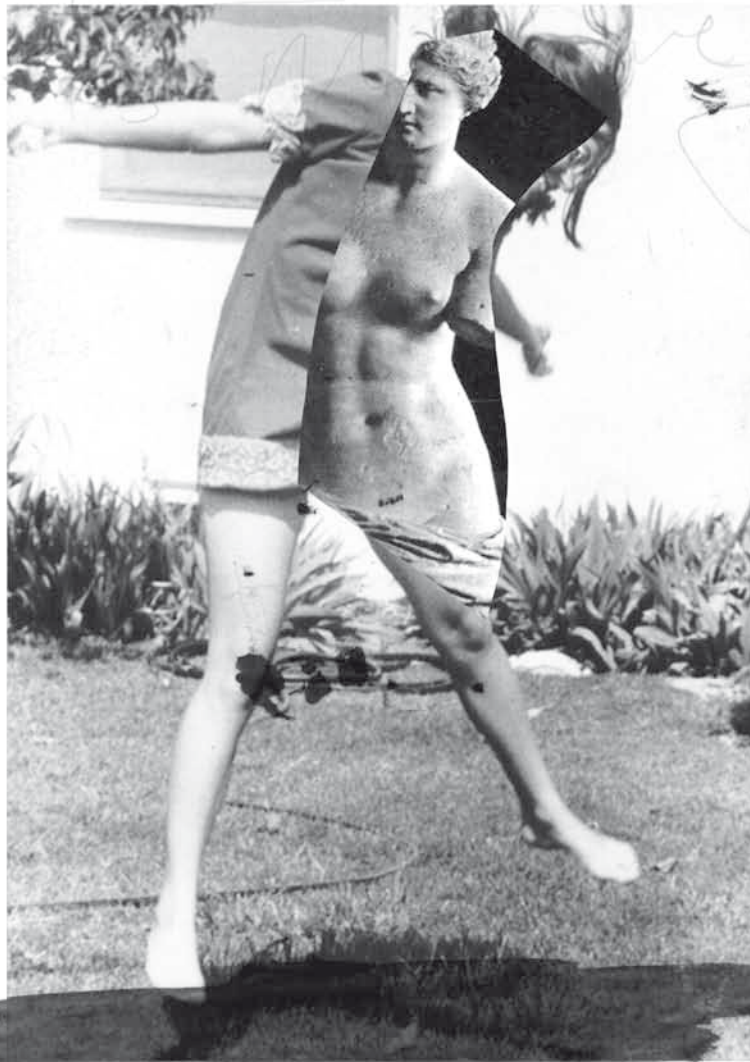


DANCEHOUSE DIARY

ISSUE 4 / MARCH - JUNE 2013



Needling, Restless, Relentless
Dance is Massive

DANCEHOUSE D

Dancehouse Diary Issue 4 / 2013

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The views and opinions expressed in the Dancehouse Diary are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the position of Dancehouse.

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Hold that feather
close: it's all you've got. Days
might dribble through your hands, leaving
their tried sediment, each morning
might seem heavier, but it's how images
flicker past you faster and faster
without touching, that drills you
coreless, insubstantial. You have to reach
further inside, through deeper skins:

(...)

What matters most is least, and that
refuses us shelter.

Alison Croggon, A Child's Play

Thinking does not need the word
but it needs the body

Dance is Massive!

The theme of this new issue of our Diary is inspired by Dance Massive, the Australian platform for contemporary dance, now reaching its third edition. We used it as a provocation to investigate a little deeper what dance does to us, what dance is to us, where dance fails us. This is the reason why we have invited a few dance thinkers to reflect on 'why dance?', the topic of the upcoming National Dance Forum.

All the articles in this issue gravitate yet again around the moving body and/as the thinking body. They highlight the body's potential for unpredictable physical invention or the production of new and unforeseen affect. They demonstrate, yet again how much we are our bodies, how everything starts and ends with our bodies and the multiple ways in which we view our corporeal presence.

Thinking does not need the word but it needs the body. And as Spinoza pointed out, seeing is doing, and seeing dance is often dancing. This is perhaps why dance opens up so many unexplored horizons, so many unforeseen emotions that tickle the senses, so many needling interrogations and doubts that stay

with us for days and sometimes a lifetime. This is why the effects of dance are as restless and relentless as its authors in their endeavours to make us see and feel with our bodies.

This fourth Diary is also a more general invitation to make us think dance as we watch it, to filter it through the mind and not only the senses, to accept that the purpose of dance (or art, in general) is not to entertain but rather to make us reflect and expand the vision of what our body means to the world and in the world. Art is an eye-opener to infinite horizons but it does not necessarily come easily and it can require effort or persistence in comprehending. All this is, of course, directly linked to the different ways of connecting people to art and the role of critics, reviewers, arts operators and cultural policy decision-makers in building the site of cultivating the taste for the arts. All of which will be developed more in the issues to come.

Until then, enjoy the massive array of dances Dance Massive has in store for you. The result may be massive.

Angela Conquet, Artistic Director, Dancehouse

Dancehouse is the centre for independent dance in Melbourne. Through its programs of residencies, performance, training and research, Dancehouse is a space for developing challenging, invigorating, and socially engaged moving art. Dancehouse aims at being a genuine tool for the dance-maker, a catalyst for developing new audiences, and a facilitator of meaningful alliances and mobility schemes, in Australia and internationally.

The Dancehouse Diary wishes to take you on an intimate journey through dance as art of thinking movement. Connected to an extended beyond of our program, it is an attempt to nourish a site for critical discourse and bring a space for sharing the dance artists' and thinkers' vision of this world with a wide readership.

Dancehouse Diary is a free independent publication published by Dancehouse.

NEEDLING

Alison Croggon

**“The body says
what words cannot.”**

Martha Graham

We live in a word-centric world. It's often assumed that contemporary culture is dominated by the visual image, but it's not that simple: the meaning of the ambiguous image is created, mediated and contested through written and spoken language. No matter how debased and crude that language is – in the repetitive sloganeering of election campaigns, for example, or the ear-bashing ads of Harvey Norman – it directs the reception and interpretation of the image. In more complex public conversations, thought is still assumed to be the province of the word.

“In the beginning,” runs the Christian dogma, “was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” In this cosmos, the word is the beginning of consciousness: through spoken and written language, human beings became able to conceive themselves as double beings, those who said and those who heard, those who made meaning and those who received it. And meaning itself was abstracted from the body: when it was written down, it existed outside and beside those who said and those who heard. It was at once God and *with* God, it was meaning itself and also separate from those who made meanings.

