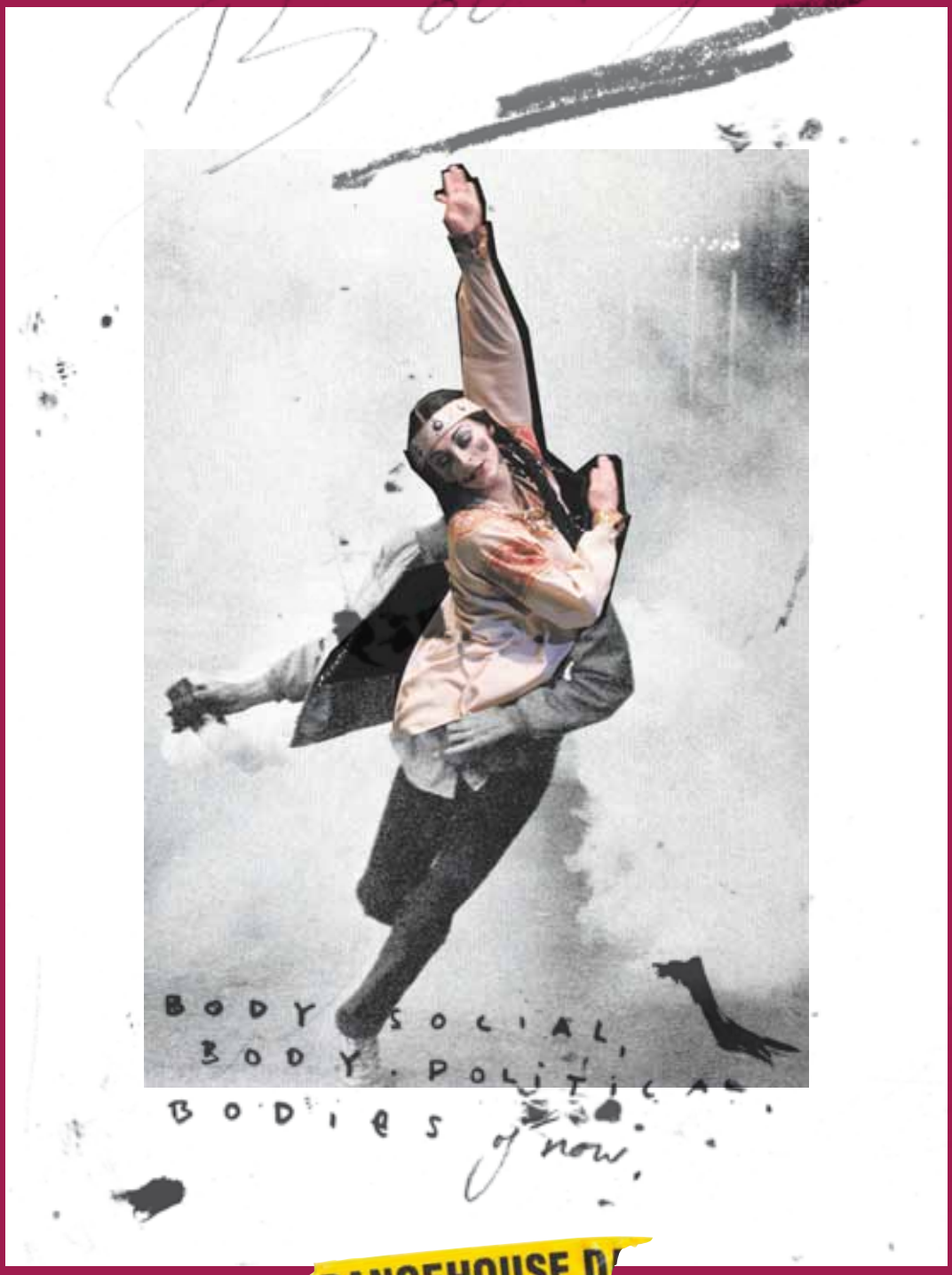
DANCEHOUSE DIARY

ISSUE 5 / JULY – OCTOBER 2013



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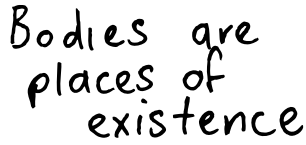
A body can become speaking, thinking, dreaming, imagining. It always senses something. It senses everything corporeal. It senses skins and stones, metals, grasses, waters, and flames. It doesn't stop sensing.

— Jean-Luc Nancy, *Corpus*



The Body. This. Now.

The thesis that social phenomena permeate and shape human bodies is common knowledge since Mauss and later Foucault investigated the social nature of our habitus (acquired abilities). Our contemporary bodies are more than ever inscribed by culture, constrained by the geopolitical environment and moulded by the social media patterns. More than ever, the body is receiving intensified scrutiny in order to better expose it to mass culture and pl(a)y it to the all mighty consumerism. Undoubtedly, the body senses, and when it does, the selves (our energies, behaviours, desires) suffer.

With this issue, we attempt to explore the patent interwovenness of the socioculturated bodies with the dancing (performing) body. We look to what extent the dancing body mirrors, deliberately or not, the societal and political challenges of our world. Not that this interrogation would be new. Starting with the late 19th century ballet airy virtuosic body hinting at the nascent bourgeois' dreams of social evasion and finishing with the saccadic defiant hip hop body epitomising the dominating social disarray and the shattering of the American dream, one would end up knowing as much on the history of dance than on our society. No wonder some of us dream of seeing the revival of the Duncan-Fuller-Saint Denis dances to remind us that the ambient prevailing puritanism is, as it has always been, mere hypocrisy.

We have invited our contributors to reflect to a slightly different angle – we wondered what kind of mirror is the body of a dancer today, now. To what extent is it given the space to be permeated by socio-political events? To what extent can it encourage political analysis and societal thought? How vigorous is the meaning that it chooses to convey?

Bodies aren't some kind of fullness or filled space, as Jean-Luc Nancy rightfully pointed out. 'They are *open* spaces, implying, in some sense, a space more *spacious* than spatial, what could also be called a *place.* Bodies are places of existence, and nothing exists without a place, a *there,* a "here," a "here is," for a *this.'*

With this issue we are precisely examining what *this* is...

Angela Conquet, Artistic Director, Dancehouse

Dancehouse Diary is a free almost quarterly independent publication published by Dancehouse. The Dancehouse Diary wishes to take you on an intimate journey through dance as art of thinking the moving body and of sculpting the spaces, the outer and the inner ones. Remotely inspired by Dancehouse's programs, it is a site for connecting the dance artists' and thinkers' vision of this world with a wide readership.

Dancehouse is the centre for independent dance in Melbourne, Australia. Through its programs of residencies, performance, training and research, Dancehouse is a space for developing challenging, invigorating, and socially engaged moving art. Dancehouse is also a hub of knowledge and resources, a presenter of outstanding programs targeting multiple communities and a fierce advocate for the vibrancy and literacy of the Australian independent dance sector.

The body, zero point of the world

SUCH A LITTLE THING

by Geisha Fontaine
translated by Frida Komesaroff

"My body is the opposite of a utopia, it is never underneath another sky, it is the absolute place, the little fragment of space with which, in the strictest sense, I am one. My body, merciless topia"

— Michel Foucault

A choreographer generally creates with the bodies of the dancers, who, in turn, work with their own bodies[1]. For a long time in the humanities, especially in Europe, the dancer's body has been the object of numerous investments, fantasies and affects[2]. Similarly, the bodily dimension and physical practices of social life were studied diversely, in various separate specialties: medical, psychiatric, anthropomorphic, philosophical, biological, ergonomic, ethnological, etc[3]. In reality, little research has been dedicated to studying the body in its multiplicity.

Yet, to dance is to own this multiplicity. The dancer's body is plural and combines different dimensions: pedestrian, expert, organic, aesthetic, sensitive, perceptive, creative, thinking. It is strange amalgam of the social and the artistic body. It is also a "field of relation to the world", in the beautiful words of Laurence Louppe[4]. This body arises from a society, from a time, and it reflects them. It is their product. And sometimes, it disturbs them. It is like the phenomenon of what the philosopher Gilles Deleuze describes as 'minor literature', where, for him, the fractures constitute the power of the work. This minor dimension is in no way a restriction; rather it is a means of exploration. Dance, with its poor body, is itself a minor art. It scorns distinctions between being and appearing, corporeal and intellectual, now and always, here and elsewhere. The body has more than one trump card. It troubles those thinkers who hold onto thought alone. But in the same way, thought disturbs dancers who are too tied to their bodies. Today, thinkers give into their bodies and dancers express their thoughts. It's a triangle linking thought, body and society. But an equilateral triangle?!

Without doubt, the dancing body participates in a socially preferred system of particular references and uses of the body. From the end of the 19th century, the cult of the body as healthy, and as such profitable, began to establish itself. Industrial societies developed, instituting an organisation of work, gesture and posture. The body was rationalised in order to render it more productive. This was also the moment when sports practices, cinema and modern dance emerged. Bodies were more highly valued. The reasons for this greater concern are diverse: the search for a less constrained life; new questioning of human interaction or of a close bond with nature. Ancient Greece became a reference point for attending to one's body.
Yet, frequently what seemed to emerge with the liberation of the body came hand in hand with its subjection. This is a paradox that we can observe throughout the 20th century up until the present. At work, in war, in art and in leisure, the body is more standardised and/or more autonomous. An extreme example is that of the Nazis who privileged the valiant body of the hero, opposing it to the pitiful body of the sickly intellectual. A healthy body is also obedient, readily becoming cannon-fodder during the two world wars that ravaged Europe.

