

Beyond the Studio: The Creative Process in Local, Site-Related Dance

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Abstract.....	4
Declaration.....	5
Acknowledgements	6
Part One	7
Introduction.....	7
The ‘Act’ of Choreography	8
Place Through to Site.....	10
Chapter Outline.....	11
Chapter One	14
Embodying Ethnography, Writing Choreography.....	14
Witnessing	15
Beginnings	16
Anthropology and Ethnography.....	20
Embodied Research.....	21
Researcher and Subject	22
<i>Beyond Shore</i> as Performance Ethnography	27
Conclusion.....	28
Chapter Two.....	29
Experiencing Darwin, Observing <i>Tracks</i>	29
Preface	29
<i>Tracks</i> in Darwin	30
Entering the Field.....	32
‘Meeting’ Darwin	33
<i>Mr Big</i>	38
A Non-hierarchical Way of Working	41
Seeding Ideas and People.....	42
Longevity.....	43
Disrupting the Sanctimonious Studio and Site-specificity.....	46
Conclusion.....	48
Chapter Three	49
Moving to a Discursive, Local Site	49
Introduction	49

The Performance of Space.....	50
Proxemics	52
The Discursive Site	54
A Framework for Site-related Dance	55
Local	58
Memory and Place.....	60
Conclusion.....	61
Part Two	62
Archive Listings	62
Overview	62
The Dance as an Archive	63
Archive One - Blister	65
Archive Two - Breakwater Pier.....	73
Archive Three - Shoreline	78
Archive Four – Zone 7.....	86
Archive Five – Claw Tree Park	91
Archive Six – Beyond Shore.....	97
Archive Seven – Seawall.....	101
Archive Nine – Racecourse	112
Archive Ten – Kororoit Creek Road.....	116
Conclusion	122
Bibliography	124
Appendices.....	132
Appendix 1: <i>Beyond Shore</i> Program Information	132
Appendix 4: First interview - David McMicken.....	140
Appendix 5: Second Interview - David McMicken	153
Appendix 7: First Interview - Tim Newth.....	181

Abstract

This practice-led research thesis comprises a dance performance and a written exegesis that will make salient and analyse the creative process in site-related choreography. The work explores the repercussions of moving dance making activities away from the traditional studio and considers how choreographic practice might be challenged or transformed when it is pursued 'on location' to allow for other understandings of site and location to permeate the choreography.

The research includes an ethnographic study on a Northern Territory dance company, *Tracks Dance*. The object is to illuminate the shifting complexities of the creative process in dance making and document this through analysis of the choreographer's experience in rehearsals. I detail the company's creative processes that exist primarily outside of the studio.

The effects of the embodied experience of fieldwork and the somatic effect this had on my own choreographic practice, led me to refigure the research to include a performative response to the fieldwork. In this thesis the connections between the interpretative acts of ethnography and choreography are elucidated in performance material, and sourced through task-based choreographic approaches that explore bodily practices such as 'witnessing' and 'journeying'. In short, the research has been situated within a performance-ethnographic paradigm in order to explore how choreography may be produced within these circumstances.

The salient feature of the case study - how 'place' is perceived and used choreographically - is imbricated within the performance through a series of performed 'archives' that embody movement, as well as visual and aural experiences that interrogate the distinctive geographical, social and cultural fabric of my local area.

Declaration

I, Josephine Daw, declare that the PhD exegesis, *Beyond the Studio: The Creative Process in Local, Site-Related Dance*, is no more than 100,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work.

Josephine Daw

Date

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Part One

Introduction

This practice-led research maps two streams of inquiry that intermingle, inform and provoke each other. One is an ethnographic field study on a dance company, *Tracks Dance*, and the other, a choreographic project leading to the performance, *Beyond Shore*. From its inception, the focus of the research project has been to use my position as choreographer to theorise upon the creative process in dance making in order to reveal elisions and fill gaps in the dance making process. The short period of time I spent on an ethnographic study of *Tracks Dance* had resounding implications for the direction of my own performance. From the interaction of the two strands of work arose a series of questions that centred on the potential for dance making to move beyond the traditional studio walls and into multifarious sites.

The collection of ten works that together make up the performance *Beyond Shore*, focuses on the effects of place on the choreographic process. Each discrete work is to be considered an investigation into the nexus of site and the body through choreography. The performance served to bind the ten dances together in a final embellishment of site-specificity. In particular, the performance considers how histories, narratives, and the 'space' of place might be conceived through extending the choreographic process to include conceptual and practical ways of situating the body to think through site. To this end I chose to situate the work within my own local area in order to incorporate the distinct social, cultural and geographical features of that vicinity.

Key questions are: how might an ethnographic study be analysed through a framework of dance performance, and to what extent can dance elucidate other readings or interpretations of ethnography? What are the implications for dance practice when the dialectic between the dance/choreographer is interrogated through strategies that situate the dancer as co-producer of the work? And how can the processes of dance making enact, describe and perform site?

The focus on *process* is a persistent theme, solidifying to incorporate both conceptual and physical approaches to exploring the notion of a *local* site. Through an entwining of ethnography, self-reflexive choreography, an analysis of dialogical art and site-related dance practices, I explore through a series of ten dances, and discuss through written material, possible ways in which the local site might be enacted through choreography.

Much of the literature on how choreography is produced is largely second-person observer accounts from which 'position and presuppositions of performance-making are Othered' (Melrose 2005a, p. 2). In contrast, my approach will be from the position Melrose terms an

‘expert practitioner’. That is to say, it is a first person account from a perspective *within the work* and is therefore able to offer unique insights from that position.

The ‘Act’ of Choreography

In this thesis I refer to choreography frequently and I need to delineate my use of the term understanding that there can be multiple meanings attached to the word according to the stylistic movement practice in question.¹ My interest in this project is in ‘set’ movement, that is, movement composed from several stages of production, which is devised, learnt, rehearsed, and (re)performed. Choreography has a particular relationship to memory that situates it on the opposite end of the spectrum from improvised movement practices. Improvised movement practices have at their core an *immediacy* of movement and are not concerned with the re-presenting movement. In this research choreographed movement was the primary mode used by both myself in the performance *Beyond Shore*, and by *Tracks Dance* as they made a new youth dance work. Both performances were devised by the choreographer(s) in conjunction with the dancers, and then later performed by the dancers.

