hence my *ACTing* role. I would also like to thank my colleague Sally MacDonald the project co-ordinator at Critical Path because without her insight and day-to-day knowledge things wouldn't happen as smoothly as they do.

Breathe

A

The third strand of our program is **The Mentoring Program**, which consists of projects of varying scale and duration, enabling artists to devise new project models and collaborations. In 2007, 4 Mentoring Projects will involve over 25 artists with a range of diverse needs. Ideas for these projects have been generated as a response to conversations between local artists and Critical Path.

- ✓ The Mentoring projects for 2007 include: **MAP** project with **Wendy Morrow** who will facilitate conversations on practice with mature artists Nikki Heywood, Tony Osbourne, Tess de Quincey and Alan Schacher, addressing issues of sustainability, artistic isolation and how experienced artists can continue to develop and contribute to the dance and new performance sector. *an issue close to my heart.*
- ✓ As with the successful 2006 Rural Residency, Critical Path will again partner with FLING Physical Theatre in Bega, to support an independent choreographer to spend a week in Bega in 2007, to undertake creative research. The quiet time and space of the residency is designed to give the artist a moment of calm and reflection in order to focus upon their practice. *I would recommend the Residency model to everyone to recharge away from home.*
- ✓ A key project in next years mentoring program is the **RealTime Critical Path Review Writing Workshop** for 8 NSW choreographers/writers who will respond through a series of mentored writing exercises to live dance, documented dance and dance film. I would like to thank the Editors of Real Time Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter for this much needed and timely initiative. *Applicants will need to submit 2 examples of their writing (published or not) to be selected for this workshop*
- ✓ Another project I am passionate about is **Looks like Dance/Sounds Like Dance** a series of Sunday evenings at The Drill in the 2nd half of 2007. In conversations with choreographers working in and around Critical Path, there is an often articulated need for furthering opportunities for informal conversation and discussion around practice and research. Critical Path anticipates that these nights will provide an opportunity for much needed lively debate, enthusiastic, passionate and intense dialogue, and will offer a thoughtful, far-ranging critical exchange, encourage networking and building of community.

⑥

We look forward to seeing you at any or all of our public events here at this amazing space, The Drill in 2007. So please tonight join us for a drink, something to eat and when all else fails take to the dance floor.

* All of the details of the 2007 program will be available on the Critical Path website when you go home tonight — so check it out...

* We look forward to seeing you at any or all of our public events here at this amazing space, The Drill in 2007.

* So please tonight

Join us for a drink, something to eat and when all else fails ---

take to the dance floor

Thank you

Cue Go --- music ---

Mystory

#7

Invisibility of the long distance dancer

a performance (for the future)

text: Julie-Anne Long

The Invisibility Project: *Now you see her*
private performance parties and public interventions.

By linking into organised book clubs and existing friendship networks, this project comes to you in your home with a performance party and a follow up opportunity for involvement in a public performance intervention. My contact will be 'the hostess' at whose home we meet. The hostess invites 7-9 of her associates for this playful, intimate, sociable, in-home entertainment. In the week prior to this event each guest receives a package in the post containing the programme/catalogue for the evening's proceedings: *The unassuming pocket book of things to do and say to support and encourage invisibility in an enjoyable and provocative way*. What is this? An induction/instruction manual? A textbook? A self-help book? A catalogue with no prices? Is there something to buy and sell? Will there be a line you have to put yourself on? A little bit of all of these and something less visible? And what exactly is this invisibility? Numerous quotes from reputable and not so reputable sources bemoan the invisibility of middle age women. However, it is clear from the pocket book, that this is not the sole tone of tonight's evening, rather an embracing of the possibilities of invisibility.

The guests arrive and I am introduced as an old friend of the hostess, at times a friendly newcomer, occasionally switching to an interloper who knows too much. It becomes evident that I am the invisibility specialist and chief 'invisibilist' for the duration of the evening. At times I appear as a majestic, oversized, verbose, magician accompanied by my submissive sidekick 'mummy'. Dancer supreme Narelle Benjamin will be my 'sidekick' for the performance parties. Narelle and I have performed together since the mid 80s and she was a performer/collaborator on *The Nun's Picnic* at Hill End. Clare Britton of My Darling Patricia repute will design and make two standout theatrical costumes and conversely two 'invisible' costumes. My sidekick 'mummy' and I will display the merchandise and demonstrate its reliability and fallibility. We will initiate and instruct the invisibility rookies through multiple-choice tasks.