Today, more than ever, the body sells. Advertising, the battle against ageing, organic food, clothing brands...the passage from a collective body to an individual body often favours a consumer's body. Let's occupy our bodies! But the question is: yes, but how? This is one of the challenges of the dancer and the choreographer.

We cannot change any of it: every human is a body. It is simultaneously the site of existence and the condition of all communities. In a radio lecture, Michel Foucault speaks, in a somewhat contradictory way, about what defines the body itself. He commences thus: "My body is the opposite of a utopia, it is never underneath another sky, it is the absolute place, the little fragment of space with which, in the strictest sense, I am one. My body, merciless topia."[5] The body is thus an "absolute" place, according to the philosopher. But his vision of the body changes during the interview: the body becomes "the zero point of the world", "it has no place, but from it emerge and spread all possible places, real or utopian". The body thus seems to escape to a non-place that produces different possibilities. Foucault wonders if "the dancer's body isn't in fact a body expanded according to a space with both interior and exterior to it".

But the philosopher then searches for what might allow us to better define the body. For him, it is the corpse[6] and the mirror: "It is the corpse and the mirror that teach us (at least which taught the Greeks and which now teaches children) that we have a body, that this body has a form, that this form has a contour, that this contour has a thickness, a weight; in short, that this body occupies a space." The philosopher concludes by once again 'spatialising' the body.

The body can therefore be that which occupies a place and projects utopias. That which, destined to being a corpse, allows the joining of numerous spaces. It is a body that permits a multitude of more or less concrete human actions, such as advancing, imagining, perceiving the real, but also sometimes denying it. That would be the body of a dancer! As for Deleuze, he refers to Nietzsche and affirms that "astonishing – that's the body". This comment in turn echoes Spinoza's famous remark,

"The dancer can contribute, through his or her body, to a challenging of dominant models and their identifiers: physical criteria, genre, virtuosity. Nevertheless, the relations between the social body and the dancer's body are complex. To what degree is the dancing body an agitator or a follower? Do nudity or sexual references really have the subversive force that they claim to have?"

— Geisha Fontaine

"we don't know what a body is capable of". Being astounded by the body, exploring its potential; these are necessary to the choreographer, just as they are to the dancer.

Yet the dancer's body fulfills physical criteria; what's more, the techniques it acquires are linked to a given society and to the history of the dance that has developed within it. An American dancer and a French dancer don't have the same physicality, even if they do have numerous common aspects. A sixty year-old dancer dances differently to a twenty year-old dancer. Different markers affect the way in which the dancing body moves.

The body is the first and the most natural instrument of man. Or, more precisely, without speaking of instrument, the first and most natural technical object (and at the same time technical means) of man, is his body[7].

The dancer's body is a paradoxical body. It is the product of a culture and of social determinants, on the one hand; and on the other, it is the producer of new uses for the body. This dimension is little acknowledged by the artists themselves. However, from the techniques and practices he or she has chosen, the dancer has formed, forged and formatted his or her body. It's a dancer's body, an expert body, sometimes a sportsman's body. Its savoir-faire arises from an ensemble of acquired knowledge. The work of the dancer consists of deepening his or her competencies and of challenging them. His or her body is certainly a means, but also possesses a potential for critique. The dancer can contribute, through his or her body, to a challenging of dominant models and their identifiers: physical criteria, genre, virtuosity. Nevertheless, the relations between the social body and the dancer's body are complex. To what degree is the dancing body an agitator or a follower? Do nudity or sexual references really have the subversive force that they claim to have? In Europe, for example, one or ten nude bodies on a stage has become commonplace. Nudity has almost become a norm of all contemporary choreographic creations[8]. In other regions of the world nudity can lead to death. This shows to what point the dancer's body is also a social body, whose audacity depends on the dominant values in a given place and time.

The sociologist Pierre Bourdieu was particularly interested in the ways the presence of the body arises from its social inscription:

"The relation to the body which is progressively incorporated, and which gives the body its truly social physiognomy, is an overall manner of holding one's body, of presenting it to others. In this, among other things, is expressed a particular relationship of consonance or dissonance between the real body and the legitimate body (as it is defined by a particular class of patterns of perception) or, if we prefer, a subconscious anticipation of the chance of success.[9]

The body invents its places, its autonomies and its porosities. It is ferocious and lively, conditioned but searching itself as rebel

"What does the body do to me? That is the question at play in dance. But also in love. In advertising. In pornography. In adolescence. To evoke the body as an entity involves the brain and its plasticity. The question might then become: How does the body move me?"

— Geisha Fontaine

The dancer is also someone who can afford the luxury of being an artist. Even if, as is characteristic of luxury, it earns him or her nothing (or little) in return! The dancer belongs to a milieu in which the necessity of earning a living seems not to be a determining factor. In any case, the dancer chooses first to become a dancer and then afterwards it becomes his or her profession[10]. S/he acquires a physical ease that constitutes a tool of his/her profession as a dancer (in this "anticipation of the chance of success" evoked by Bourdieu). To his/her symbolic capital, the dancer adds a corporeal capital that contributes to his/her status as an artist. The individual positioning of the dancer in his/her capacity as an artist is a social positioning. It is a relational vector between the dancer and the world. As for the choreographer, collaborating with the dancers, s/he creates a specific "between-bodies" and models a temporary organisation of human exchanges. How do the bodies pass each other, mix with each other, meet each other and touch each other? It is a provisional arrangement that signals an indefinable community, in movement, not able to be pinned down. At the same time, the choreographer organises a collective functioning that adheres to modes of production and wage-earning. The dancer with whom s/he works is a worker whose movements also arise from an economic system. The relation to the world then plays along different registers: relations established in artistic creation, work relations and the exchanges between choreographer, dancers, dance professionals and audience. This engenders a network of resonances among several facets of the body: what it exposes, what it feels, what it offers, what it exchanges, what it retains.

What does the body do to me? That is the question at play in dance. But also in love. In advertising. In pornography. In adolescence. To evoke the body as an entity involves the brain and its plasticity. The question might then become: How does the body move me? That is one of the beautiful questions that Spinoza asks. The speed and the slowness of the body relay the speed and the slowness of thought. Sometimes they resist thought. Sometimes they provoke it.

Dancers travel more and more[11]. This is the era of globalisation and they go from country to country. The body of the dancer is a socialised one that submits to certain rules and invents others. It is subject to jetlag, changes in the seasons and economic injunction. It invents its places, its autonomies and its porosities. It is ferocious and lively, conditioned but searching itself as rebel.

The dancer's body is such a little thing, immense.

Geisha Fontaine is a choreographer, performer, writer and dance theorist. Together with partner and video artist Pierre Cottreau, she created several important works which toured the world, including *A Mechanical Piece* a choreography for sensor-activated robots. Her book *Les Danses du Temps* was recently translated into Spanish.

ENSE

Footnotes:

1 There are exceptions! In *100% polyester, objet dansant à définir n°*(1999) by the French choreographer Christian Rizzo, there are no dancers. In *Une pièce démontée* (2010), Geisha Fontaine and Pierre Cottreau set the stage with twenty-five moving sculptures by the artist Dominique Blais. In these works, movement is taken over by a 'non-human', shifting the limits of dance.

2 For example, the French philosopher Michel Serres, influenced without doubt by Stéphane Mallarmé (*Genèse,* Grasset, 1982), speaks of the dancing body as "a totally abstract body, with no existence and with no escape". In the Anglo-Saxon field of "Cultural Studies", the approach to the body is much less literary and is studied according to precise perspectives (gender, colonialism etc.); but it does not focus on the overall workings and dimensions of the body.

3 The sociologist Luc Boltanski questions the foundations of a sociology of the body: "Is it enough to insist on the geographical and historical diversity of the uses of the body (collecting sometimes in the name of "proof" the most heteroclite data, taken from the diverse societies and disconnected from the cultural ensemble that alone can give them their meaning) in order to make possible their sociological anlaysis?" (Luc Boltanski, "Les usages sociaux du corps", *Les Annales*, 1, 1971, p. 205-233).

4 Laurence Louppe, *Poétique de la danse contemporaine,* Contredanse, 1997.

5 Michel Foucault, *Le corps, lieu d'utopies*, radio lecture, 7th December 1966, France Culture.

6 Foucault reminds us: "The Greek word for body only appears in Homer in reference to a corpse."

7 Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie,* PUF, 1950.

8 In *Histoire de la sexualité* (Gallimard, 1976 and 1984), Foucault analyses how different sexual practices are more induced from outside and internalised than determined from within.

9 Pierre Bourdieu, "Remarques provisiores sur la perception sociale du corps", *Actes de la recherché en sciences sociales*, volume 14, April 1977.

10 The opportunities for being a professional dancer vary from country to country. But the choice to dedicate a lot of time to dancing remains an investment, whether or not it earns a return.