Dramaturge and writer, Andre Lepecki observes that the ‘act of choreography’ is a relatively recent idea that gained intellectual currency with the advent of modernity, eventually resulting in the increased prominence of the choreographer as the primary producer of dance (Lepecki 2006). While this model still dominates the literature of ballet, there are increasing resistances and tensions regarding its appropriateness in a modern dance context (Gardner 2005; Lepecki 2006). Although the role of the choreographer still stands as the public face of the dance company structure, the role of the dancer has shifted. The current mode is for dancers to contribute to the development of choreography by devising movement from task-based activities set by the choreographer, for example.² To be inventive and imaginative when sourcing and generating movement phrases according to a task, requires different skills than being able to quickly learn and remember movement that is set by the choreographer. As a choreographer in my own performance work I positioned and understood the dancers as co-producers of the work.

This concept of ‘shared’ choreography implies that the rehearsals are not merely sessions where steps are learnt and memorised, but are themselves vital and fecund places of engagement. In this way the term ‘rehearsal’ no longer adequately reflects the possibilities that occur within the dance studio towards a performance. Instead this interaction, this

1 Two definitions of choreography from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*: 1. the composition of dance steps and sequences for ballet and stage and film dancing, and 4. the art of dancing.

2 Sometimes indicated in the program notes where dancers are credited with choreography.

dialectic, suggests more *a process* that reflects the actual multiplicities that are apparent in the development of dances. The term ‘process’ is a recent addition to the vocabulary of dance making, coinciding with the advent of conceptual art practices from minimalism in the 1960s that has had profound effects upon the practice of modern dance.

Postmodern dance explicitly allowed other readings of the body to emerge in ways that resonated powerfully with dance practices. With the disruption of the boundaries between performance and staging of dance and the growing rejection of theatrical aids such as lighting, set and costume, *how* the work was made became a more pressing (and interesting) question. Representational strategies embedded in dance pedagogy and rehearsals leading to performance were scrutinised as fresh thinking around new modalities of dance was explored (Adshead-Lansdale 1999; Albright 1997).

Process has continued to gain currency in the dance world through various attempts to map out what exactly does happen when dance is made. Choreographers are exploring cognitive modes of dance production in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands respectively. In Australia, *Conceiving Connections* (2003-2005) a study of the ‘generative and exploratory processes of problem-finding and problem-solving and metaphorical thinking’ (Grove, McKechnie & Stevens 2005) was an attempt to describe the choreographic process. This project contributes to this developing interest in the process of dance making and choreography.

Within this research I use the word ‘witnessing’ as a keyword to describe the relationships between (respectively) the ethnographer and subject and the choreographer and dancer. I link these activities closely and argue that they share intimate qualities. I was drawn to the idea of the ‘witness’ (as opposed to viewer) through the work of performance maker, Tim Etchells, as it explores a position where the viewer is implicated further within the work – a position I relate to through my fieldwork experience. Both my ethnographic study on *Tracks Dance*, and the performance work with the dancers for *Beyond Shore*, are connected in that through them I occupy a dual position of designing the work (study/performance) and yet remaining, unavoidably, outside of it. Australian choreographer Cheryl Stock noted how her research on making intercultural dance in Vietnam, positioned her as a reflective practitioner stating: ‘The artist turning to research to reflect on his or her practice, will continually move between two ways of seeing the world, both as outsider and insider to the research material’ (Stock 2000, p. 7).

Place Through to Site

The research began with no indication that ‘place’ would become a key trope. However after my fieldwork experience in Darwin it became apparent that the choreography *Tracks* was producing was strongly informed by a local sense of place. In addition, many of their performances are site-specific so a further focus on site was necessary. The body of literature in the visual arts exploring the genealogy of site-specific art has been useful, particularly the notion of the discursive site, which influenced my work with the dancers in the site of Williamstown (Kaye 2000; Kwon 2004; Meyer 2000). Theorist on site-specific art, Miwon Kwon suggests these new ways of envisioning site frames the visual artist as providing ‘critical-artistic services’ (Kwon 2004, p. 50) rather than producing aesthetic objects. This model and its ephemeral operations has emerged from a critique of the art institution, (that for so long has been focussed on the art object), and has implications for dance that may move it beyond the traditional theatre presentation.

My initial research focus was to document and analyse the creative process of a choreographer as they made a new dance work. As a choreographer myself, I was interested in how other choreographers made work, and how they negotiated what I felt to be a highly contentious realm: that is to say, how do they make sense of and articulate a process that I understood to be a fluid and highly complex one. In my initial approach to this problem, I imagined that much of my research would occur within the walls of a dance studio as I closely observed a dance company in action. Instead, I chose as my research subject a company, *Tracks*, whose practice extended well past the studio walls and into the local community. The company effects the privileging of the relations between themselves and community over the formal structures of a ‘conventional’ company. This is in contrast to the hierarchical model of the Western theatrical dance company that works from a position where the choreographer is the main expressive focus. Importantly, I was struck by how the social, cultural and geographical landscapes of Darwin informed the choices, directions and philosophy of *Tracks*, and how this knowledge was deployed in their day-to-day dance activities. This led me to question how these ways of working might be transferred to a new place or whether they were unique and contingent upon a particular mix of people and location.

A further impact of the field study was my emerging interest in exploring the connections between the *interpretative acts* of ethnography and choreography. I felt certain there were similarities between the embodied positions of researcher and choreographer in these two streams of cultural production. This position was one that implicated me in the work from a unique perspective – simultaneously outside of it observing, and inside it devising the

outcome(s). As a way of closing the gap between these two roles, I incorporated some of the practices I had observed in *Tracks Dance* into my own performance making activities.