Thinking and the making of meaning is commonly considered inconceivable without the word. Throughout western history, the ability to be articulate has been equated with consciousness itself, as the defining marker of humanity. Animals can be treated as insentient objects because they have no speech: their suffering is unconsidered, because it is unspoken. This is extended to a hierarchy of humanity, in which only those who use the right words in the right way are considered to be fully human. It's a major mechanism used to exclude women, or the poor, or children, or disabled people, or even those who don't speak the right language or are the wrong skin colour. Their very experiences, even when articulated in the “proper” language, are dismissed as invalid. You can see this at work in US journalist H.L. Mencken's *Notes on Democracy*, when he claims that the “lower orders” are incapable of thought:

“The lower orders of men, though they seem superficially to use articulate speech and thus to deal in ideas, are actually but little more accomplished in that way than so many trained animals. Words, save the most elemental, convey nothing to them. Their minds cannot grasp even the simplest abstractions; all their thinking is done on the level of a few primitive appetites and emotions. It is thus a sheer impossibility to educate them, as much so as it would be if they were devoid of the five senses.

The school-marm who has at them wastes her time shouting up a rain-spout. They are imitative, as many of the lower animals are imitative, and so they sometimes deceive her into believing that her expositions and exhortations have gone home, but a scientific examination quickly reveals that they have taken in almost nothing. Thus ideas leave them unscathed; they are responsive only to emotions, and their emotions are all elemental – the emotions, indeed, of tabby-cats rather than of men.”

Most women will recognise that argument: the act of dismissing a woman's capacity for language is in fact a dismissal of her experience. It recalls Samuel Johnson's famous aphorism: “Sir, a woman's preaching is like a dog's walking on his hinder legs. It is not done well; but you are surprized to find it done at all.” Even when “lower” humans attain the requisite skill of using the proper words, they are still considered no better than performing animals aping the “real” people.

These hierarchies are the result of the capacity to discriminate, to perceive phenomena as like or unlike others. From Aristotle on, our traditions of science and philosophy and art are built on this capacity: it is a crucial component of learning how to think at all. But as is clear, it can also mean concomitant losses in our cultural ability to perceive the world in which we live.

Now, I am a writer, a person who thinks first in words, and so I am hardly one to deny the importance of spoken and written language in the creation and communication of meaning. Ever since I first learned to read, which was well before I went to school, words were the means through which I shaped and imagined and understood experience. But it has always been clear to me that there are many ways of thinking and communicating. Any pet owner knows that, even beyond the projections of anthropomorphism, a dog can express joy or sadness. Human beings are ingenious creatures, and we make language in many ways: through image, through gesture, through abstract sound. Mathematics is a language that shapes our reality, although it has no words. A visual artist makes meaning through shape and colour and texture. A dancer makes meaning using his body, through the syntax of her gestures, her movement through space and time.

As there are hierarchies of human beings, so we have created hierarchies of language. Even among the spoken tongues, some are more equal than others: ask any Indigenous person fighting to have their language taught in schools. And among those that



The word is not
the beginning

“Interpretation is the revenge of the intellect upon art. Even more. It is the revenge of the intellect on the world... The world, our world, is impoverished enough. Away with all duplicates, until we again experience more immediately what we have.”

Susan Sontag

are not spoken, the language of the body is most marginalised, because it is the least translatable into speech: its articulations are often not recognised as thought on their own terms. Yet – most clearly in contemporary dance – these articulations *are* a language: they are complex and precise responses to the inner and outer worlds in which we live. This is why, when Isadora Duncan was asked the meaning of a dance, she said: “If I could tell you what it meant, there would be no point in dancing it.”

I recognise Duncan’s response with the impatience of a poet who often had to answer questions in school about “what the poet was trying to say”. The poet wasn’t *trying* to say anything: the poet was saying it. In that question is a blanket denial of certain properties of language: meaning *does not exist* until the poem is paraphrased into a recognisable narrative. The formal shape of the poem or the dance, its sensuous properties, its resonance within the body, its capacity to be, rather than record, lived experience, is simply not registered. And entire dimensions of our existence are thus invisibly but inexorably ignored, and the materiality of our lives rendered as an increasing poverty.

This demand for paraphrase, for expression to be pruned back to the already known, is true about the reception of all art. And yet, at least in part, art emerges from a desire for expression that realises our multiplicities, as individuals and communities: the passionate intellect, the lived imagination, the word made flesh, the many in the one. These are not contradictions, although our culture often makes them so: they are necessary conditions of each other.

Einstein says, in speaking of his visualisations: “The words or the language, as they are written or spoken, do not seem to play any role in my mechanism of thought. The psychical entities which seem to serve as elements in thought are certain signs and more or less clear images which can be ‘voluntarily’ reproduced and combined. This combinatory play seems to be the essential feature in productive thought before there is any connection with logical construction in words or other kinds of signs which can be communicated to others.”

No one would deny that Einstein was thinking, even though he doesn’t employ words; but dance is often not given this courtesy. And yet dance is a language that anyone can understand: all that is required is to watch and to listen, to follow the thought in action as it unfolds before you.

As one who thinks in words, I can’t escape the knowledge that words are late-comers to thought, mere approximations of intricate interior processes. Bodies are complex apparatuses, and our conscious lives are moved by an infinite number of influences: not just the word written down, but the word as spoken; not just the word as spoken, but the communications of subconsciously registered gesture; not just the exterior stimuli, but the feedback mechanisms of nervous and endocrinal systems, the movement of blood through veins, the vibrations of sounds, the molecular chemistry of smell. Our animal bodies are inescapable. And yet much of our tradition of thought is about denying or ignoring the presence of our animal bodies.

There are many languages I don’t understand. But to deny their role in the creation of human meaning would not only be blind and prejudiced: it would impoverish my own languages. Some things cannot be said in words. Indeed, as a poet, I discovered that what I wanted to translate into speech were precisely those experiences that language can’t encompass. Perhaps this is why I found myself so fascinated by contemporary dance, when I first began to watch it seriously a few years ago. It’s no accident that it so often makes me think of poetry: like a poem, dance is an articulation of thought that comes before (and also, because culture is the medium we swim in, after) the word. The Word is not the Beginning. Dance is a language that poetry reaches for, without ever quite inhabiting it.

Poetry is a medium that attempts to make the body resonate in its meanings. Dance *is* the body resonant with meaning. Writing is always past tense: the best writing creates the illusion that it is occurring in the present. Dance doesn’t have to create that illusion: *it is* the present tense. You are in the present moment. The present moment is difficult, exhausting, joyous, painful, complex, mundane, delicious, exhilarating, hilarious, tragic. The present moment is mathematical, meta-physical, metaphorical. The present is thinking. NOW NOW NOW.

Born in 1962, **Alison Croggon** is one of a generation of Australian poets emerged in the 1990s. She writes in many genres, including criticism, theatre and prose. She has until very recently published reviews and critical texts on her blog, Theatre Notes

theatrenotes.blogspot.com.au

Dancing is the elaboration
of difference,

chance. **WHY DANCE?**

change, Philipa Rothfield

changing of transitions
and relations

**Dancing is the
elaboration of
difference, chance,
change, changing,
of transitions and
relations.**

There are as many answers to this question as there are bodies, more perhaps. This is because dancing is not limited to the identity of the body that moves, that is, to the identity of 'the dancer'. Dancing is the elaboration of difference, chance, change, changing, of transitions and relations. Such a broad notion of dance—of movement as an open and self-differentiating field—is offset by the many ways in which dance practices tend to narrow down that field. Once each narrowing comes into play—through the traces of culture, milieu, convention, technique and (kin) aesthetics—then different kinds of answer present themselves. In other words, the question branches out.