11 When they can't travel, they make use of the Internet in developing their dance. Globalised forms of dance appear where young dancers do the same movements in different parts of the world. The same movement vocabularies are found in Algiers, New York, Teheran and Peking.

Read More:

Laurence Louppe, *Poetics of Contemporary Dance*, translated by Sally Gardner, Dance Books Ltd, 2010
on sale now at Dancehouse

BODY POLITIC REFLECTIONS

We have asked the following three questions to a few artists whose works seemed to be sitting in the politically-engaged realm:

Do you consider your works to be political and if so, what motivates this choice?

Could you describe the contemporary and political body your particular practice produces?

Can we identify in the live arts today a sort of a body that understands what it generates, not only artistically, but also politically and socially?

Sarah Jane Norman

I would certainly identify my body of work as political, because I think the choice to make art is fundamentally a political act. I would also argue that all art is about the body, insofar as it is generated by, and concerned with, a stirring the senses. I'm an essentialist in this regard, which is why I make the work I make. The body is the alpha and the omega of human experience, and so my question to myself as a performance and installation artist is how, by speaking to and through the body, we might seek to hit the real heart of particular questions. I'm concerned with how my own body and, by extension, the bodies of my audience, are owned by particular cultural narratives- my practice at the present time is concerned largely with my own cultural and genetic inheritance as a person of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage, and how by embracing the hybridity of my own flesh, I might claim a space from which to speak truthfully to our violent history and our contemporary struggle.

Sarah-Jane Norman is an interdisciplinary artist originally from Sydney, now based between Australia and Europe. Her work *Bone Library* was featured in the 2012 Next Wave Festival. Her most recent body of work, *Unsettling Suite*, was presented by Performance Space in February 2013.

Nikki Heywood

In devising performance, I tend to work close to the bone, drawing material from concerns that make me ill at ease, mining my own perceptions, belief systems and ground of social being particularly related to constructs such as gender, power and intimacy.

Whilst I've collaborated in explicitly political performance making, my own body of work is more intrinsically political, responding to social and cultural conditions in a fairly subjective and inter-subjective way. Less 'head-on' and more playfully lateral, without losing sight of the rich materiality and existence in time that frames the 'realness' of performance.

Whenever one works from the perceptually receptive body with a sense of compassion, we open ourselves to somatic identification, to our own 'discomfort' and to the disquiet or suffering of those around us whose voices are drowned out by the noise of the dominant economic and political agenda. 'Those' may also include animals.

Currently, I am looking at the history of animal representation in art and performance, as well as supporting political activism for the rights and humane treatment of animals.

Nikki Heywood is a Sydney based performance maker and Doctoral Candidate at University of Wollongong. A section of her practice research was recently published in the 1st edition of Animal Studies Journal http://ro.uow.edu.au/asj/

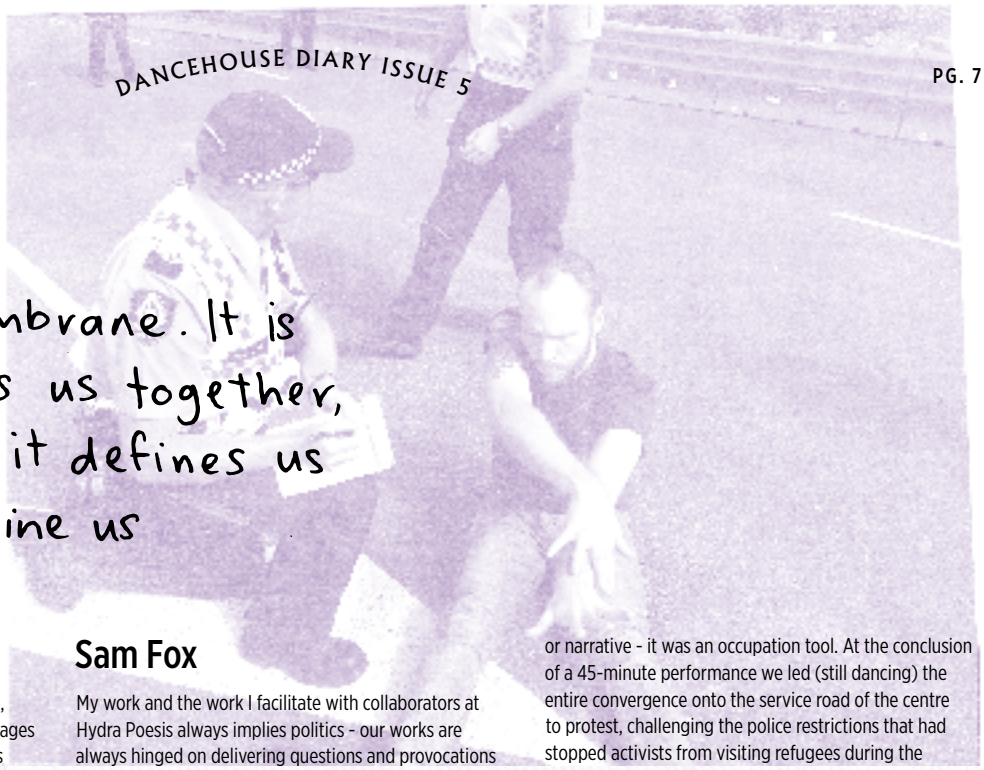
Ahilan Ratnamohan

I consider my work political in terms of the structures and process I work with, but more societal in terms of content. I attempt to work with unconventional performers and hope that in the process I will access an audience who may never have visited a theatre.

Amongst other things, I concentrate on football as a form of movement approaching dance. Up to this point, I feel that such exploration has led to a quite raw, impacting, masculine form of movement, but I also feel that there is a lighter side, which I am beginning to touch on. I am also mainly working with marginalised people, their (and my) movement is not refined or trained in any particular technique. They have their own idiosyncratic technique and, in some ways, just their presence (which is not so common in many theatres) is enough to capture me. For me, often, it is just about not getting in the way of this presence.

A body that understands what it generates? I don't feel that it is possible to entirely understand this because of the multiple interpretations. Quite on the contrary, my choice is to work against this and to work with a body that is not aware of itself in a theatre/dance context, but wholly proficient in a chosen arena. But I do feel that the process of breaking down such forms of movement and choreographing then leads to greater awareness.

Ahilan Ratnamohan is a former footballer and a performance maker based in Sydney and Antwerp.



The body is a membrane. It is a border. It holds us together, it gives us life, it defines us but also can confine us

Jodie McNeilly

I would consider my practice to be (not) not political, indeed a useless double negative, but one that massages the question of: can art be political? My earlier works were highly conceptual, situating my choreographic thinking in opposition to the Kantian notion of *aesthetic disinterest*—a classic position that refuses art to be anything but beautiful in its tickling of our imaginative faculties. Even in striving beyond the tickling vagueness of beauty, my works never had an explicit political agenda. And yet the use of white flour in one production provoked audience thoughts about world hunger, while the quivering of bodies in another was felt to be radically feminist. Rethinking the Kantian position, these readings/experiences tie my work more resolutely to Jacques Ranciére's idea of the *distribution of the sensible* in his approach to a politics of aesthetics.[1] Here, the political in art is possible at a 'non-representational' and 'formal' level, whereby a community shares and participates in a "distribution of spaces, times and forms of activity"(p12). I like this idea—so would Kant. It somehow describes the kind of 'political body' that my current *system of transitions* could produce: the weight, direction, line, speed, breath, scale and atmospheres of moving alone, with others, or in site. The formal registrations of a body moving in space and time might be enough to participate in the political. A body choreographed purely in its transitions is a non-didactic, transgressive manoeuvre where one can sip up their revolutionary slogans and concepts—much like liberated Labanian bodies that formed the tapestry and forces of Nazism.

The political body is subtle. Perhaps dance is politicking more than we recognise, and all that is required for participation is to feel the "rhythms of a dancing chorus" (p14).

Jodie McNeilly is a Sydney based choreographer and researcher working on a system of transitions for choreography and interdisciplinary practice, and coordinating an international working group for experimental methods in dramaturgy.

1 Ranciére, J. (2004). The *Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill. London and New York: Continuum. D.

Sam Fox

My work and the work I facilitate with collaborators at Hydra Poesis always implies politics - our works are always hinged on delivering questions and provocations to audiences. They are delivered in surprising, strange ways, with varying degrees of aesthetic investment, but the questions are always prominent and explicit. This is a political exchange. But we aren't deluded in thinking work in small theatres is a challenge to cultural hegemony or capitalism or that it will tear down the fences of Australia's illegal prison camps. Our work might thematically connect to broader movements, but if we aren't actively connecting, then this is mostly incidental or theoretical politics. Theory can be stimulating but practice that involves connection and exchange with real people on the ground is so much more. Our work is constantly moving towards direct connection to journalists, activists, campaigners, and presenting performance as a beacon at sites of cultural and political significance.

What has come up across all our works is that movements, stories, even data and research, need bodies. The body can be a beacon in human politics. No matter how rich the data, a journalist can't tell a story without quoting somebody or showing us an image. We know that the media always needs an image. Stories in any form need either a protagonist or a mass of humans. A mass of humans is always more interesting and implies a body politic. And it also implies dance. There's a major role for performance practitioners to play in associating abstract, complex work with conflicts or political narratives - not by reducing the inherent abstraction core to our artform(s), but by investing in the placement or connection between work through presenting them at iconic sites of conflict, or dedicating them to a particular active audience and doing this through a real dialogue.