My recent dance practice has taken place within an institutional framework, placing me in the category of a 'reflective practitioner' which Stock describes as 'researching through the artwork...which...implies some form of interrogation *about* the created work even though the artistic practice per se is central to the research paradigm and the methodology, with reflection and analysis as a parallel discourse' (Stock 2000, p. 7). In recent years I have become increasingly interested in practices found in visual arts and performance, which employ participatory or relational pathways between the artist and the audience/viewer, and subsequently involve the viewer as producers of the work (Bishop 2006; Bourriaud 2006; Kester 2000). My own explorations in this area have centered on the *process* of the work rather than the finished performance. My interest in dance pedagogy and the notion of 'training' have led me to employ tactics that were in effect constraints or rules I needed to follow and which tested my role as author of the work.³ These dialogical ways of working offer a 'liveness' to the work, and I have employed several of these modes of production in this research. In the second part of the thesis I describe several of these exchanges with the dancers and other artists.

Chapter Outline

To emphasize the practice-led nature of the research I have structured the thesis chronologically to reflect the emergence of the research material and how this influenced the performance-making component. Key points in the research were my journey to Darwin and my subsequent work on the field study that led to my interest in site related dance practices. To mirror this journey I have included a chapter on the methodology and positioning of myself as ethnographer, which may be seen in a practice-led sense as an anticipatory chapter. My chapter on *Tracks* reflects the short but powerful experience of fieldwork, and so could be understood as a chapter on influences. Following this, my third chapter on site, may be seen as a chapter in which discovery is the key trope. Weaving through the three chapters is a focus on the participatory relations between artists involved in the research whether they are dancers, artistic directors, visual artists or others who contributed to and influenced the work. In keeping with the emergent nature of the scholarly-artistic framing of the research the literature review is included throughout the text.

³ For example, *Corpus Delecti* (2004) was my Honours year performance. In developing the work I used several dialogical pathways to investigate how I might make dance from the results. They included instructions to the dancers, letters to the general public and instructions to follow from a visual artist.

Chapter One focuses on the methodological framing of the two ‘acts’ of ethnography and choreography, using existing conceptual and philosophical underpinnings of performance ethnography. I explore my position as an ethnographer in the field and explore how this (dis)placement and (re)figuring of my body in the research contributed to the themes in *Beyond Shore*.

Chapter Two charts the field-study on *Tracks Dance*. The company itself has an extraordinary depth and breadth of practice, which would warrant a more in-depth study suited to a full PhD document. For my purposes I contextualise the company’s practices and define the boundaries of my focus. The latter part of the chapter outlines five ‘modes of production’ of the company exploring how they differ from a more conventional model. These include non-hierarchical ways of dance-making, the concept of ‘seeding’ people and ideas, the dismantling of the sanctity of the dance studio, exposing the tension within site-specificity, and longevity in dance practice.

Chapter Three addresses the notion of ‘site’ and how this has developed over time from a phenomenological approach to site (a fixed geographic model within which the body moves), to the discursive site (the expansion of the geographical boundaries of site to include a multitude of conceptual approaches). I use examples from dance practices to explore how dance has infiltrated and made use of these changed relations, which includes exploring a framework for situating dance and site. Specific to this discursive understanding of site lies my focus on the *local* site and the elements that are particular to the local, such as memory, familiarity, nostalgia and other socio-cultural areas that might be relevant to a body-centered exploration. Using a pre-existing framework of site-related dance I trace the potential for my own work within these confines.

The second part of the thesis is a listing of the ten separate dances that formed the performance *Beyond Shore*. I consider each dance or ‘archive’ as a discrete unit and I provide a listing of ‘materials’ that contributed to each dance. These include both material objects (video, photographs and texts) and geographical locations, as well as other poetic and pragmatic elements that contributed to the unfolding of the dance as it was created. In effect this stands as an *application* of the topics I have explored in the preceding chapters. The listing explores ways of thinking through dance and site as well as describing techniques of practice relevant to site-specific *Dance Works*. The archive listings could be seen as ‘findings’ although I resist the urge to reduce them to techniques of practice, understanding they are more useful in an artistic context to be considered as beginnings or provocations.

In this way I follow the work of anthropologist Greg Denning by using a more fluid approach to how ethnographic material may be presented (Denning 1998). This affords other ways of

understanding the material and resists a linear reading of the research. The twin roles of choreographer/ethnographer are presented as entwined acts. Denning's commitment to applying imagination in anthropological studies is relevant to my particular construction of the performance *Beyond Shore*, and the subsequent writing of this document that accompanies it. I recognise the constraints and problems associated with describing a process that is inherently embodied and accesses pathways of dance making that do not lend themselves to be described. I am aware of the magnitude (perhaps impossibility) of the task of describing the 'multi-dimensional, multi-schematic and multi-participant modes' (Melrose 2005a, p. 8) of dance making. I am also aware of the critical eye that could be cast over this 'thick description' (Geertz 1973) of my own process. Simon Ellis cautions 'against undermining the practice-led strategies by relying on words to *transcribe* or *translate* the creative processes' (Ellis 2005, p. 28). While mindful of this, I suggest that a painstaking unpicking of choreographic process (including those parts that resist description), may lead to other ways of framing dance practices that may in turn challenge assumptions and familiar ways of seeing/knowing dance. As the reader will note, despite my attempts, occasionally the segues from my descriptions of the unfolding of the choreographic process, to how the dance appeared in performance, show the inability of words to adequately describe the choreographed moment. To counter this, I return to what surrounds the dance - the relations between the choreographer (myself) and the other elements of the process – the site and the dancers.

Chapter One

Embodying Ethnography, Writing Choreography

In the introduction, I refer to this research as an emergent form of inquiry into the creative process of dance making through the entwined methods of ethnography and choreography. I use the term *practice-led* to describe my approach to the research. As artist Nithikul Nimkulrat describes it: ‘practice in practice-led research is conscious exploration with the knowledge involved in the making of (artworks)’ (Nimkulrat 2007).⁴ In the research I actively sought to discover and articulate what I identified as significant knowledge discoveries relevant to choreography. My intention was to extend the relevance of my research by looking beyond my individual practice to include a wider parameter of focus. To this end I explored two streams, one an ethnographic study that served to contribute to knowledge about another’s dance practice, the other an investigation into and development of site-related dance concepts within my own choreographic practice.