Why dance? Is this a question about the instrumental value of dance? Is dance a means to some other end, something other than itself? If we were to look for answers along these lines, we might ask what interests dance serves: whether national, cultural, social and the like. If dance serves interests other than itself, it becomes a means, a technology towards the creation of values. Following along, we could think of dancing in relation to culture, which would open up a plethora of possibilities: dance as cultural identity, as a mode of representation, as the means to flourishing, health, a form of subculture or youth culture. Or dance could be seen in terms of representation, where dance represents the group, culture or nation state. Similarly, dance can be conceptualised as a mode of social change or cultural survival. These ways of looking at dance address what it is that dance can do, what it can achieve in human terms.

Dancing as a way of life.

Although dancing is not always about art it is often, and especially in the west, associated with art. Beauty is the muse of aesthetics, the ultimate goal of art as an object of contemplation. Such an approach leaves aside the question of art as creation, privileging the observer over the artist. Drawing on Deleuze, Elizabeth Grosz poses art as capturing sensation, new sensations not felt before, sensations not belonging to the dancer but to the artwork. If this is so, then the artfulness of dance is the body—those bodies—moving, changing, shifting so as to create new sensations. This way of thinking about dance as art provokes a reconsideration of the body, away from its identity with the self (the dancer) and towards what it is that it can create, in motion:

...material transformations and becomings, to remaking the body, intensifying its forces, while investing its milieu in a new configuration of closures and openings.¹

This notion of art leans towards a future, beyond repetition. Its notion of sensation calls upon the body but suggests that the body is alchemical, the subject of changes beyond its own ken.

Why dance? Feeling, sensation, intensity, qualities in motion, movement, alive, life, cultivation, invention, habituation, de-habituation, towards the future, traces, tracings, the eventfulness of dancing, performance, performing, multiplicity of forces, bodies, transforming, singularly and together.

Philipa Rothfield is a Senior Lecturer of the Philosophy Program at La Trobe University and a dance writer for RealTime and Momm magazine (Korea).

¹ Elizabeth Grosz, *Chaos, Territory, Earth, Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth*, New York: Columbia University press, 2008, p.21.

WHY DANCE?

Introduction

Kath Papas

In the National Dance Forum 2013, we are asking the question *Why dance?* This question arose for us early in the curatorial process. It elicited rich responses for everyone; instantly, it created a territory we circled around in for some time. It morphed, went down tributaries, got longer and less direct (will we scare them off?), and eventually we pruned it back to where we began.

As we make the forum, some of the *whys* we have been thinking about are: pushing the form; making a statement; telling a story; expressing identity and culture; building community; educating; giving voice to; connecting.

The first forum two years ago focused simply on 'dance practice'. This time, I am excited we are going further by addressing not only our dancing itself but its impact in the world. I think perhaps the conversations will be both broader and more specific.

Dwelling in this territory has been tremendously satisfying because over the last year or so, the *why* of what we do has been on my mind a lot. Some of the things I have been thinking about: generosity and urgency (Emily Sexton's key concepts in last year's Next Wave festival); dance for our times, dance that is courageous, human, transcendent.

I hope the forum's conversations ripple out. Here in fact are some of its first ripples. Thank you Dancehouse for taking up our question.

Kath Papas is an independent producer and the producer of National Dance Forum.

Ashley Dyer

When I enjoy dance as an audience member, I often read the dancer's body as an extension of my own. The closer their experiences and lived history are to mine, the closer I am to dancing with them from my chair; the more I become a ghosting partner. Seated, I jump when they jump, turn when they turn, gesture when they gesture, grimace when they role their ankle. I read their body thinking and I think my body into a delightful sweat and sometimes exhaustion.

When I enjoy dance as an audience, often a dance performance offers me a rare invitation. It declares, "Come and look at me! Place your eyes on my flesh in whatever way you like. I'll show you what this body can and can't do." It's more than a perve. The dancer places their body in an extra normal position of vulnerability and in that situation they reveal something of themselves. It's something I'm not usually encouraged or conventionally allowed to do. I rarely glare at a stranger's hands or calves whilst having a coffee at a café.

This is one of the reasons why I use dance as a performance form. It functions very differently to theatre, or music, or film, or sport. It is simultaneously the most abstract and most human of all the art forms. Using these paradoxical aspects, it makes an intimacy possible that otherwise would be impossible. It's a space for being with. It's a place for me to be vulnerable and offer up a scarred and imperfect leg for you to glare at.

Ashley Dyer is a Melbourne-based artist. He presents *Life Support* in Dance Massive at Dancehouse, March 12-14th

Raewyn Hill

As creators, the 'why dance' question naturally leads us to the questions of what we create and how we engage, why we participate in this mostly silent world, why we see dance in corners of the world that others pass by. Personally, it led me to ask why do I work in this medium to communicate in a language that challenges definition. It led me to ask questions about my own 'theory of practice' and in beginning to define these theories, life as a true, living form begins to shape itself in front of me. These 'theories of practice' are at the very core of my own personal belief system, the foundation of my values and my knowledge and through this the dance appears. Dance is a language in which we ask questions and form opinions, in which we have the ability to guide ourselves and others to make decisions about their actions and beliefs, about what is useful and what is not. Dance is the lens through which we begin to reflect our culture, identity, and develop our own (mostly) silent language.

The silent visceral language where the body can say more than words can describe, where the invisible becomes visible, and the audience silenced as there is no appropriate language to label the moment that a dancer, inside of their practice, moves their arm skyward and the world in which we live stands still for a second. Dance, where judgment and evaluation hold their breath long enough to let the dancer fall outside of themselves, and long enough for us as the viewers to look inward and perhaps ask a question of how we participate in or view the world around us.

We all know what love and loss, conflict and defeat, courage and despair mean; with emotions felt in our bodies. So it is through dance that I aim to capture these emotions, through meaningful images and attempt to transfer those images through the dancer to the audience. We live in a shared world; we discover each other through images, voice, sensation and emotion. And through this unwritten language we call movement, and because we all experience and live within it, dance has the ability to resonate with all of us in some small way.

Raewyn Hill is Artistic Director of Dance North and a National Dance Forum panellist.

Know more

on the National Dance Forum:

ausdance.org.au/projects/details/2013-national-dance-forum

Why dance?

Tracie Mitchell

The word *dance* is the skin of an organic process that continues to evolve.

'... a shadow shaped like a tadpole suddenly appeared at one corner of the screen. It swelled to an immense size, quivered, bulged, and sank back again into nonentity... for a moment it seemed to embody some monstrous, diseased imagination of the lunatic's brain. For a moment it seemed as if thought could be conveyed by shape more effectively than by words.' (Virginia Woolf on seeing the film *Dr Caligari* in 1926)

The action Dance is/are structures one creates with which to explore movement.