In the *Dance Journalism* project, Hydra Poesis facilitated collaboration between dancers and activists from around the country to present a dance work at the Yongah Hill detention centre in regional Western Australia and cover the National Refugee Rights Convergence. We literally paired dance with journalistic video dispatches from outside the centre, against the police lines. We were a beacon for this site of extreme cultural significance. The choreography was not at all an embodiment of a theme or narrative - it was an occupation tool. At the conclusion of a 45-minute performance we led (still dancing) the entire convergence onto the service road of the centre to protest, challenging the police restrictions that had stopped activists from visiting refugees during the convergence. I wouldn't call this project an artwork.

It was an action. But it draws on and connects to a lot of our performance artworks. The contemporary and political body in our practice is one that's alive and active and at the centre of conflicts of culture, representation, human rights, even the environment.

The body is a membrane. It is a border. It holds us together, it gives us life, it defines us but it can also confine us. We can't grow without change and change involves degrees of violence. There's a lot of queer performance that leads the charge in exploring the complex dynamic of definition and constriction. There's a long history of body art that is very aware of what it generates politically and socially.

If there is a 'live arts body' to be identified, it is complex and it is changing, but not just for the sake of change or fashion or kitsch. It is changing through awareness of cultural and political forces. It is an exciting and scary body. It is far more concerned with conflict and metamorphosis and growth than beauty.

Sam Fox is a performance maker, writer and choreographer working at the intersections of contemporary art, social action and political organising, and is the director of Hydra Poesis based in Perth, Western Australia.

See:

Dance Journalism
http://hydrapoesis.net/category/morphology/projects/dance-journalism/

The political body is subtle. perhaps dance is politicking more than we recognise

WHEN I THINK, I DANCE

Making sense with dance an introduction to Jean-Luc Nancy

by Chris Watkin

In the mid 2000s, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and choreographer Mathilde Monner collaborated on a project that explored the relation between dancing and thinking. Their joint work can help us get over the idea that dance is an object we pick over and dissect in our thinking and writing, and help us embrace a notion of the relation between dance and thinking that is more mutual, where both participate in making sense. This article explores what Nancy means by "when I think, I dance", where dance is used not as a metaphor but as a literal description of the activity of thinking.

Is it worth even trying to think and write about dance? To begin with, dance itself is not a thought that can be formed in syntactic language. If it were there would be nothing to be gained by bothering to see a performance; thinking would be enough. On the other hand, thought comes with its ready-made linguistic categories of "movement", "expression", "tension", "pace" and innumerable other metaphors and images that seek to convey dance in words, or perhaps to represent it, or translate it, or capture it. Or betray it, reduce it, smother it.

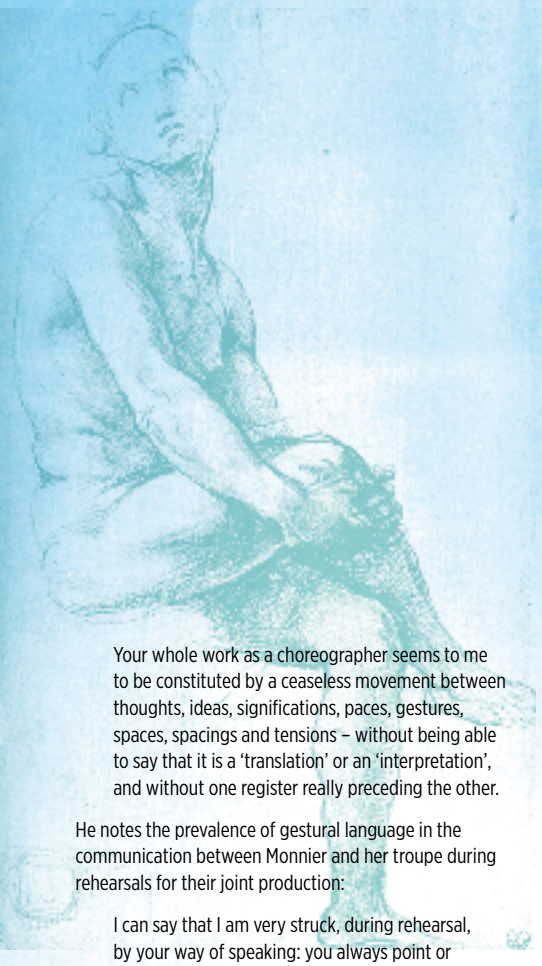
The question of whether it is worth trying to think and write about dance already assumes that dance is a "what" rather than, for example, a "how". It assumes that dance is something that is either happening or isn't happening to a particular body in a particular place at a particular time, and that this "what" can yield itself up as the content of a thought. Nevertheless, it would be too hasty to conclude from this difficulty of working out how dance and thought relate that we must not think about dance at all, but just "experience" it (as if we could divide thought from experience) or just let it flow over us (as if "flow" itself were not just one metaphor seeking to capture dance in language). No, the encounter between dance and thought is necessary, even if it remains difficult.

The question of how dance and thought can encounter each other in such a way that thought neither translates dance nor betrays it is explored in depth by choreographer Mathilde Monnier and philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy in their 2005 publication *Allitérations*. Here they discuss their collaborative performance at the Montréal dance festival in 2000 in which Nancy read from a text at a lectern on stage while, as the encounter is described on Monnier's website, four dancers and a composer sought to "work on the interstices and gaps that arrive when we pass over from listening to a text or to music to the perception of a movement".

In their reflections on the collaboration, Nancy at one point reflects on why the Nazis had such an aversion to dance. Perhaps because it lends itself to a greater ambiguity than the other arts and therefore less to the sort of simple decision and predictable model sought by National Socialism. This is not to say that dance tells no story, but its story is not to be understood as belonging to the category of the danced communication of information to be found in the natural world, like the 'waggle dance' of the bee which indicates the route from the hive to pollen-rich plants in relation to the angle of the sun. In fact, the language of dance is further away from the bee's waggle than it is from syntactic language. In the waggle dance there is a necessary and calculable correspondence between the movement and the reality it signifies: so many vibrations for such and such a distance. In syntactic language that correspondence is no longer necessary (we say "cow", not "moo", and "dog", not "woof"). Similarly, the language of dance – its posture, energy, rhythm and presence – dispenses with a correspondence to a signified reality; it speaks for itself. So it is far too hasty to say that language is a barrier between dance and thought, and that any commerce between the two must be a translation into or out of language per se. Dance and thought both disrupt the necessary relationship between sign and reality; in this respect what they share is greater than what divides them.

Nancy and Monnier are quick to dismiss the paradigm of translation as an adequate figure of the relation between thought and dance. It is emphatically not the case that dance is the contingent carrier of information or code which can be reconstituted without loss in syntactic language. Rather, dance requires a non-intellectual (or at least a not exclusively intellectual, a super-intellectual) experiential understanding.

This does not mean, however, that language and dance can have no commerce with each other, because dance participates, along with syntactic language, in the medium of sense. To "make sense" with movement is not a metaphor, an image or a translation, Nancy insists, and it is not a question of assigning to each gesture or movement an equivalent in syntactic language, but rather of considering gestures as carriers of sense in their own right. Rather than translating sense from elsewhere, dance extracts a new, other and different sense. We can say that Nancy understands dance as a language here, but only on the condition that "language" itself be understood differently, transformed by its encounter with dance, as Nancy comments on Monnier's rehearsals:



When I think I dance

> Your whole work as a choreographer seems to me to be constituted by a ceaseless movement between thoughts, ideas, significations, paces, gestures, spaces, spacings and tensions – without being able to say that it is a 'translation' or an 'interpretation', and without one register really preceding the other.

He notes the prevalence of gestural language in the communication between Monnier and her troupe during rehearsals for their joint production:

> I can say that I am very struck, during rehearsal, by your way of speaking: you always point or name obliquely, through images, comparisons or indications which from the start refuse to name, like when you say "No, it's not that!" – a "that" that you point towards "the thing itself", towards the "sense" to be produced or touched. I noted down more or less accurately some phrases you used with the dancers: "there, it must be stronger... longer... less broken," "at this point, I didn't know where you were", or again "in that light it won't do, I lose my bearings". You point out the identities of place, time and gesture, tiny unities and unities of the whole, but you do not give their significations – or you merely brush past them.