The ethnographic study was an opportunity to observe and analyse the working methods of other choreographers, and it was a useful and influential part of the research. However, the opportunity to explore my own choreographic process critically in order to understand how the research findings could *literally* be applied to dance practice is where the crux of the research lies. This framework offered me an opportunity to articulate aspects of how site-related choreography may be considered and devised, through privileging place through the body.

My methodology then was a merging of artistic practice with a framing of an ethnographic study of another choreographer(s). This somewhat complicated nexus presented some difficulty in how to render this methodology for the purpose of public knowledge. To separate the two streams seems to eschew the spirit of practice-led research and how it may contribute to artistic-scholarly knowledge in the domain. This study proposes to describe how ethnographic perspectives within ethnographic research influenced my artistic process, understanding that in this research they are unable to be considered as separate. I have however weighted the document towards analysis of *how* the interaction between ethnography and choreography might occur, and less on personal thematic concerns of my choreographic processes and the resultant performance.

⁴ As opposed to practice-based research where the artwork and the subsequent contextualisation and reflection of it forms the basis of the thesis. I see my research as focusing primarily on the emergent process of making work hence my identification with practice-led research.

Witnessing

In his book on the workings of the contemporary performance group *Forced Entertainment*, writer and performer Tim Etchells speaks of the act of witnessing as opposed to viewing:

to witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight of things and one's own place in them, even if that place is simply, for the moment, as an onlooker.

(Etchells 1999, p. 17)

The term witnessing is used in this instance to describe what *Forced Entertainment* seek in their own performances - that is for the audience to become more than viewers. Becoming a witness to the performance places the viewer in a position where they are compelled to be involved in the work in a more immediate way. Once an audience member experiences the difference between viewing and witnessing, it would be difficult to imagine a conventional viewing experience could match the drama of a witnessed event. In her introduction to Etchells' book, Peggy Phelan examines this notion of witnessing and looks at how a witness may be *produced* in the theatre. Phelan acknowledges the difficulty in producing witnesses for the theatre, as the audiences' agency (relative autonomy) remains a critical factor in determining whether they are fully present in the theatrical moment. She cites as an example the reluctant audience member dragged onstage to form part of the action, who may not be fully present if they are unwilling to participate.

The 'production of witnesses' in the theatre cannot be like other kinds of production. The 'product' will never be formed into an object, for witnessing, as a conscious, albeit belated, response to the messy truths that exceed the empirical, prevents objectification.

(Phelan 1999b, p. 13)

I see the acceptance of the role of witness by the ethnographer to be a key element in the production of ethnographic research, as it necessitates the move towards a subjective stance. Moreover the 'witnessing' of an event as Etchells and Phelan describe, seems to indicate that if circumstances allow, and the researcher becomes a part of the action of the field, then the subjectivity of the researcher becomes a central factor in the production of the ethnographic study. In this chapter I begin by stating that my own ethnographic experience was characterized by the situation wherein my witnessing of *Tracks Dance* became the pivotal moment of the research.

Phelan draws our attention to the idea that 'witnessing allows the dead, the disappeared, the lost, to continue to live as we rediscover their force in our ongoing present' (Phelan 1999b, p. 13). I am interested in this statement in relation to dance as it is also a form that is constantly producing, directed forward and occupied with 'becoming'. I do not see the 'becoming' of

dance as a constraint. I am not preoccupied with the ‘disappearance’ of dance (Phelan 1993) or the ‘lament’ (Lepecki 2006) of dance as I don’t see ephemerality as problematic, but rather a fundamental aspect of the form. Moreover, my own practice of choreography suggests that much of the material that is generated choreographically is excavated from bodily experiences. These are multifaceted, complex and embedded deposits in the body that emerge and/or are recalled from the body through the action of choreography. I note that this is my own individual way of working choreographically and I acknowledge that there are many ways of making choreography that differ widely from my methods. I do not propose to speak on behalf of other choreographers, nor do I presume that my choreographic techniques are unique.

Two questions arising from the idea of the (re)encounter with inscriptions of the body have implications for my research:

- Could my encounter ‘in the field’ in Darwin (an embodied experience that resonates in my body and influences me to this day) be ‘written up’ or analysed through dance practice as a form of performance ethnography?
- Could the process towards the performance *Beyond Shore*, a work about a local site of Williamstown, be seen as a form of danced ethnography - an exploration of a site where the voices, presences and geographies of the site may be encountered through interventions in the site by the dancers and myself?

These two questions provide a structure for this chapter. The first half explores the fieldwork experience including constructing the field, the notion of ‘truth’ in ethnography and the researcher/subject relationship. The second half examines how practice-led research may be seen as a process whereby the theory and experiences encountered in the field by the researcher are ‘held’ within the researcher’s body and used productively later as practice-led research tools. A key proposition of this research is that the two positions or roles of choreographer and ethnographer may be envisaged as entwined.

Beginnings

My interest is in how other choreographers make dance. This is a relatively simple statement that belies a host of activity behind it. At the outset of this research I believed my inquiry would focus on Western dance practices and would therefore take place within the four walls of a dance studio. That reckoning was soon to be challenged as I undertook an ethnographic study on the work practices of two choreographers.

In July 2006 I spent a month in Darwin, in the Northern Territory, observing a local, semi-professional dance company called *Tracks Dance*, create a new dance work. As the following chapter specifically focuses on several key points of the company's creative processes, I will not spend time in this chapter discussing my findings other than to note this small period of time was in fact the defining and pivotal point of my research. In effect, the notion I had of the work being made within the studio confines was fundamentally challenged by the way *Tracks* approached the creative process. The company encompassed the wider geographic and socio-cultural landscapes of Darwin in their creative processes in productive ways. Although I felt the company's approach to dance making could be analysed and presented in a written form, I was interested in how it may be understood on a scholarly-artistic level by exploring these working practices through dance making itself.