Surrounded by the film and camera crew a dialogue takes place between myself and the performer, Carlee Mellow. All of us are focused, watching, listening, speaking and understanding. I speak a direction to the performer and I watch her hear the words, catching what she understands and in turn claiming what she catches. She transports my direction, through her understanding, from being about listening with ears and sight to that of her physical intelligence. I watch the minute subtle shifting of a dialogue of movement that travels through her body in which muscle, spine and limbs listen, respond, listen, respond. The site is the moment we are in. We are all listening, waiting, for her response to arrive. The movement is a small shift of a muscle on the side of her face and a tone of thought that can be seen in her eyes. This series of small movements is amplified by the intensity of the concentration of the group. We capture its moment of arrival. (Filming *Under the Weather - Ballroom Scene* 2009).

Tracie Mitchell is a choreographer and film maker. She presets a retrospective of her dance on screen films in Dance Massive at Dancehouse, March 23/24th

Martin del Amo

Why Not? Why Not Dance!

To be honest, I have never been a fan of 'why'-questions. Maybe partially because as an artist, you are constantly subjected to them - by presenters, producers, funding bodies, dramaturges, and sometimes even by your peers and individual audience members. What I don't like about the ubiquitous WHY? It sets up, I feel, a power dynamic, in which the person who asks the question assumes that it is okay to put the person who is asked in a position where they need to explain themselves. So, now we've got the entire National Dance Forum dedicated to a 'why'-question. Ah well, more explaining to do . . .

Why Dance? My answer would be - Why Not? Why Not Dance! Make no mistake, there is a lot to be said against it. It's hard, it doesn't get easier, it's highly competitive, you don't make any money from it, recognition is rare, promotion even rarer, it is not exactly a popular art form, it struggles to reach audiences, sustainability is difficult, longevity nearly impossible. Dance is not for the faint-hearted and the idea of dedicating one's life to it must sound most unappealing to them.

But for those who feel adventurous, endlessly curious, prepared to challenge themselves on an ongoing basis, develop new models of how to communicate with people, discover alternate ways of being in the world, putting their body and their entire being on the line all the time - for those, and it's certainly true for myself, the answer to the question Why Dance? will just simply be Why Not? Only to add, emphatically: Why Not Dance!

Martin del Amo is a Sydney-based choreographer.

He is currently presenting *Slow dances for fast times* at Carriageworks, Sydney.

National Dance Forum program

Presented by project partners **Ausdance National** and **Australia Council for the Arts**, the second **National Dance Forum** (NDF2013) will take place at **Footscray Community Arts Centre** in Melbourne, **15-17 March 2013** and is set to coincide with **Dance Massive**.

Keynote artists-in-conversation are Dalisa Pigram, co-Artistic Director of Marrugeku, with David Pledger, and Artistic Director of Australian Dance Theatre Garry Stewart with Anne Thompson.

Diverse breakout sessions cover panel, presentation, roundtable and screening formats:

BlakDance First Nations Dance Panel

'Whose responsibility is it to make sense of this?'

Dramaturgy, outside eye or feedback?

Virtuosi industry preview screening

'What role dance education play in shaping Australian culture for tomorrow?'

Beyond hybridity: current Australia/Asia-Pacific dance practices

A Lifetime's Collaboration

BETWEEN US: Connections within and beyond the independent dance sector

What is dance doing in Australia? And what is Australian dance doing in the world?

The NDF2013 Facilitator is Jeff Khan, co-Director of Performance Space, Sydney. Also joining the NDF2013 team for a number of sessions is Janenne Willis, guest co-facilitator, roving provocateur and catalyst at large. Janenne will bring her energy, seasoned facilitation skills and experience co-creating futures one conversation at a time.

DANCING DANCE AGAIN

David Huggins

We all are bodies

Dance is an art form categorised by its precarious nature. It is essentially one generation away from extinction if it isn't passed through living and intelligent bodies. Dance elusively defies our efforts to contain, codify and document it faithfully. These are not new concepts; the ephemeral nature of dance has been long discussed and praised by very articulate people. Yet, as I look around, I question whether contemporary dance artists celebrate this uniqueness enough. Do we acknowledge it as a core aspect of the art form we have chosen? In fact, there seems to be a palpable discomfort with engaging with dance as an art form unto itself, and this is hindering the possibility of dance to continue to develop as a legitimate art form on its own. How can we expect audiences to be part of the discourse of dance, when we are lacking confidence in our own voice? Dance, desperately needs its advocates, and it has to begin with us.

The problem with dance is that its medium is the body. We all have one, in varying shapes and forms; so familiar and immediate, that it often exists in a blind spot avoiding scrutiny. To place a living body in front of another in a performance is an opportunity to bring to the fore that which may be hidden or too obvious to be noticed in the everyday; to re-present that which we know. It can be a chance to question the place the body inhabits in our society, how we relate to one another, the nature of existence, and may suggest new ways of being and thinking. It is an opportunity to by-pass the rational and intellectual, and appeal to our other impulses; empathetic responses as fellow human beings.

Much of dance that occurs today gives no room for audiences to consider such questions. "This dance is about" is a statement that we tend to avoid in programme notes. The words "an exploration of" or "an investigation of" often take its place. Yet such words still imply that the audiences are expected to *get* something; a narrative or an underlying theme or concept that can be explained in words. It is as if the mere recognition of the artist's intent within the work is the task of the audience. How many times have you heard people say "I don't get contemporary dance." They are kept busy, burdened with the expectation to

understand the work, and this alleviates any need to delve into more challenging ways of engagement.

Too often works rely on many elements, apart from the dancing to convey its messages. It is as if we are trying to tie dance down, imbuing the work with excessive content through often awkward marriages to other more familiar art forms such as dramatic theatre, film, sculpture, music, so that it may be better understood. It signifies an unfortunate lack of confidence in the art form itself; as if dance is not enough. Perhaps it is even an admission that the dancing is underdeveloped, lacking in information and that it cannot withstand the scrutiny? I am not saying that all dance artists should do away with making work about themes they may find interesting or compelling. However, I will argue that too often, the resulting works are *about* something solely because of the other, loaded elements; the dancing itself superfluous. The art of dance is not enough of a priority. If the other art forms serve your purposes better, why bother with the dancing?

Lack of embodied information, rigorous investigation and invention of new movement is also causing a stasis in dance. Dance is primarily passed on from one body to another, and requires a large investment of time for this process to occur by both choreographer and dancer. The limited amount of time afforded to companies for creation/development, as well as the relatively small pool of professionally employed dancers in such companies contribute to the unsurprising similarities in choreography that can be observed across the board. Again, the *other* elements mentioned earlier help to distinguish the works apart, but we are essentially dancing what we already know, in different guises.