This proliferation of gestural language begins to help us see why it is wrong to assume that gesture and dance form one mode of communication, and language and ideas another. Language, too, dances, and not only in a metaphorical way. We can see this by looking at the educational context. Whereas "instruction" is merely the passage of information, a closed transaction of fixed meanings, Nancy argues that all "education", insofar as it sets the learner on a path rather than imparting certain pre-packaged information, deals not only in linguistic meanings that signify but also in gestures that signal and mobilise without signifying, just like Monnier's instructions to her troupe. These gestures communicate no determinate content but they communicate themselves, their energy and intensity. To educate is to pass on a way of going outside oneself with an energy that is open to new significations but that cannot be reduced to them. It is to pass on knowledge, but also to pass on the gesture appropriate to that knowledge: its tone, timbre, allure, manner or inclination. Education is caught up in a gesturing that lends it what Nancy calls its colouration. Don't we all remember, he suggests, the pacing, the mannerisms and the gestures of some of our former teachers, their ways of moving and holding themselves that became indivisible from the "content" of their teaching? We might continue: and wasn't it that moving and holding that made the content make sense, that conveyed a love of and curiosity for learning? When we begin reflecting in this way on the inseparability of manner and information we soon find that we have to leave behind the clunky distinction between content and gesture, between the form and content of education. What is more, this moving and holding is no idiosyncratic appendage to the process of education but education's necessary participation in what Nancy calls "dancerly transmission". In concrete situations of the transmission of thought and ideas, those ideas are danced in a sense that does not reduce "dance" to a metaphor.

Gestures are communicated otherwise than as information. They are not given to be reproduced in a one-to-one correspondence (even if there is a training of the muscles) but their energy itself is passed on. For Nancy, this passage of energy is figured in terms not of imitation (*mimesis*) but participation (*methexis*), the sharing of a habitus (*hexis*), a disposition to occupy space in a particular way or way of holding the body. This sharing takes place not only between one dancer and another but between the dancer and the location, the dancer and him/herself, the dancer and the choreography and the dancer and the spectator. Dance interweaves a whole series of participations that, while they cannot be reduced to representation nevertheless provide their own "representation":

> We "represent" something by "participating" in it, and we participate through a representation that is not a reproduction but a production, a production of the body as it participates in... in what? In sense, in thought, in being, whatever you want...

Surely, someone might object, can't dance be imitation too? Can't it simply tell a story with a sequence of gestures that, like the bee's waggle dance, have a direct and unambiguous correspondence with the reality they are intended to signify? Nancy does not deny that such dance exists, but he does argue that, even in the case of ostensibly mimetic dance, a gesture is *danced* before and in order that it be *mimed*, and the mime does not reproduce the mimed act but extracts its sense or essence from the dance, opening a participation with this essence or sense.

The notion of participation allows us to move away from the idea of dance as referring beyond itself to an (intelligible) meaning, and it allows us to move towards an understanding of dance as producing sense, where sense escapes the difference between the intelligible and the sensible because it precedes their division. Both dance and thought participate in and produce sense, but neither one is its gatekeeper. Indeed, Nancy insists that it is without any trickery or laxity that he can claim "when I think, I dance".

Chris Watkin lectures French culture, literature and film at Monash University and writes on contemporary French philosophy, with a particular focus on theology and atheism.

christopherwatkin.com

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Surviving at the crossroads: production and performance of a dancer's body

by Shruti Ghosh

First stamp your right foot counting one; then stamp on the left with the second count. Count three as you stamp the right again followed by four on the left. Then repeat the routine and keep repeating until you get it correct.

This is the first dance step I learnt some twentyfive years ago. Ever since then I have repeated it innumerable times, recalled it on several occasions while practicing, performing or teaching. Every time I repeat the step, I recall the experience of learning it as well. Remembrance of the step has always been accompanied by the memory of the 'process of its learning'; the process and the step has become one. The overpowering enigma of this process which takes the virtuosic name of 'training' is a must to produce a dancer. If such has been the overpowering forces of my training in shaping my dancer's identity, then can I ever come out of it? Is there any need to come out of it?

To become a dancer it takes rigorous and regular practice of movements; a repetitive doing of several routines prescribed by the teacher or the choreographer in the course of a training. Training imbibes within a dancer definite skills, i.e. certain specific knowledge and abilities, which aids his/her dancing capabilities. Moreover by the virtue of possessing these skills can h/she differentiate himself/herself from another dancer. The fact that Gene Kelly excelled as a tap dancer not only attests to his skills in producing sounds and rhythm with his boots but it also distinguishes him from the Russian ballerina Anna Pavlova, who possessed a different set of skills. Evidently then 'skill' associates itself with the notion of capacity as well as identity. Greater the skill, stronger are the dancer's abilities, closer one gets towards the (dance) form and after a point h/she inhabits the form; subsequently earning the identity of a performer of 'that' particular form. Undoubtedly a good training is imperative as much as the skill is integral. But training also contains 'regulatory' aspects besides the productive facets which makes it problematic in various ways. This has been discussed by several dance scholars who have adopted Michel Foucault's formulations on docile bodies and training, articulated in his ground breaking work *Discipline and Punish: the birth of the prison.*

As S M Gardner remarks what often gets obscured is 'the role of training in both producing and limiting what the dancer and thus, indirectly, the choreographer can do and be."(Gardner 2011, 152) She notes that, "It is important to recognize that there is a close historical parallel between the phenomenon of training as part of what Michel Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* (1977), calls the disciplinary regimes of modernity and the development of classical ballet." (Gardner 2011, 152) Taking cues from Foucault she indicates how the juridical aspects of training which aims in producing ideal dancing bodies, able of performing certain skills is built through simultaneous elimination of certain other skills. Allsopp and Lepecki emphasizes upon the ways a dancer subjugates herself to the given commands to become the ideal body in a choreographic process. His/her movements along with when and how h/she is permitted to move within the choreography become questions of geo-political and bio-political concerns. (Allsop and Lepecki, 2008, 1-3)

When a body is layered with multiple disciplining, like that of a dancer, it yields intriguing consequences. The socio-cultural forces (family tradition/community rituals/class position/ racial affiliations etc) act upon the dancer's body shaping his/ her behavioral patterns and gestures. Gender identity that is but a performative accomplishment (See Butler 1988) is also enforced and engendered through those socio-cultural forces. Dance training adds on another layer of disciplining, harnessing the body to produce means to other ends. Interestingly each disciplining doesn't just overlap but is in a constant tussle with the other which only heightens the continuous switching in between roles. For example the femininity that is expected of me is conditioned by my social positioning as a woman. 'Indianhood' arising from other affiliations further fabricates this role, adding on elements (such as traditionalism, timidity, spirituality among others) which are associated with the notion of a typical Indian woman. My dance training on the other hand calls for a complete unleashing of the 'containment' that characterises this typical Indian womanhood, thus perhaps jeopardising my entire being. The display of my body during a performance with its expressions and movements, i.e. the particular skill I have learned from my dance training, opposes the limitations imposed by the feminine role playing the society otherwise calls forth. In such performance situations *my disciplined dancing woman's body* offers resistance to *my other* woman's body produced through other socio-political disciplining.

If all disciplinary regimes are geared towards pedagogically and biologically producing useful bodies able of performing tasks, then the *docile* (dancer's) body develops certain counter tasks that challenge the disciplining; ironically the seeds of this counter-play is sown within the disciplinary regimes themselves. One particular training surface the weaknesses of the other and in doing so gives meaning to itself, identifies itself. The violence of subjection initiated by a particular disciplining is retaliated by the volition to subjugate oneself to the other. Coming out of a training thus becomes a conscious distancing, not a disavowal. This distancing helps develop a critical eye towards one's own training(s) and in turn creates awareness of the forces that are at work in the production of the different bodies. It facilitates continuous travelling of the disciplined body (ies) across different regimes and thus of the multiple selves emerging thereof. It makes problematic any act of naming, keeping alive the performative aspect of our everyday life (see Goffman, 1959). From stage to living room, art to everyday as a dancer moves, his/her being finds meaning only at the intersections where the social body, the political body and the cultural body meet to produce a body of now.

Shruti Ghosh has a degree in Kathak dance and a master's degree in Film Studies. Currently she is pursuing her PhD in Performance Studies at Macquarie University in Sydney. She has been teaching kathak for some year now and has collaborated with Australian artists on various dance and theatre projects performed in Sydney and Canberra.

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FREE BEER

by Alison Finn

"Nudity is like calling something 'Free Beer.' I always threaten to make people do stuff naked, and I'm all for it, but to me, it's usually more trouble than it's worth. If something is swinging around, that's all anybody looks at."

— Mark Morris, Choreographer

It's also all anybody talks about. In the case of Phillip Adams BalletLab's premiere season in March of *And All Things Return to Nature, Tomorrow* this notion is distracting because a profound and fascinating component of the two works was a vibrating array of cymbals, bells and electronic jams combined in a sort of incorporeal choir to effectively 'sing a world into being'. But we are talking here about bodies, and for one evening performance of *Tomorrow* (the second work in the program, choreographed and directed by Phillip Adams) the audience was asked to undress for its duration to "complete the creative vision" of the piece as "a harmonious and utopian experience" (from the bookings website). What is the meaning, and value, of nudity or nakedness – for these are different things - in contemporary dance work? I was one of the (undressed) audience members invited to participate on stage at this performance and in the days afterward I thought a lot about bodies – bodies in groups, conforming and non-conforming bodies – and my own body, alone, and where I'd put it. The experience offers itself up to an application of Susan Foster's treatment of choreography as "a theorization of relationships between body and self, gender, desire, individuality, communality, and nationality."[1] The body/self relationship has been explored by dance historians who, for at least three decades, have mined literary theory to conceive of dances as 'texts' that are 'written' through or by bodies in various modes of subjectification ('processes of becoming', after Foucault, Deleuze and Kristeva).