It is now recognized in the field of ethnographic research that there are multiple ways to interpret the field experience. For example, we find in Norman Denzin an emphasis on 'the situated, relational and textual structures of the ethnographic text' (Denzin 2003, p. 37). As I conceptualised the field of my own research, I expected the challenges would lie in *identifying* the invisible and unspoken elements that surround the choreographer as they embark on the creative process of dance-making, and how to *write* those elements. These challenges were met, and brought into the public arena by both writing a chapter on *Tracks* in this thesis (see Chapter Two) and by creating a series of ten dances that comprised the performance *Beyond Shore*.

To indicate the beginning of a process, I reproduce a short paragraph written early in my research before my fieldwork experience:

This research will observe the rehearsal processes three choreographers use when making a new body of work. The choreographers will consist of artists who work in a company model and who employ dancers to perform their work. It will identify modes of communication used by the choreographers, either verbal or kinaesthetic, to explore and translate their intentions. It will focus on the selection of movement material and what forces are engaged to influence decision making in the rehearsal process through to performance.

Josie Daw, 2006

In reflecting on this statement, the aim to understand the choreographic process of others does not appear too far distant from the point I eventually reached as the thesis matured. My initial questions searched for techniques of practice and essentially focused on what physical processes choreographers might use to make dance. This I predicted would centre on various stages that would be identified in the rehearsal processes, such as gathering and selecting movement passages towards creating choreography.

However, what the above quote also signals to me (although it is not made explicit) is the reliance on an *objective approach* to the research. I believed at that time that it was possible to observe the process of another choreographer, to analyse it, and report on the resultant ‘data’ in order to empirically describe and illuminate certain ‘facts’ concerning how choreography is produced, in a way that was unencumbered by the weight of my own subjectivity.

This approach dominated despite my preparation before entering the field to understand the implications and complications of observing others. These preparations included becoming familiar with the guiding concepts found in the traditional areas of ethnography and anthropology such as ‘the detached researcher’, ‘the pure subject’ and the ‘construction of the field’ (Crang & Cook 2007; Denzin & Lincoln 2003). My belief in the utility of the objective stance persisted notwithstanding the influence of my then supervisor, Mark Minchinton, who had written his thesis on the working methods of three theatre directors, and was thus well versed in the tension present between subjective and objective approaches to ethnography. Minchinton used a self-reflective approach to his extensive study, (he was a performer in the theatre groups he studied), and was firmly positioned as an insider to the processes he describes. By way of conclusion to his thesis, he alludes to the difficulty in understanding and writing empirical research, and proposes several ‘counter postulates of performance’ (Minchinton 1996, p. 232).

Performance makers do not construct signs to express a pre-thought world, but intervene and construct worlds through performance-making. We cannot hope to construct a majoritarian, or Royal, science of performance or theatre that will supply (a) a coherent system that can be studied separate from the historical conjuncture which produced it, or (b) that ignores the perversities of performers and directors, the irrational, chaotic and delirious decisions that undermine searches for global meanings, or masterful visions.

(Minchinton 1996, p. 232)

What is illuminating about Minchinton’s accounts is that he speaks from the voice of an insider and his analysis acknowledges the difficulty inherent within those processes, those ‘irrational and chaotic’ moments that cause friction, joy, conflict and insight between the directors and participants. How to write those moments was an issue that also emerged in my research.

Minchinton recognised the importance writing performs in not only documenting, but also theorising practice by those within the art forms. This view is supported by others, including cultural theorist, Nikos Papastergiadis, who considers arts writing is limited if it remains just *about* the art work and should instead be able to ‘enter the ideas (of the art work) and then move with them in parallel or adjacent trajectories’ (Papastergiadis 2002, p. 9). Although the

task of writing *how* choreography manifests is ambitious (due to the difficulty in describing the complexity and multiplicity of the creative process as it comes into being), I stubbornly persist with this approach throughout the second part of the thesis. By doing so I hope to offer a context that surrounds the moment, and an approximate and heuristic articulation of the relationship between the entities involved.

Ethnographers, Mike Crang and Ian Cook describe coming to terms with the subjective experience of fieldwork as an important part of the research experience (Crang & Cook 2007). In doing so they argue that research is able to move past a search for ‘the absolute ‘truth’’ of the subject. By acknowledging the subjective position of the researcher, they propose that the researcher is able to gain a deeper understanding of the research subject. This is logical as well as intuitive because the culture surrounding the subject is not isolated from the rest of the world, but engages with global processes that both inform and shape that culture (Nast & Pile 1998).

What needs to be addressed in the research experience by the ethnographer is ‘the struggle to produce *inter-subjective truths*, to understand why so many versions of events are produced and recited’ (Crang & Cook 2007, p. 14). This means the researcher needs to make an important distinction in the production of research, that is to say, through the narratives and experiences that people use to make sense of events that surround them. The researcher’s focus is not merely aimed at simply telling these stories, but rather on interpretively contextualising the ways in which these stories are situated within the larger cultural, social, political and economic realms. Crang and Cook suggest that ‘stories told in the research encounter are not simply to be regarded as a means of mirroring the world, but the means *through which it is constructed*, understood and acted out’ (Crang & Cook 2007, p. 14).

Mindful of my position in this research - that of a dance practitioner with an area of expertise in choreography - I approach my interpretation of the research first and foremost as a choreographer, and not within the academic expertise and experience of an ethnographer. The fieldwork comprised a small window in my overall research experience, and I need to be clear that my thesis does not rest on a comprehensive and painstaking ethnography of *Tracks Dance*. The company’s artistic directors framed the parameters of the study, which considers how they create dance within their immediate environment. As Crang and Cook emphasise, research stories can be told in numerous ways and my approach leans towards understanding my findings through an embodied inquiry into the nexus of dance and site through choreography.