The lights go off and the glow of the tv screen reveals us all in an eerie infrared room. Surprisingly the magician and the mummy have disappeared. We talk about our experiences of inhabiting invisibility, where the good, the bad and the ordinary are celebrated. I reveal my inner most feelings, you may reveal yours... about haberdashery, crows' feet and Martha knows best. Unique contributions and points of view all find their place at this party. I am the mad cow, the old crone. I am the tea lady, with my ubiquitous cheerfulness. There is time for a grumpy old woman rant. We bluster "and another thing..." and the torrent keeps on coming. I drop the baggage and return to the role of invisibility consultant. Reporting on the status of our open ended conversations around women-under-the-influence-of-invisibility, at this now- you-see-her-now-you-don't party. Within this constructed scenario we are all complicit. We build an archive of the realities of invisibility in our lives. Bizarre intersections of reality and fantasy are assembled. Under 'the cloak of darkness', we go for a walk around the neighbourhood, observed by the candid cameras of filmmaker Sam James and photographer Heidrun Löhr. At the end of the evening the partygoers plot the potentialities for further action from this initial gathering of the *invisibilist* cell of middle-aged women.

Catalogue and Take- Home Kit

The Invisibility Catalogue will be sent to participants at least a week prior to their attendance at a performance party. It will contain a collection of 'invisibility' materials and proposed party activities as described above. Both the catalogue and the take-home kit will be conceived, developed and designed in collaboration with the quiet dissenter, visual artist Deborah Kelly. At the conclusion of each party participants will receive a take-home invisibility kit. Ideas may include: At home "Under the Cloak of Darkness"; mysteriously leave traces of where you have been and conquered: by not completing or subverting the things which you do on a regular basis on the domestic front, that are often taken for granted. You may be encouraged to "Develop a Personalised Invisibility Plan" or "Improve your Visibility Skills", or you may be interested in "Ways to Counteract Invisibility Bullying by Barracking for Mother as Coach." The take home kit will also contain a participant feedback form- for better or worse.

Interventions

Following each set of parties there will be an opportunity for interested party participants to be involved in a public performance intervention. This will require your attendance at a one day session to devise and rehearse the plan and execute it. Examples of a few early ideas for these interventions include:

1. "Can I help you MAam": 'The Invisibles' shopping team will infiltrate all those shops where MA's are seldom welcome. Designer boutiques with insey-wincey garments won't scare the MA's. And don't assume that the skateboard they are inquiring about is for a young boy. 'The Invisibles' will question the misconceptions of age-appropriate clothing and activities and examine the associations between physical ageing, decline, appearance and acceptable behaviour. With rehearsed scripts the MA's will unsettle and

challenge the status quo, as they represent themselves 'inappropriately' in public.

2. "The Marching MA's": precision marching team 'The reMArkables' will take to the streets, kicking up a storm in a teacup.

This is the transformation of art into an everyday event. This is the transformation of an everyday event into art. This experience shifts perceptions of the conventional performer audience relationship and dissolves definitions of the border around the performer. Throughout the evening we play with the ambiguity of where the performer starts and finishes, moving in and out of performative surprises. The party provides a place to explore invisibility in the privacy, comfort and safety of your own home through this customised invisibility performance that is made to fit the needs of you and your guests. It will be an opportunity to reflect on the things we do in life that nobody notices, the things that are taken for granted. You may also reflect on the small secret pleasures that are yours and yours alone, the illicit invisibilities that you 'get away' with. The personal as political - a quietly subversive rallying of troops of *invisibilists*.



Invisibility of the long distance dancer

A work-in-progress by Julie-Anne Long and Kate Murphy
Aust, 2009, 10 min, Colour DVD

Performer/Choreographer: Julie-Anne Long
Video Artist: Kate Murphy

A rough cut/edit of a video work-in-progress exploring appropriated everyday tasks and Saturday Afternoon Fever 'grooving'.

Shot on location in Sydney, November 2008 - October 2009.



The Invisibility Project – Julie-Anne Long

Invisible Woman #1 *Break*, video still: Kate Murphy

Invisible Woman #2 *Depot*, video still: Kate Murphy

Invisible Woman #3 *Kitchen*, video still: Kate Murphy

Invisible Woman #4 *Lounge*, video still: Kate Murphy

Invisible Woman #5 *Backyard*, video still: Kate Murphy

Invisible Woman #6 *Washing*, video still: Kate Murphy