Several videos of *Tomorrow* have been uploaded to Vimeo - with a clothed audience - that will give readers an idea of the set-up. The five performers whispered invitations to some of us in the front row to undertake various forms of participation on stage. My turn consisted of carrying a bundled rug in my arms onto the stage, led by one of the performers, and lying down on the rug in a circle formation with other unclothed participants and assorted odd-looking objects, as if for an imminent ritual, for the remainder of the show. Canadian critic Suzanne Jaeger has written a useful analysis of nude contemporary dance works, in which she examines John Berger's work in the 1970s on the distinction between nakedness and nudity:

> To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude... To be naked is to be without disguise. To be on display is to have the surface of one's own skin, the hairs of one's own body, turned into a disguise...Nudity is a form of dress.[2]

She argues that this distinction can be productively applied to the use of nudity in dance work, and observes "there is a sense in which unclothed dancers are nude rather than naked... Their bodies become objects invested with meanings relative to the spectacle of performance. The dancers are also subject to the fantasies and interpretations of the audience as well as the will of the choreographer and artistic director."[3] But *I* wasn't one of the dancers, and my body (as object) had no opportunity to be invested with any meaning for the rest of the audience 'relative to the spectacle' – so was I being invited to be *nude* or to be *naked*? Does it make a difference? Did it matter to me? Not in any way that I had contemplated before going to the Southbank theatre that night – hell, I didn't even shave my legs. But I want to explore some of the variations within my experience to fully address this question.

In many ways I operated as a displayed object (nude): I was closely controlled at every point, led to the stage and directed to lie down. Prostrate, I retained no agency, mobility, or even any direct line of vision (earlier I had been instructed to close my eyes). Not only was I not invited to initiate any movement or interaction, I was rendered unable to. On the other hand, there *were* aspects of undisguised revelation – of nakedness – in my display. It probably goes without saying that my body is not a 'dancerly' one and has none of the disguise by way of performative authority that physical type establishes. I was up there *as myself*, and I distinctly felt that my experience consisted predominantly of sensations from which I could make my own meanings, rather than serving to generate them for those watching me. I became, perhaps predictably when in greater contact with the surfaces around me, hyper-aware of my sensations – once I had adjusted to my position I was very comfortable, there was a nice flow of air over my legs, I stretched my feet against the cool stage floor and noticed the beautiful floodlight, the way it dragged on floating dust above me, making it glow. In this way the work demanded recognition for (rather than a forgetting of) *both* the commonality of all bodies and the particularity of each.

Finally, there was one part of my encounter that occurred outside of any mode of display, and which links back to the self/body dynamic I referred to earlier. When I had been led to the stage and opened my eyes, I stood facing dancer Rennie McDougall who commenced to speak, quietly only to me, a succession of thoughts occurring to him one after the other. A stream-of-consciousness voicing of mental activity (which is both immaterial in form and the product of bodily events) that seemed to run parallel to the quasi-communicative connection established when two people lock eyes. This was 'dance' *without* movement; the sudden opening of a silent unguarded body into uncontainable speech, casting a being into space.

Alison Finn is Melbourne-based lawyer and writer with a strong interest in dance history and theory

1 Susan Foster (ed), *Corporealities: Dancing, Knowledge, Culture and Power* (New York: Routledge, 1996) p xiii.

2 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (New York: Viking Press, 1972) p 54.

3 Suzanne Jaeger, "Finding a Pedagogical Framework for Dialogue about Nudity and Dance Art", *Journal of Aetic Education* (Vol. 43, No. 4, Winter 2009). The epigraph is also used by Jaeger.

no beginning –

the intimacy of breath and movement

by Alice Cummins

"To breathe by myself allows me also to move away from a socio-cultural placenta. Thus I can begin to be born … To be born to my life"

— Luce Irigaray

If we follow a movement as it unravels and becomes a sequence, a flow of movement, a dance, can we perceive where the move originates? Where, in the body, does the dancing begin? Or is there no beginning? The movement's realisation is made possible by the imperceptible surge of breath, which is in infinite continuity and flux. Where does breath begin? We might well ask where the wind begins? The breath, like the wind, is intimately connected to the particular topography and the elemental forces at play. The body is engaged in a continual exchange with the environment … and breath negotiates that space between inside and outside, connecting all of us in its economy. The dancer takes more breath, more oxygen and also releases more carbon dioxide … her breath is one of exchange. Her moving forces an expansion of lungs. What she inhales in her exertion she returns with her exhalation. Through the elegant reciprocal process of photosynthesis oxygen is then released into the environment. The activity of her cells and lungs is one of continuous expanding, condensing and exchange. And this chemical exchange occurs across membranes: carried in the blood and diffused through permeable membranes – oxygen and carbon dioxide are constantly seeking balance. And this seeking is dynamic. There is no rest, place, or time where this exchange is not crucial for the continuity of life. It is a continuum. So this 'thing' that we do, breathe, goes largely unnoticed in our daily lives. We breathe in something of place, and we breathe out a little of our own internal place. And place needs space to become place. Does space precede breath or does breath create space? Or are they in a mobius loop of becoming, each for the other?

Is this relationship then, between breathing and digestion, the activity against which all activity can be measured? Without space and breath we cannot make anything. We are not just breathless, we are dead. So how then does breathing make things? Does breath create the space in which something can happen? In which things are made. In which the dancer can make something. I occupy the space of my body and through breath I move into space, and towards or away from others. In occupying my body I take up space. In taking up this space I take up a socio-political position. No one else can occupy that particular space/position of my body. Breath precedes movement. What then precedes breath … space? The void? Every breath includes a pause … this completes the rhythm and the cycle. Is the pause also the void? Is the void the space in which something might be conceived … in darkness?

Space offers the potential for anything, or something or nothing to become … emerging from a pre-verbal womb to engage with the far reaches of our inner and outer imaginary. We move and the movement does things. Those who watch us dance may also experience a state of lucid re-configuring of ideas, an effortless realising and organising. This breath filled dance illuminating and potentially challenging personal, political and socio-cultural belief systems. Could we call this beyond verbal? Giving dance a status rarely understood? Luce Irigaray reminds us: "The threshold of the lips … A sort of doorway to voluptuousness? They are not useful, except as that which designates a place, the very place of uselessness, at least as it is habitually understood" (1993: 18). What then does dance offer? Like philosophy, nothing except uselessness? This may be its gift and its contribution. Aligning itself with the 'feminine' in its position within the culture. Unseen, silent, barely understood and unrecognised. A submerged possibility that always and also makes the space for and creates the place for conceptualisation, growth and birth … a place of transformation … for the making of work in any form. The space appropriated by the event of what takes place after the birth. Along with the affect of gravity is the affect of time. Space though precedes time and without space there is nowhere for time to manifest.

Elizabeth Grosz suggests: "The more clearly we understand our temporal location as beings who straddle the past and the future without the security of a stable and abiding present, the more mobile our possibilities are, and the more transformation becomes conceivable" (2004: 14). When we occupy the space of our bodies and embody this knowing it becomes increasingly difficult to engage in the split world of Cartesian thought.

And this dancing is a making of love creating the matrix from which a shift might occur. And this shift may be an event, a leap of evolution, inspiring a suppleness between peoples and especially between men and women. Its potential perhaps no less than what Irigaray suggests the power of the carnal and sexual act of love, to give, "new form, birth, incarnation to the self. Instead of implying the downfall of the body, it takes part in the body's renaissance" (1993: 50-51). This matrix allowing the feminine to co-exist with, and contribute to our geo-political world with vigour. As Irigaray reminds us, "Women have to constitute a social entity if love and cultural fecundity are to take place" (1993: 67).

I believe it is in the dance and the dancing that the origins of a possible new form of living and loving might become apparent.

"If there is to be flesh, an autonomous breath must infuse the body. Through autonomous forms of life and love" (Irigaray 1993: 145).

Alice Cummins is an independent dance artist and Body-Mind Centering Practitioner. She has worked extensively in Australia, Europe and the United States. Alice collaborates with musicians, writers, visual artists and filmmakers. Recent works include: *aperture*, co-creating and directing Brenda Downing, Perth (2012); *lumbar*, with Sarita Beraha, Festival of Experimental Film, Paris (2011). Her work is informed by her studies of Body-Mind Centering, improvisation practices, and feminist philosophy. www.alicecummins.com

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Matthew Day's *mass*: An observation of practising

by Olivia Millard

Matthew Day, Melbourne based dance maker and performer is currently undertaking the creation of a new work at Dancehouse. He is the recipient of an Australia Council Early Career Artist Commission Grant and he will be in residence at Dancehouse for this project, working with various collaborators over several months. He will perform his new work in 2014. Over the past few years, Day has made and performed a trilogy of solo works. Each solo exists as a single entity yet they are also linked. He has performed these solos several times in various Australian cities as well as in Europe.

In the very early stage of this new creative process, I saw Day regularly outside of the studio. I formed the impression that, in undertaking the creation of a completely new work, following on from what could be perceived as 'success' in the presentation of his previous work, that Day was facing challenges: How does one begin to 'make' something new? What should be left behind and what should be held on to in embarking on a new creative journey?