Anthropology and Ethnography

Dance has been and continues to be a rich vein of study for both anthropologists and ethnologists alike. For example, there is a long tradition of anthropological study of indigenous movement systems that began in the early 20th century and continues to this day (Henry 2000; Kaepler 2000). Although the paradigms and interpretative perspectives of ethnographic and anthropological research have altered over time, (Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Kaepler 2000) the commonality between the varying branches of dance anthropology⁵ has at its base an interest in

structured movement systems (that) are systems of knowledge- the products of action and interaction as well as processes through which action and interaction take place.

(Kaepler 2000, p. 117)

Anthropologist Adrienne Kaepler makes an important distinction between dance ethnologists and anthropologists. The anthropologist is interested in the study of human movement to understand more fully the wider socio-cultural systems that surround a community, which leads them to explore dance as one part of a wider framework. Dance ethnologists, on the other hand, focus on dance and dance making as their primary source material. Generally there is a variation between disciplines as to the length of time the researcher would spend in the field: an anthropologist usually spends over a year in the field and an ethnologist's fieldwork is generally of much shorter duration. Importantly, the anthropologist operates within philosophical and pedagogical frameworks that underpin anthropological studies, where an ethnologist can come from a broader background that is not restricted to anthropology. These guidelines lead me to situate myself within my own research as an ethnologist.

It is a relatively common occurrence in ethnographic research that the researcher is often drawn to a particular study from their personal experience of that subject. (For example, a researcher who suffers from a particular disease may choose to study the effects of that same disease on others in specific contexts). Similarly, my position as a dance maker led me to study how other choreographers made dance and within this field I entered the research as an artist - one who privileges an emergent and multifaceted creative process in dance making. It follows, that my approach to observing others at work was one that I could reconcile with what I valued *myself* in a creative process. This lay in the realm of making apparent what Kaepler terms 'the 'invisible' underlying system, the processes that produce both the system

5 Anthropologist Adrienne Kaepler identifies a difference in focus in dance anthropology between Europe and America. The European approach generally uses comparative methods, contrasting with an American approach that 'questions what constitutes the field' (Kaepler 2000).

and the product, and the socio-political context' (Kaepler 2000, p. 117) which surround them.

Anthropologist Rosita Henry believes dance can offer more than a reflective approach to socio-cultural paradigms through its embodied nature and she explores how this notion may reposition dance as an 'active, fraught and dynamic force in human social life' (Henry 2000, p. 253). She endeavours to widen the boundaries of dance ethnographic scholarship in order to study 'the dialectical space of performative action' (Henry 2000, p. 253). My own interest converges upon a specific focus: how dance practice and creative dance-making processes occur within and beyond the studio. However, my method also incorporates a position that Henry advocates, one that allows a broader perspective, and extends to the social and cultural paradigms of the dancing body.

Embodied Research

In relation to how the embodied action of research may be understood as a valuable tool of the researcher, I turn to the work of dance anthropologist, Franca Tamisari, and her work with the Yolngu of Northeast Arnhem Land. Tamisari spent a number of years learning the women's dances of the Yolngu and on occasion performed the dances with the women at ceremonies. She describes the significance of this experience:

Far from interpreting the significance of Yolngu dancing from the recess of my idiosyncratic experiences, my participation in dancing – indeed making and negotiating political and emotional statements about my increasing involvement with others – brought to light aspects of Yolngu performances which would have otherwise been beyond my grasp, both at the level of experience and of analysis.

(Tamisari 2000, p. 276)

She adds it was 'my participation that allowed me an empathic understanding of how knowledge associated with country is embodied and transferred in the performative act itself' (Tamisari 2000, p. 277). She describes how the experience of dancing with the women enabled her to connect powerfully with the earth and thus generated for her a profound understanding of how the Yolngu are in the world. Her account of dancing with the Yolngu evocatively describes how she felt her body moving in relation to others and how the immediacy of the movement connected her to the other dancers. She also notes that her negotiations with the Yolngu, in order to dance, contributed to her further understanding of Yolgnu socio-cultural practices.

In the process of making *Beyond Shore* my circumstances were hardly comparable to Tamisari's transcendent experiences of ritual dance. However I would posit that my embodied activities in the conduct and outcome of the research reached beyond my previous

limits of choreographic experience. In particular my ethnographic study extended beyond the studio into the surrounds of Darwin, as I actively explored the city, hence increasing my contextual knowledge of the place in which *Tracks* work.

Researcher and Subject

Relationships of intimacy and familiarity between researcher and subject are envisioned as a fundamental medium of investigation rather than as an extraneous by-product or even an impediment.

(Amit 2000, p. 2)

The complexity of relationships between researcher and subject is an important facet in the qualitative research experience. Awareness of the interplay and tension between these opposing positions and the resulting methods employed to negotiate this territory have come to the fore since the representational turn in qualitative research, which began in the mid 1980s⁶. This important shift, centering on the relations between researcher and subject, led to the focus on the positionality of the researcher within the study and how they choose to manage and represent this position. A close and intimate relationship between subject and researcher can lead to insightful and subtle interpretations becoming available to the researcher and equally these intimacies make clear the impossibility of an objective position.

Helena Wulff conducted fieldwork over a period of four years on the Royal Swedish Ballet, the Royal Ballet, the American Ballet and Ballet Frankfurt. She notes that her own dance experience provided her with some insight into daily company life, particularly in the hierarchical organization of ballet structures, which she termed ‘homogenous in work practices (daily training, rehearsals, performances, basic steps)’ (Wulff 2000, p. 147). She describes her gradual emergence into the closed world of the ballet company. Over a period of a year she began by formally observing the company - in classes, in rehearsals and performances as well as through more informal access in the canteen and other social areas. After two months she was allowed access to the dressing-rooms and later was included in ‘in’ jokes. A final threshold was when she was able to trace observations and comments she had spoken to dancers about, as they were relayed back to her by other dancers. Wulff concludes that her past experience as a dancer, as well as her continued presence in the field, informed her understanding of the subject(s), and led to close friendships. She concludes: ‘(f)ieldwork is often not the kind of compartmentalized experience or practice it is presented as being’ (Wulff 2000, p. 157).