There is no denying that the alternative would be hard work. I would suggest that movement-based practices, where the dancing is rigorously investigated as the priority, are uncommon in Australia, not because they are considered out-dated, do not produce significant results, or are costly in time and money, but are unpopular precisely because they are hard work. It would also require a significant shift in expectations on the part of audiences, artists, funding bodies and other stakeholders in the "industry". Everyone is invested in

some way, and change to the status quo is threatening. There are livelihoods at stake after all. However, I would hope that such a significant overhaul would result in a more vibrant, innovative and confident art form that is not afraid to let its voice be heard on its own terms (or better still be seen and sensed?).

Dance can be a generous and exhilarating opportunity to offer audiences living canvases on which to project themselves, to see/sense themselves through another body and to ask the big questions. Dance works that are overloaded with content distract the audiences away from this innate potential. As dance artists, we have decided to invest an immense amount of time and effort to exploring the form, inviting audiences to come with us on the journey. There are no doubt many ways in which this can and will occur, but perhaps we need to be posing subtle questions through our work rather than trying to make bold statements. We must address the unutterable and explore the spaces where language fails us. Let's dance dance again, and remind our audiences and ourselves that we all already have a valuable point of reference to engage with the art form on a profound level: we all are bodies.

David Huggins has recently graduated Victoria College of the Arts and is currently performing with Russell Dumas' dance exchange in *dance for the time being - Southern Exposure*, in Dance Massive. He writes critical texts and reviews on his blog, <http://dancerstalksdance.tumblr.com/>

See:

***dance for the time being -
Southern Exposure***
at Dancehouse, March 19-21

BORDERLESS BODIES THINKING DANCE MASSIVE

Hellen Sky

perforates spaces, sheds light
to make thought fit

“If we were to look down upon ourselves from some other planetary perspective, we would see that our social political spaces would not make much sense because we would see them as flows of information, networks and ecologies that cannot be contained behind borders... how we use technology, in a techno-scientifically driven world, would be to ensure that emotive, sensing, poetic experience still exists.”¹

Borderless Bodies is a provocation I use not only to describe the perception of my bodies porosity of ‘presence’ and ‘affect’ in the dance between real time technology systems and their/my potential to transform the movement of my intuitive thoughts; as a continuous, complex, multidimensional synaesthetic gesture; AND at the same time BORDERLESS BODIES is intended to provoke a way of understanding the potential of dance as MASSIVE.

As massive and as slippery as an eel. As an itch gets under our skins, it can get in, enter sly ways through periphery doors of perception, sneak infectiously through gaps, through pores like spawn it mushrooms, mutate between bodies, through buildings and stages, super imposing other ways it molds time, operates on culture, in culture, a mirror with no edges prismatically, does not sit in the dark waiting, but perforates spaces, sheds light to make thought fit.

Dancing is a complex transmission that like our body is not contained within borders. Sensing the potential of the difference between bodies, people, culture, states, as we understand more about what moves our world and in turn what moves us to move; the affects and impacts of our choreographic scores, to make visible or to sense the invisible, the liminal, is a MASSIVE dance. And our bodies moving, thinking moving, become a hinge between experience and embodied future knowledge.

Antonio Damasio, a professor of neuroscience used a specific moment he experienced in the theatre that ‘performed’ (as dancers do) to further his thoughts on what it is to embody a moment in time to sense new knowledge.

“I have always been intrigued by the specific moment, as we sit waiting in the audience, the door to the stage opens and a performer steps into the light; or to take the other perspective, the moment when a performer who waits in semidarkness sees the same door open, revealing the lights, the stage, and the audience...”²

...Years later he reflected on the ‘moving qualities of this moment’ and he realized that it came from. *“Its embodiment of a passage through a threshold that separates a protected but limiting shelter from the possibility and risk of a world beyond and ahead.”*

And he sensed it as a powerful metaphor for consciousness.

Hellen Sky is an Australian digital choreographer / performer / director / writer. Her inter-disciplinary work bridges dance, performance, theatre, and installation extended through new technologies. Together with John Mc Cormick and Sylvia Staehli, she is also the founder of Dancehouse.

¹ Sky, 2006: pg.68 2006. *Strange Attractors: Charm between Art and Science – Deep Space: Between Body and Cosmos* Hellen Sky & Paul Bourke, (Centre for Super Computing & Astrophysics. Swinburne University Melbourne) Art Catalogue, Zendai Museum for Modern Art Shanghai. A. Ivanova, ed., Novamedia Art. Melbourne, Australia.

² Damasi. A. *The feeling of what happens, body emotion and the making of consciousness* page 3. Vintage, Random House, UK 2000

CAPTURING THE LIVE MOMENT 'THE RECORDING'

Sandra Parker

'The Recording' is a project that investigates the question: Is it possible to set down and document live performance in a reproducible form?

Through setting up a film shoot on stage, and moving through the process of capturing footage in a similar way to the recording process in film and television, the work confronts the problem of representation and reproduction in both screen based media and in theatre.

My interest in the notion of capturing came about through researching theorist André Lepecki's writings on choreography, and through theorists who debate whether any process of capturing, such as photography, documentary film, or documentation of live performance can ever truly represent the live moment. Theorist Peggy Phelan suggests that live performance can never be documented or re-presented; instead, once a performance disappears it is transformed to something "other than performance".¹ Lepecki contends that choreographic forms suffer the same fate - choreography is transformed through the process of what he terms, 'recapturing'. To illustrate how choreography can be understood as 'recapturing', he uses the example of taking improvised movement - movement already captured through improvising - and 'recapturing' that movement by transforming it into set movement patterns where it can be remembered and performed again. Lepecki observes that the return to choreography in a rehearsal, or on any subsequent performance, is a constant "choreographic reiteration of the vanishing moment...an endless striving to recapture a perfect moment, a perfect pose, spin, intentions, that we believe can be realized again from its own disappearance".²

In the studio this theoretical starting point began to spear off into a deeper concern with the problem of recapturing, not only of the choreographic score itself, but the same performance; the same inflection, presence, or emphasis each time. The fragility of the live act, and the performer's role in finding a way to make the "reiteration of the vanishing moment" believable, became

the central creative investigation. Is each reiteration only ever an approximation of a previous iteration? Can a performer ever feel the same physical or psychic sensations found in a previous performance? And is this desirable anyhow?

I began to think about this disparity and its relationship to contemporary life, where the line between what is truly 'live', 'real', or manipulated is blurred. Is there a difference between our selves as subjects inside of reality television, computer screens, YouTube clips, Facebook photographs, and our 'real' selves? Am I 'performing' my profile, or my true *authentic* self? How 'real' is a person on 'reality' TV? While researching 'The Recording', the point was brought home for me on watching the TV series *The Sopranos*. One of the characters, Carmela Soprano, is trying to get her husband Tony's attention while he watches a small TV set. He replies: "Just a sec, so much more interesting". She asks: "Than what?" He says: "Life". She replies: "What, are you kidding me? It is your life".³ So what is more *real*? Are mediated representations more interesting? Is the present and live more desirable, or the recaptured, reproduced and manipulated, and as Carmela Soprano suggests, no longer any different?