Day very generously offered me the opportunity to observe his practising. I spent about an hour with him in the studio. He did not 'tell' or 'show' me anything. Rather, I was a witness to a wandering series of physical and performative trials and immersions.

In the studio Day practised with objects which were of similar or equal weight to his own: a bag of sand and a huge stick of wood which was flat on three sides and hollowed out, somewhat irregularly on one side. Following are some of my impressions from watching Matthew Day practising.

A watched body

I walked downstairs with Day and into the theatre at Dancehouse. Even though I am very familiar with the space, I felt an immediate shift as I was entering the space, that I was arriving in Day's domain. He immediately began to prepare himself to practise. He scooped some clothes and shoes from under the seating bank and, after removing the ones he was wearing, put them on. He moved the stereo system to the main part of the room and set it up. He moved a chair next to me to retrieve a large, heavy bag which I could see, from the spilling of its contents, contained sand. From the stage at the back of the space, he brought down a huge, heavy stick of wood.

Having prepared himself and gathered his various implements, and without any perceptible change in his demeanour, Day proceeded to 'practise' with them. This practising consisted of moving the heavy objects around by various means such as pushing them with his head (sand bag), dragging them across the space, balancing and resting various portions of his body on them. At times he left the objects alone and in these moments seemed, at most times, to be in contact with physical elements of the space, (the floor or the walls), with parts of his body other than his feet. Either that or he was pacing or running.

After a while watching, I began to feel aware that although there had been no 'beginning', I was very much playing the role of the observer. Day had slipped into being a watched body with extreme ease and almost a lack of deliberateness.

I also noticed that Day's body changed over the time of his practising. Although impossible to discern while it was happening, I became aware that Day's body had become more open, more available to me as its witness. I am unsure if this change was wrought through my gaze, or if the body was becoming, softer, weightier through its own physical exertion. It was probably both of those things.

No Why

A few times during his practice, I observed Day in situations which I will describe as having 'no why'. One example of this is, having left the sand bag behind him, and perhaps on the way to do something else, he knelt to the ground and rolled over his head, shoulders, back. And then he doubled back on himself and did exactly the same thing again. After that he repeated this roll many times. It was in the second roll that my interest lay. The first roll felt like a searching for something, maybe something to do or something to find an interest in. The many repeated rolls were exactly that: repetition. Once the repetition was established, I settled down into watching repetition. In the second roll however, Day was neither searching for 'something' nor was he yet committed (as I perceived) to a lengthy series of repeating rolls. He simply had no reason for executing the second roll and because of that my interest was piqued. It seemed that Day was in a momentary state of not knowing why he was doing what he was doing.

There were other moments throughout Day's period of practising which I perceived as having no why. Another example is a setting up of the objects in a way which led to Day tipping the stick off the edge of the stage while riding on it. Again it was not the conclusion of this episode which enlivened my attention, but the arranging, which included various permutations of manipulating the objects, before a purpose began to emerge. Those moments came from a deliberate willingness on Day's part to not know why he might be doing something. To allow this not knowing requires courage from the performer, especially in the presence of a witness and especially in Day's case, so early in his period of practising.

It is through being witnessed, however, that that moment of not knowing can become a moment of significance. Stuart Grant writes, "Audience and performance are fundamentally, in their essence, intentional relations". (2012, p.68) Both Day and I were able to rely on this intentional relationship as practitioner and observer. I was able to watch Day as a performer as he wilfully allowed me to perceive his moments of not knowing. And through my presence, the need to be doing 'something' was heightened, therefore allowing the moments of no why to be perceivable.

Observing Practising

Being given the opportunity to watch Day practise at such an early stage in his creative process enabled me to observe not the making of a work, but the searching for possibilities, the trying on of ideas, the willingness to not know what he was undertaking in order to begin practising. In my role as an observer, I was not present to offer critical feedback or even to ask questions but merely to watch. This freedom to watch allowed me the possibility to see what was unfolding in the present. I could 'not know' while I was watching and while I was 'not knowing' I was able to look at what I was seeing without the need to imagine what it might or should mean. I was able to observe Matthew Day practising.

Olivia Millard has worked as a performer, maker and teacher of dance for the past 20 years. She is particularly interested in the interactions that take place through and about dance in the studio.

UNCOMFORTABLE COMFORT

A conversation between Dancehouse artist in residence Victoria Chiu and Artistic Director Angela Conquet.

I cannot see what flowers are at my feet,
Nor what soft incense hangs upon the boughs,
But, in embalmed darkness, guess each sweet
Wherewith the seasonable month endows
The grass, the thicket, and the fruit-tree wild;
White hawthorn, and the pastoral eglantine;
Fast fading violets cover›d up in leaves;
And mid-May›s eldest child,
The coming musk-rose, full of dewy wine,
The murmurous haunt of flies on summer eves.

— John Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*

Why are you uncomfortable when it comes to comfort?

Where do I draw the line between my desire to feel comfortable and the weight of my existential responsibilities? What's the best use of my resources? Should I buy things to make me feel comfortable or be generous and thoughtful with my money? Should I only use the heater at night? When is it ok to over-indulge? When is not okay to not indulge?

These days things that comfort us are available, highly valued and normal. Access to information means we are aware of the negative effects our desire for comforts can have towards other people (money) or people in the future (environmental), to ourselves (health) and even to people we are close to (our relationships). Awareness only sometimes leads to action but easily leads to a feeling that I'm not doing right by myself or others...

Is comfort automatically about complacency and indulgence? The world is a wilderness and it seems only natural for humans to seek comfort in safety nets and anxiety-relieving devices.

Comfort isn't necessarily automatically about either of these things. The act of wanting comfort has been instilled in us for so long and now it is part of our culture to want more. We use what we can to make our lives comfortable. It's a natural reaction and is why the possibility of change can appear insurmountable.
Fulfilling needs physically, mentally and socially in our society leads us to seek comfort. Not every comfort leads to complacency, although some do and they differ for each person.

Do you think the pursuit of comfort, just like the pursuit of happiness, renders us more selfish, self-centred and at times, not very audacious?

If we weren't a bit selfish we might not make it in our modern world. There are a few people who remove themselves from it all. I admire that they can do that, but the majority of people wouldn't actually be happy if they did that. If we choose not to fringe dwell we are looking for happiness in a fast paced lifestyle and trying to take any type of fear out of the equation. That can definitely affect our audacity. So many options encourage our fear and make us buy more security, objects, status. Some people do end up taking the safe option constantly until they aren't very audacious. Some people are happier with safety, but then killing your audacity is like killing your soul. When I was 25 there was a lot of death around me - my father, my young cousin, my grandmother, grandfather and aunty, followed by another cousin too young. These events hammered home that death is final, there's no deal, insurance or magic trick to escape it. We all know it can happen any day, so I don't want to be in a place where I wished I were more audacious.

Seeking comfort induces some degree of passivity, or docility, which perhaps explains why in wealthy parts of the world, we no longer think in terms of communities or solidarity, of mutual support?

In our society it appears that a lot of comfort seeking does make us more docile, even inert. For example, we're fatter than we used to be, but on the other hand, we're more tech savvy. Perhaps our passivity is formed through our fear to give up our comfortable situations?
A comedian at Melbourne's Comedy Festival said that if Australians were suddenly told they had to walk around wearing a penis on their forehead, they would complain about it for a long time, but in the end they would just wear it. I think other parts of the world are quicker to express and act on their dislike to policy. Australia now is quite conservative in general and is getting more controlled and more bureaucratic. Relating this back to our self-centred pursuits, we have lost strength in community, we acknowledge our friends and we need people but we prioritise our own convenience and needs. We don't seek to make decisions for other people without making sure we are ok first.

I have a two-year old and we were asked if we would take an asylum seeker into our flat. We met with him several times, he is a good man, worked in television in the country he came from but his status in his country meant extremists wanted him dead. We wanted to help him, but what stopped me was fear that this would encroach on our lifestyle with our two-year old. We could help this guy on a short-term basis, but it was too stressful to imagine helping him long term.

I still don't know what the right decision was. There's a much greater sense of wellbeing in finding true moments of mutual support, than finding financial, social or egotistical gain in life experiences. Today we have placed less value on that.

In my research into comfort I spoke to a psychiatrist about comparing comfort and consumerism to substance addiction. He thought you could apply the same rules of change on both. Simply, at the base of finding change there needs to be big motivation, enough money and solid support networks. I think that although money is essential for health and mental health, seeking it can render us docile. It's harder to define where our motivation for change is unless we ourselves are faced with death, or with the death of people close to us. Motivation is harder to maintain and understand why it's beneficial when the results aren't seen in our immediate circle or in our lifetime.

Do you see any signs that this society, centred on individual needs, may change soon? Are you worried when you imagine what world your son will be left with? Is there anything at all that can make us better?

It doesn't seem like it's about to change. Small changes will continue, but in which way? More or less self focus, more or less influence from big power and money, more or less care for others, more or less stuff, more or less using the undereducated masses for comfort gain, more or less old values. Occasionally, history tells us big change is possible - in what way?