⁶ Generally regarded as emitting from Paul Stoller’s anthropological texts with the Songhay of Niger in which he wrote himself in to the research as a subject within the Songhay world.

Refiguring the Research Paradigms

After my fieldwork experience, I returned to Melbourne to analyse my findings in relation to my own performance work. I was coming to terms with the abrupt shift from my objective position in the field to a subjective one, at the same time questioning how I was to interweave the fieldwork into my own performance. I was working on both aspects of the research study at the same time - one through a written account (the fieldwork) and one through a bodily account (the performance). Tension existed between these two modes of production, the dance work, markedly moving forward as the performance started to develop, and the fieldwork experience, becoming increasingly reflective as the distance and duration between it and myself expanded. However, counter to this was the interdependence of the two fields of production, neither would exist without the other. The ethnography was feeding into the studio work and the studio work in turn was feeding into how I analysed the ethnography. To draw out this relationship further I will describe some of the elements of each field:

Ethnographic. As researcher in the ethnographic study I moved between an objective position (as observer), to a subjective position (witness). Similarly, within my own choreography, I switched between locating myself in the dance and outside of it as I respectively danced and devised the work myself and then observed the dancers as they performed it. In addition the ethnographic experience expanded my notions of the boundaries and location of the site exploration of Darwin and also the local site of Williamstown where the performance *Beyond Shore* was located.

Artistic. The ethnography and the choreography were produced by my interpretation of the 'data' (the collection of material in both the choreographic and ethnographic fields) and the subsequent discoveries found in both fields. Techniques I used included: dancing the experience of journeying and displacement; exploring the site of Williamstown through corporeal practices such as psychogeography; and gathering source material such as still and video images.

When I made the decision to look at other choreographers, I was, in effect, mapping knowledge and cultural production from one choreographic field into my own practice. As choreography is a cultural form of communication and does not occur in a vacuum, becoming immersed in any field of production will impact on the dance practice. Through my previous dance making experience, I expected the fieldwork would seep into my own practice as I began to work towards my performance.

An early field note I made concerning relation was that my performance would ‘draw a bridge between it and the fieldwork’.⁷ Nevertheless, I experienced a distance between the areas of choreography and ethnography before I was able to reconcile this through my artistic practice. To consider how I might make the fieldwork/performance link in the research more explicit, I used a technique reasonably common to contemporary performance making – posing a provocation (Garoian 1999). What would happen if I performed the ethnography? From this point, I decided to explore the findings from the ethnographic experience that I felt were the most compelling. I had identified several areas of *Tracks*’ work I saw as significant indicators of their choreographic output, which resulted from the impact of *place* on the choreography *Tracks* produce. Embedded within these areas were two streams that I would address from my artistic practice.

The first was to make a site-specific work in my local area. This was a direct attempt to replicate the conditions of *Tracks*’ work, albeit in a different socio-cultural and geographic environment.

The second was to emulate *Tracks* practice of privileging relations with others in their work. I would expand my network of relations with others as I made the performance to situate them more centrally in the construction of the work. The dancers and other artists were engaged in the project as co-producers, allowing me to look at the potential of dialogical art practices to inform the corporeal and conceptual underpinnings of my evolving choreography.

Exploring these features in the studio and site of Williamstown, my local area, through improvisation, and outdoors through dialogical pathways with others, led me to extend the parameters of ethnographic research as it is traditionally conducted to privilege the embodied activity of fieldwork. I felt this was significant for a study that explored dance and importantly it allowed me to explore these features through privileging performance in my methodology. The construction of the performance *Beyond Shore* was therefore a direct response to what I encountered in my fieldwork. In effect I would ‘write-up’ my findings through the process of choreography. The insights that might be uncovered through an artistic experience would contribute positively to the research.

Performance Ethnography

The expansion of the boundaries of both the researcher and subject, as well as the concept of the field being ‘constructed’ have led to increased discourse around how the representation of the research subject may occur. By operating from the premise that there is no possibility of

⁷ Studio notes on my return from Darwin, 2006.

an objective status in the field, these other ways of knowing have shifted ethnographic research from what might be termed a 'grand narrative' and form modernist interpretations that attempt to form a distanced and objective stance towards the subject. It is acknowledgement of the researcher's subjectivity that leads to a 'perspective of the gendered, historically situated and interacting individual' (Denzin & Lincoln 2003, p. 612). This destabilises the traditional and more linear and rigid interpretations of ethnographic research. Other possible ways for the ethnographic research encounter to be explored are through experimental inquiry including methods such as autobiography, narrative and creative writings (Turner & Turner 2004). This more diffuse approach to knowledge production allows for hitherto subaltern voices to become articulated, that is to say, those found within feminist, queer, ethnic and other marginal positions. Denzin argues that over time the discipline of ethnography will increasingly focus on *performativity* as a medium of interpretation. He considers:

Performance approaches to knowing insist on immediacy and involvement, they consist of partial, plural, incomplete and contingent understandings, not analytical distance or detachment, the hallmarks of the textual and positivist paradigms.

(Denzin 2003, p. 8)

Performance ethnologist Bryant Alexander describes performance ethnography as 'literally the staged re-enactment of ethnographically derived notes' (Alexander, BK 2008, p. 75). This experimental union of the disciplines of performance and ethnography seems an unlikely, if not radical, way to understand the ethnographic research experience, but as I will try to make clear, these disciplines are not so disparate. What performance and ethnography have in common is an embodied understanding of knowledge-centred practice that moves beyond mere observation. Both disciplines are enacted through the body, foregrounding the experiential element of each. Alexander describes the commonality between performance and ethnography as an 'approach to studying and staging culture (that) works towards lessening the gap between a perceived and actualized sense of self and the other' (Alexander, BK 2008, p. 75).

Performance ethnography generally consists of a series of steps: the ethnographic experience, the analysis of material gathered towards the development of texts, and finally the performance. The nature of the work - understanding difference, the participants' experiences, the audience's understanding of the performance - and the direct engagement of socio-cultural elements such as gender, class and race, links performance ethnography with a social action agenda.