'The Recording' plays with the slippage between the real and the mediated. By using a movement vocabulary literally drawn from film and television, a strategy to present embodied movement we instinctually recognise and feel comfortable watching, 'The Recording' overthrows what appears at first glance. Cinematic lighting, camera framing, and emotional dramatic sound are layered over movement sequences to create a familiar tone and empathy, drawing the viewer into the work, before they are deconstructed, disrupting and breaking apart the world on stage. Through layering aural, textual and visual elements, a rehearsal, (which perhaps is the most authentic performance possible with its slippages, mistakes and



See:

rough edges?), is transformed to the dramatic and back again, uncovering the way in which a live moment can be manipulated, recorded and reproduced. Exposing the risk of manipulation and blind acceptance, the gap between the live 'rehearsal' and the capturing and recapturing process is opened up and tested on stage before the audience.

Although 'The Recording' draws heavily from film and television, the work *is* theatre, which in a similar way to film and television plays with manipulating reality. Philosopher Alva Noë writes: "theater denies real presence".⁴ By this, I take Noë to mean that in theatre, an authentic, truthful exchange between the presence of the performer and the audience is marred by theatrical conventions. However, Noë points out that there is an exception, the symbolic space of the theatre is held up by the pretense that the "possibility of something going wrong on stage is always a live one; as audience, we only pretend that we are not alert to it".⁵ This denial, and our susceptibility to embarrassment when something does go wrong, according to Noë, "is evidence of modernity's only fragile hold on us".⁶ While we surrender and enter the world of theatrical fantasy, the suspension is tenuous, on a precipice. Liveness affords alternate possibilities – something else *could* happen.

By playing with the line between reality and fantasy, 'The Recording' aims to disrupt the symbolic flow of the theatre and show how both audience and performer are susceptible to slippage beyond the pretense of the stage space. The work invites the 'something else' to happen. Although already rehearsed, seemingly so well known, yet elusive in its perpetual disappearance, in 'The Recording' the performer measures their success in 'recapturing' or reiterating the live moment, making it 'real', new, and believable each time, while in a similar way to the audience, denies the potential of something going wrong.

Like watching actors or dancers in an open rehearsal without dramatic lighting and sound to mask or emotionally manipulate the audience's perception, in 'The Recording' the audience can see more than they should – the performer's real effort to 'get it right'. The impossibility of recapturing, the search for the definitive version, and making the performer's work to achieve the live moment over and over again obvious and apparent, 'The Recording' makes the case that the theatrical struggle for presence, and for transcendence and mastery is in fact a real one.

Sandra Parker
The Recording
Dance Massive
March 13-16, 7pm

¹ Phelan, Peggy *Unmarked The Politics of Performance*, Routledge, 1993, p. 146

² Lepecki, André 'As If Dance Was Visible', *Performance Research*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1996, p. 73

³ *The Sopranos*, HBO, Season 4, Episode 11

⁴ Noë, Alva *Varieties of Presence*, Harvard University Press, 2012, p. 5

⁵ *ibid.* p. 6

⁶ *ibid.* p. 6

Myriam Gourfink 'Breathing Monster'

See:

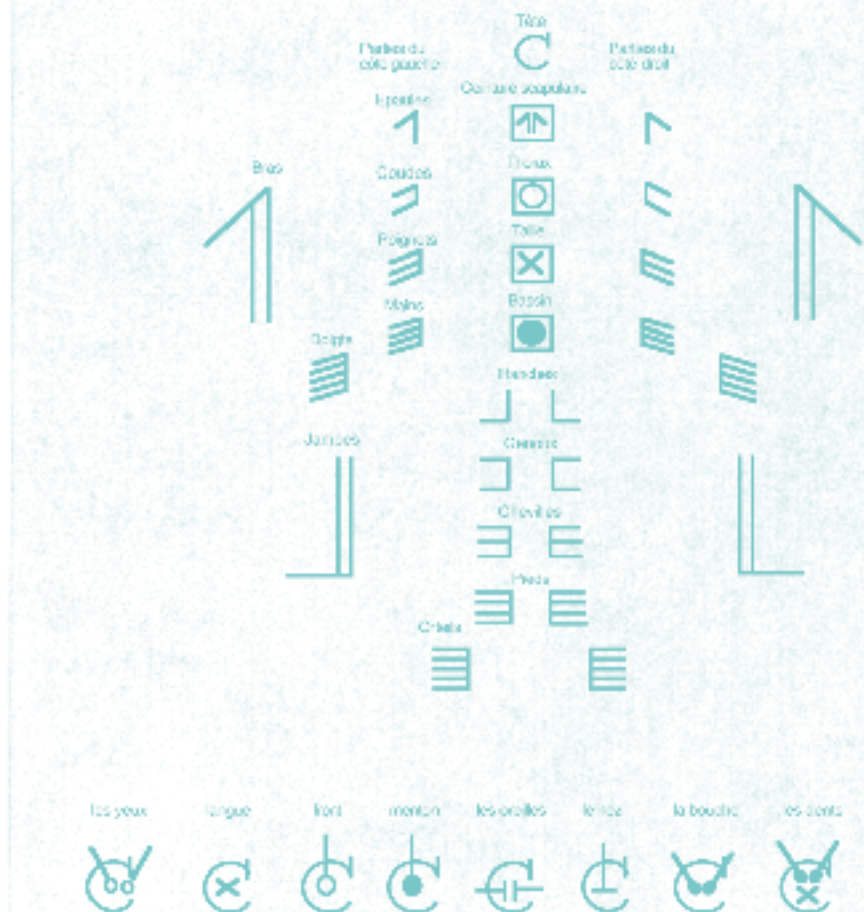
Myriam Gourfink
Breathing Monster,
June 28 – 29th, 8pm

(in partnership with Critical Path and Performance Space/ISEA, Sydney and with the support of the Institut Français and Ambassade de France en Australie).

Read more:
www.myriam-gourfink.com

Myriam Gourfink has fascinated the French choreographic landscape for the past 10 years. Only recently, her rigorous yet challenging works have reached critical and public acclaim. Her pieces now tour the world and the choreographic composition software she invented, LOL, proves new movements are possible.

Dancehouse has invited Myriam in June this year. We chose two reputed dance critics to introduce her to the Australian audiences.





Enhanced Treshholds

Jean-Marc Adolphe

In-View In Perspective

Gérard Mayen

Dance involves bodies. Yes, but more than that... It involves bodies at work, committed, thoughtful bodies, bodies that are aware of the time/space continuum that they render visible, or at least perceptible. This is the case for every genuine expression of choreographic creativity: if the body is at work, it must be driven by an intention, a thought, a goal, carried by currents that are not necessarily linear, and where there is often conflict between techniques for control and the desire for unrestrained expression.