Maybe we are happily flawed?
Is our race egotistical or are we unaware of how self-destructive we are? How could we let the Great Barrier Reef become so threatened? It looks like past generations have learnt from mistakes and passed down old morals, old stories, old lessons which we are quicker to reject in this society for quick monetary gain. Imagine them laughing at us saying 'you've got it all wrong! You're not progressing anymore.'

What my son will grow up with does worry me. What will my son see? Worst case is scary and best case is maybe not much better. He will want a lot from the earth and maybe he won't give much back, like me.

So, to be better and create change we can be conscious and do our best to make it happen or we can notice when change evolves from an unpredictable place and find out why it did.

See:

FLOORED
by Victoria Chiu
Aug 14 – 18 at Dancehouse

The New Censorship: A Campaign Against Arts Funding?

by Ben Eltham

When Melbourne artist Paul Yore set out to participate in an exhibition called *Like Mike Now What??*, he can't have realised that he would end up at the centre of the most significant art censorship controversy since the Bill Henson scandal of 2008.

Australian artists under the age of 40 might have thought the days of charging artists for obscenity have been consigned to the history books. But perhaps a more censorious era is returning. While the Bill Henson controversy is now half a decade away, government and police action against art continues in periodic spurts. Earlier this year, Australian classifiers banned a movie from screening at Sydney's Mardi Gras Film Festival. And only a fortnight ago, Paul Yore's show was raided and Yore pulled in for questioning by Victoria Police.

Yore's installation at the Linden Contemporary Arts Centre was prepared for a show paying homage to pioneering Australian artist, whose riotous pop-inspired collages can currently be seen at Melbourne's Heide Museum of Modern Art. Yore's offending work was a Brown-inspired collage entitled *Everything is Fucked*, which featured Justin Bieber urinating from a dildo into a sink. Fittingly, Brown was himself prosecuted and convicted for obscenity in 1966, in a turbulent period of Australian culture that also saw the editors of *Oz* magazine prosecuted and sentenced to jail.

Everything is Fucked is hardly the most risque thing to be found at a public gallery. But should Yore be charged and convicted of the offence of producing child pornography, he could spend a maximum of ten years in jail. As the National Association for the Visual Arts' Tamara Winikoff observed in a recent article for artHub 'here is a young artist hauled up by the cops for cutting out and sticking together a montage.'

The visual arts community has reacted with concern. Fairfax journalists Sonia Harford and Dewi Cooke have been covering the issue extensively; they've gathered negative reactions from a range of artists and civil liberties figures. For instance, prominent artist Juan Davila told *The Age* that 'in my view, his so-called pornographic collages belong to the language and domain of art. Many artists, critics and academics could attest to that.'

'On what grounds has he been criminalised?' Davila asked pointedly. 'Why does our society live in a moral panic?'

The Linden Centre, meanwhile, remained closed for more than a week, and when it reopened on Tuesday, featured a black curtain pulled over Yore's installation.

The mention of that dreaded phrase 'child pornography' inevitably leads to comparisons with the Bill Henson case of 2008. At the time, despite a firestorm of public controversy, Henson was eventually not charged by New South Wales Police. But what prompts police investigations of art exhibitions in the first place?

Generally, police raids on art exhibitions are the result of complaints, not from gallery visitors or the general public, but from people with a political agenda.

According to Associate Professor Brian Simpson of the University of New England's School of Law, 'these things don't come up spontaneously and I'm sure that most police officers, the last thing they'd want to do is raid art galleries.'

Simpson is referring to the fact that the original complaint that brought Yore's Linden exhibition to the attention of police emanated from the murky local politics of Melbourne's Port Philip Council. According to this article by Mark Holsworth in *Crikey*, the complaint to police was made by Adrian Jackson, a local hotelier who has documented ties to local Liberal Party branch member Chris Spillane.

In a comment written on the website of a local newspaper, Jackson posts:

'Mission accomplished — the kiddy art exhibition is now closed. Next step is getting the Linden Gallery to be self funding instead of behaving like a parasite on ratepayers. Currently $100,000 PA is spent by Port Phillip Council on maintenance and equipment in the Linden which has been a ratepayer owned building for the last 25 years or so.'

Jackson's friend Spillane has also recently been looking into the Linden Centre, turning up to Port Phillip Council meetings and putting some questions to local councillors. According to the Council's minutes:

'Chris Spillane asked about a current art exhibition at the Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts in St Kilda. He stated that while he hasn't seen the exhibition himself, from what he has heard about the exhibition, it is offensive and pornographic in nature. He suggested that the exhibition should be shut down or, at the very least, there should be more appropriate signage warning of the contents, age restrictions in place, and this section of the gallery should be cordoned off. He asked, as sponsors of the gallery, what action the Council intends to take?'

Have Paul Yore and the Linden Centre become unwitting targets in a new outbreak of Australia's culture wars? For many on the political right in Australia, public funding for the arts is a hot issue. For instance, a well-connected think tank, the Institute for Public Affairs (IPA), recently argued that the Commonwealth should 'end all public subsidies to sport and the arts'.

IPA researcher Chris Berg has been attacking arts funding in recent weeks. In an opinion column for the Fairfax newspapers, he took aim at a recent performance of Mikala Dwyer's *Goldene Bend'er* at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Outraged at the public funding of a work he claimed was 'faux-radicalism', Berg wrote a stinging critique of the 'indulgent and mundane' performance. It took a lengthy Twitter exchange between myself and Berg to establish that he hadn't seen the show.

But Berg is less interested in journalistic ethics than in taking a few easy pot-shots at the public funding of the arts. 'Taxpayer funding protects artists from their audience,' he writes (rather ironically, given he wasn't in the audience). 'That it tends to produce more rubbish than genius is a feature, not a bug. The system is designed to favour indulgent, unpopular work over appealing work.'

What we're seeing here is the politicisation of the arts by right-wingers, with a view to attacking the basis for public funding for culture. These arguments are easiest to make about unpopular or challenging art such as Paul Yore's, so that's where the first stones are being hurled. As Van Badham pointed out in *The Guardian*, Australia's forthcoming federal election provides commentators like Berg with an opportunity to beat up on arts funding. 'As predictably as asylum-seeker bashing, we must also endure the triennial exhibition known as The Australian Right Making a Political Boogie Monster Out of The Arts,' Badham quipped

Local Victorian MP Martin Foley says the Linden raid does not reflect the views of the majority of his diverse electorate. 'A small band of moral straighteners in the St Kilda community, who speak for no one, were able to raise sufficient panic and concern that this matter was taken seriously at a bland Council meeting, and then given that leg up followed a complaint to the Victoria police,' he wrote in an email. 'If this is politicisation of the arts and the emergence of a local variety of our own cultural wars, then the first win goes to the forces of reaction.'

The University of New England's Brian Simpson says there is a risk that police actions of this kind could have a chilling effect on artistic expression. Simpson, who has researched the legalities of the Bill Henson case in an academic article, told artsHub that 'artists are there to confront us, they're there to make us think about these issues.'

'If you start searching and raiding and arresting people for doing that, it's quite reasonable to expect that many artists will put off from doing that.'

Ben Eltham is a national affairs correspondent for New Matilda, an industry columnist for artsHub and Crikey, a Research Fellow at the Centre for Memory, Imagination and Invention (Deakin University) and a Fellow at the Centre for Policy Development.

This article was initially published by artsHub

EVENT CALENDAR

TRAINING
JULY 18 & 25
ALMOST INTENSIVES
WITH **FIONA BRYANT** AND **ANNA MORTLEY**

DISCUSSION
JULY 25TH
SIMONE'S BOUDOIR #8
ON PROCESSES – WITH **MATTHEW DAY**

WORKSHOP
AUGUST 3 & 4
HI-IN-VIS (MAKING THE UNSEEN SEEN)
WITH **LUKE GEORGE**

TRAINING
AUGUST 1, 8 & 15
ALMOST INTENSIVES
WITH **SOPHIA COWEN**,
KIM SARGENT-WISHART, **JO WHITE**

DISCUSSION
AUGUST 8
SIMONE'S BOUDOIR #9
UNCOMFORTABLE COMFORT?

PERFORMANCE
AUGUST 14 – 18
FLOORED – **VICTORIA CHIU**

INTERNATIONAL WORKSHOP
SEPTEMBER 7 & 8
HIP HOP WITH **ANNE NGUYEN** (FR)

PERFORMANCE
OCTOBER 9 – 13
YOUR WAY OPEN SEASON
LUKE GEORGE – NOT ABOUT FACE

Contributors to Dancehouse Diary

Dancehouse would like to warmly thank all the contributors to this issue of our Diary: Geisha Fontaine, Christ Watkin, Sarah Jane Norman, Nikki Heywood, Sam Fox, Ahil Ratnamohan, Jodie McNeilly, Shruti Ghosh, Alison Finn, Alice Cummins, Olivia Millard, Victoria Chiu, Ben Eltham as well as Frida Komesaroff for her great translations. Thank you to Dominic Forde (Famous) for the elegant design. A special thank you to Philipa Rothfield for all her support and to Ashley Dyer for his input to this issue.

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Graphic Design: Famous Visual Services - famousvs.com

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Dancehouse is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding advisory body, and is supported by the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria, Department of Premier and Cabinet and by the City of Yarra through the use of the Dancehouse facility.

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