Focusing on this conflict, intrinsic to every physical body in a state of dance, Myriam Gourfink has created a field of resonances. Rarely has a choreographer ventured so far in her simultaneous exploration of the organicity of movement and "constraining scripts". From her first solos (*Beith*, in 1996, and *Waw*, in 1997) to her forthcoming productions of *Bestiole* and *Une lente mastication*, the vibratory line of a determinedly innovative dance has produced a portfolio that is already significant, numbering around twenty dance productions. But beyond this body of work that has continually expanded and forged a performance model distinct from ambient styles, Myriam Gourfink has used a wholly arborescent kinesthesia, which has become the very heartbeat of her choreographic research. By slowing time-spans, giving space to the echo of "micro-movements", and honing perceptions inspired by the disciplined practice of yoga, she has forged a unique, poetical expression of presence.

Simultaneously, the need to write dance scores has led her down the road to scripts inspired by Labanotation, most often used a posteriori to refine her choreographic vocabulary, rather than to inspire composition. The use of computer software or motion captors does not function as prosthetics that would program an enhanced body: these techniques, serving a choreographic concept, are there to accompany the introduction of threshold enhancement. If dance produces a flash (apparent or real) at the same time as a tremor, its magnitude can only be measured, or felt, in the passageways that it opens in the boundaries of our perception. Which no doubt explains the recurrent theme of the visible perception that dance awakens. In other words: what does dance (and in particular Myriam Gourfink's dance) invite us to see, beyond what is merely recognizable?

Myriam Gourfink's dances are only ever performed slowly. Her one-hour productions hardly develop more than a single, infinite expression. For others, two or three minutes would be enough. And moreover, her productions are all the same. We've just stretched the point, imagining what an uninformed spectator, at least one unreceptive to Myriam Gourfink's art, might have to say in the first instance.

The essence that would be captured by observation only skim the surface. However, for nearly fifteen years now, her determined research has explored a world whose limits seem to extend each time we believe we have reached them. This quest is endless, which goes beyond the veil of token appearance and is forever reinvented. Breathtaking, she inhales. With Myriam Gourfink, timescales are indefinably plastic, multi-dimensional and multi-directional, nourished in complete porosity by the vibrations of a body that flows across them by reflecting and projecting its own perceptions. This has to be understood as respiratory, reversible and fleeting, neverending. It is minimal. But not minimalist. Because it is infinitely enriched with activated, diversified and well-constructed data. From where does Myriam Gourfink's expression originate? From a flow of deep internal respiration. This flow is intensely laden with multiple imaginative particles whose perceptive function itself is a source of supply. The well-developed practice of Tibetan energy yoga, several hours a day, enables her to master the most subtle nuances of the "female force centre", via contractions and relaxation of the genital organs and related respiratory connections in circulatory flux.

The composition software, LOL, produced in collaboration with musician Kasper T. Toeplitz and dancer-choreographer Laurence Marthouret enables her to create a time-space context that is flexible, composite and reversible. This choice of technology uses the dance score as a context for spontaneous invention without relegating it to a conservative role of posterior scripting. The composition is performed in real time, according to the open structures which are drawn from the speculative, auto-reflexive and auto-fictional dimensions generated at the core of the perceptive function itself. Myriam Gourfink's dance seeks expression within liaisons that are not invisible in nature, but which are deliberately derived from the in-view perspective – that which is not seen but could be seen, in which the art form can operate by liberating the unleashed potential of forbidden evidence.

which the art form
can operate by liberating
the unleashed potential
of forbidden evidence

TOO MANY FESTIVALS BAD FOR LOCAL ARTISTS

Mary Lou Jelbart

“Too many festivals, too many artists” has been a recurrent cry for the past 5 years, particularly in France, which boasts a huge number cultural events.

Paris counts some 300 independent choreographers and the country some 50 dance festivals. Here we highlight this debate that seems to be brewing, but with issues that are specific to Australia. The following article, originally published by Arts Hub, is a response to Esther Anatolitis’ *Too Many festivals is never enough*. So too many festivals, good or bad?

I read Esther Anatolitis’ view of arts festivals with considerable interest.¹ As a former director of the Fringe Festival, it isn’t surprising that she feels there can *never be too many festivals*. There is a great feeling of energy around the Fringe Festival, hundreds of shows, thousands of performers, visual artists, techs, directors and producers, crowds of young arts lovers going to events across the (inner) city. But it’s one thing to be in a funded environment (i.e. the organizer) and quite another to be a venue or performer doing their damndest not to go under in a sea of performance created debt.

My view is that of the independent venue, and the independent (and mostly unfunded) performers. For us, festivals tend to suck the oxygen out of the air. Try getting media coverage for a production during the Comedy Festival (sponsored by Fairfax). Try getting an audience during Melbourne Festival (with virtually no hope of print media coverage of any sort or perhaps a grudging review from an overloaded critic).

While Festivals make politicians feel good (all those free tickets and priority seating at grand events), they tend to depress those of us who don’t quite fit the festival mode, who just want to present good theatre and build up loyal audiences. Take a look at the numbers of shows giving away tickets on various websites or half tix every day of the week and it becomes obvious just what a battle making theatre can be – in a city that prides itself on its arts loving audiences.

For those of you who don’t know fortyfivedownstairs, this is an in dependent, not for profit theatre and gallery which has now been in existence for over ten years. We charge rent for the space plus expenses and have a small number of private donors who help keep the doors open. One of my passions is new Australian work (there hasn’t been all that much of it on the mainstream stages since we began in 2002). Unlike the mainstream theatres we have presented many works by Australian women writers – Patricia Cornelius, Kit Lazaroo, Dina Ross, Rachel Berger, Linda Jaivin, Moira Finucane & Jackie Smith, Noelle Janaczewska, Lally Katz, Bagryana Popov

But over the past decade it has become a lot tougher as yet another festival emerges. Let me take you through the scenario: companies, writers and directors approach me to present a season at fortyfive and we start to talk about timing: It turns out that March/April is out because of the Comedy Festival. Every second year, Next Wave takes up most of another month, and now the new Cabaret Festival takes over in July. The Fringe cuts out three weeks in September/October for many companies, and as far as October and the Melbourne Festival is concerned, if you’re not in it, you might just as well take off overseas for a break.

So (hypothetical here) you decide you have to join in, if you’re not to stay shut for half the year. But you discover that the Comedy Festival wants you, but doesn’t really want you to compete for audiences with their own productions. And everyone knows that the Town Hall is the place to be if you’re to get any support from the Festival, beyond listing in the program. Many performers will approach us, but really as a fall back position in case they don’t get into the Town Hall. And then, if you do fill three slots a night, you discover that the venue isn’t marked on the map at the Town Hall – only their own managed venues have that privilege. The last year we had anything to do with the Festival (2009), I asked for one of the bright pink flags which I’d seen on other venues in Flinders Lane, so that people knew we were part of the Comedy Festival. But I was knocked back because (a) they were expensive (I offered to pay) and (b) they were only for *Festival-run* venues.

The situation with the Melbourne Festival is different, but can be equally tricky. Most recently we have proposed productions which have been accepted as part of the Umbrella program of the Festival. That means you have the prestige of being part of a really wonderful event but no funds are available to assist. In our most recent experience we proposed a season by New Zealand’s national Maori theatre company, Taki Rua, which has performed in many parts of the world, but never at a capital city festival in Australia. Apparently exposure in the Festival brochure is valued at \$40,000 (page 38, half a left hand page). Despite several four star reviews, and audiences leaving the theatre raving about the performance, we lost some thousands of dollars on this production, something which an unfunded venue like fortyfivedownstairs cannot afford to do.

When I was a journalist, and an arts reviewer, I loved Arts Festivals, and during Comedy Festival I would go to three shows a night. At the Melbourne Festival I saw wonderful productions from all over the world, as one can do today. But looking now from the other (unpaid) side of the fence, I can also see that the proliferation and expansion of arts festivals can have an unintended, but sadly negative effect on the local performance scene. In these times there are limited discretionary dollars to go around and a huge amount of them are going to the Festival imports, at the expense of the local independent scene.

All those big festivals are underwritten to the tune of many millions of dollars by taxpayers. I don’t want to seem overly parochial but imagine what might happen if some of those millions were used to support local companies? We could be the Berlin of the Antipodes!

Mary Lou Jelbart is an arts journalist and Artistic Director of fortyfive downstairs. This article was originally published by Arts Hub in November 2012.

¹ Ester Anatolitis, *Too Many festivals is never enough*, published by Arts Hub in September 2012. (<http://ad.artshub.com/au/news-article/-/s/-/too-many-festivals-is-never-enough-191407>).



It's All Happening

Housemate XI Announced

Congratulations to our New Housemate, Victoria Chiu!

Victoria has performed and toured extensively with European companies and choreographers and has worked with Australian dance makers Fiona Malone and Bernadette Walong. She has presented short and full-length works in Australia and in various European locations.

Victoria will work with dancer Amelia McQueen to create *Floored* (working title) a movement-based exploration following a thematic thread of comforts, dependence and obsession.

Victoria will begin her residency at Dancehouse after Dance Massive.

Learning Curve 2013 with Tony Yap

2 – 6, 8 – 12 April, 9.30am – 1pm

Learning Curve is a Dancehouse mentoring and further training free program that brings dancers/choreographers together with an established facilitating artist in a concentrated and intimate studio experience.

Born in Malaysia, Yap is an accomplished dancer, director, choreographer and visual artist. Tony has made a commitment to the exploration and creation of an individual dance theatre language that is informed by psycho-physical research, Asian shamanistic trance dance, Butoh, Voice and Visual design.

To apply

www.dancehouse.com.au

Workshop with Martin del Amo

6 – 10 May, 9.30am – 1pm

The Body Exists To Be Tested

As dancers, we are trained to perform extremely complex movement material and make it look effortless. It's precisely our training, however, that sometimes makes us forget how powerful a simple gesture can be, or a moment of stillness, or a mere flick of an isolated body part. This workshop takes an investigative approach to dance making, exploring various improvisational and compositional strategies to generate, structure and analyse solo dance material.

Martin del Amo is a Sydney-based dancer and choreographer. He is best known for his full-length solos, fusing idiosyncratic movement and intimate storytelling. In recent years, Martin has extended his practice to choreographing group works and solos for others and various solos for his ongoing multi-part choreographic project, *Slow Dances For Fast Times*. Martin regularly teaches for a wide range of arts organisations and companies and has extensively worked as mentor and consultant on projects initiated by young and emerging artists. He also writes and regularly contributes to RealTime magazine.

More information:

www.dancehouse.com.au

Dance Sites

Longtime collaborators Critical Path, Strut Dance and Dancehouse have joined forces to formalise a new mobility network for independent dance, a first of its kind in Australia. Centres for independent dance making in their respective states, the 3 partners recognise that limited opportunities currently exist for Australian dance artists to tour their work interstate, and to introduce it to interstate peers, presenters and audiences alike. The Dance Sites network will work together to formulate projects which promote new pathways from research to presentation that circulate independent dance around Australia.

In 2013, we will support 3 choreographers (one each from NSW, VIC and WA) to present a work in development over 3 nights as part of Strut's Eyes Wide Open Dance Platform at Kings St Art Centre, Perth. Facilitated by Rebecca Hilton, the work-in-progress showings aim to provide an opportunity to fold peer exchange and critical engagement with audience into the research and development process.

Critical Path, Sydney

Critical Path will host Re/Inventing Traditions in March, a weeklong exchange bringing together ten independent choreographers working with traditional or classical forms in contemporary practices.

March, April and May residencies in the Drill Hall: WeiZen Ho explores question of death through improvisation working from her practice of Pancha Tanmatra, and Nick Power collaborates with French choreographer and b*girl Anne Nguyen to dissect the raw energy and expression of the cypher. Meryl Tankard revisits The Oracle through technology, and Ghenoa Gela explores the boundaries of her traditional Torres Strait Islander dancing.

In the Research Room: Visual artist Deborah Kelly interviews a range of choreographers, historians, sociologists and dancers in Australia and elsewhere a series of questions formulated from her memorial project Tank Man Tango based on the Tiananmen protests.

Don't miss our upcoming workshop series **The Sustainability of Future Bodies** and **SEAM** info session (5 June).

More information

www.criticalpath.org.au

EVENT CALENDAR

DANCE MASSIVE

March 12 – 14

ASHLEY DYER Life Support

WORLD PREMIERE

March 13 – 16

SANDRA PARKER The Recording

WORLD PREMIERE

March 17 – 19

MATTHEW DAY Intermission

March 18 – 21

RUSSELL DUMAS

dance for the time being – Southern Exposure

March 22 – 24

ATLANTA EKE Monster Body

March 23 – 24

TRACIE MITCHELL

Dance Screen Retrospective 1985-2008

March 24

BEN SPETH WeTube LIVE

April 4 – 7 Performance (open season)

HELEN SMITH Ten Worlds

April 2 – 12 Workshop

LEARNING CURVE with **TONY YAP**

May 6 – 10 Workshop

THE BODY EXISTS TO BE TESTED
with **MARTIN DEL AMO**

June 24 – 28 International Workshop
ENHANCED BODIES with **MYRIAM GOURFINK**

June 28 – 29 Performance

MYRIAM GOURFINK (FR)

BREATHING MONSTER

Contributors To Dancehouse Diary

Dancehouse would like to warmly thank all the contributors to this issue of our Diary: Alison Croggon, Philippa Rothfield, Kath Papas, Ashley Dyer, Tracie Mitchell, Raewyn Hill, Martin Del Amo, David Huggins, Hellen Sky, Sandra Parker, Myriam Gourfink, Jean-Marc Adolphe, Gérard Mayen, Mary Lou Jelbart, as well as Dominic Forde (Famous) for his awesome new design. A special thank you to Philippa Rothfield for all her support.

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Dancehouse is situated on Wurunjeri land. We acknowledge the Wurunjeri people who are the Traditional Custodians of the Land on which Dancehouse sits and pay respect to the Elders both past and present of their Kulin Nation.

Location Map