Initially, the types of performance ethnography I researched were essentially dramatic performances, used as a means of telling stories and describing experiences from the perspective of the subject. Despite the presence of texts in these performances, I felt there were elements within this relationship that were relevant to my dance experience. Denzin, operating from the premise that ‘the world is a performance, not a text’, sees performativity and its focus on action as a way to disrupt the textual confines in which the social sciences may be grounded. According to Denzin, this necessitates the revisioning of the paradigms of the social sciences to include performance. Consider these points Denzin makes about performance:

- Performances and their representations reside in the centre of lived experience.
- The observer and observed are co-performers in a performance event.
- (Performance and hermeneutics) privilege performed inquiry as a way of knowing, as a method of critical inquiry, and as a mode of understanding.
- Performed experiences are the sites where felt emotion, memory, desire and understanding come together.
- The performative becomes an act of doing, an act of resistance, a way of connecting the biographical, the pedagogical and the political.

(Denzin 2003, pp. 12-4)

The above indicate some of the key points of the relations between performance, and respectively, representation, observation, hermeneutics, experiences and resistance. Within these relations dance can certainly fit comfortably and can perhaps also offer something more to the scholarship than text-based performance ethnographies. The diversity of texts for performance ethnography are many, they include play-texts, poetry, testimonials, and ethno-dramas to name a few (Denzin 2003). Once again, many of these texts have at their core a commitment to presenting an understanding of another’s culture, and are often created specifically to speak for an oppressed community. With the exception of performance ethnographies that are designed *dialogically* (where the ‘subject’ actively takes part in the creation of the work), these text based performance ethnographies remain another form of interpretation of the research by the ethnographer.

I was not convinced that my performance outcome needed to be linked so explicitly to the social and cultural activism that seems to be at the core of much performance ethnography. My understanding of what I had encountered through my fieldwork experience - the impact of place on choreographic practice - seemed to be a worthy topic of investigation. This topic linked more closely with an embodied, artistic inquiry into how site-related dance might be envisaged and created in a local environment. I felt that this way of framing the research was a form of social action itself, (although I make no claims to speak of behalf of my subject – *Tracks Dance*). My act of making a performance was a direct response to what I had seen *Tracks* do, that is, make a work ‘about’ the place where they lived. By undertaking a performance ethnography, I felt I was opening up the research experience to a level of inquiry that in itself was unique.

***Beyond Shore* as Performance Ethnography**

Following Denzin’s five observations about Performance Ethnography, I situate the creative process of *Beyond Shore* as a series of interventions in the landscape of Williamstown.

- *Beyond Shore* was not concerned with representing my field study subject (*Tracks Dance*), but resides in the dancers and my own embodied experiences of site.
- *Tracks Dance*, the dancers and myself are co-performers in the process towards the performance *Beyond Shore*.
- My ethnographic experience and the performance *Beyond Shore* is an interpretation that privileges performed inquiry as a way of knowing, as a method of critical inquiry, and as a mode of understanding.
- The dancers’ bodies are the sites where the site-related investigations are felt and seen.
- My performance in the field and the subsequent translation of the resonance of that experience to the dancers was a way of connecting the biographical, the pedagogical and the political.

Working towards the performance outcome of *Beyond Shore* was an important step within the research process, although I regard the performance as less significant than the development and investigation of the processes that led to it. While I analysed these processes that were deeply connected to my own practice, I was conscious of elements I encountered - such as the

relations between choreographer and dancer, pragmatic and poetic spatial framings and corporeal practices - as being more universal conditions of Western choreography.

Conclusion

During the processes towards the performance *Beyond Shore*, I used site and dialogical practices with other artists (the dancers, four visual artists and an actor) as a basis for an inquiry into dance making practices. By working in a way that I felt was integral to the way *Tracks* worked, I would immerse myself far more deeply in an ethnographic study by experiencing first hand through the experience of performance making, ways of seeing, thinking and experiencing through dance, the processes of other dance makers. I saw this methodology as situating myself as a witness in the ethnographic encounter in order to conduct a deeper probe into the act of witnessing. It was only through the experiential element of making a performance myself that I would understand the implications and conceptual grounding of the practices *Tracks* undertake.

Chapter Two

Experiencing Darwin, Observing *Tracks*

Preface

Darwin is the most unprivate of places. Too humid for clothing and walls, one lives outside, half dressed and often half packed, and fecund nature moves in. I have never had my domestic airwaves so congested with the lives of other sentient beings: if not the car hoons, tree loppers, televisions or domestics, it's the fig birds or the bats. ...Heat dissolves things and humidity makes them stick. All is interwoven, inextricable, mostly intimate. One slows down, lets go, opens up as cool headedly as possible. The result can be a fruitful but often uncomfortable confrontation with oneself.

(Ooms 2005, p19)

In an article that delineates her five-year artistic practice in Darwin, visual artist Anne Ooms explores the irony of her move to Darwin to escape her mid-life crisis. She describes her encounter with the tropical city as unsettling, as her desire to hide away was futile, and in fact due to the differences she experienced in the social and geographic climates, she found herself exposed more than ever.

As the Ooms quote expresses, the overwhelming feeling of the external environment encroaching on the interior landscape of self was for her, unexpected and powerful. She experienced this sense of exposure through the natural environment and socially with the sounds of other lives pervading her space. The open style of tropical housing meant conversations, household noises, sounds of animals and music were constantly heard. This exposure added to a heightened reality of everyday living and Ooms describes the effect this had on her and other artists she knows, as one where 'eurocentric art paradigms' (Ooms, 2005) melted in the heat.⁸ My own short experience in Darwin allowed me a glimpse into how this encroachment of nature and daily life begins to act on the body. There was a sense of familiarity that comes with being an Australian in an Australian city, but the climate and geography and the way people lived within these circumstances felt very different.

One of the first few nights I was in Darwin, I arrived for the first time, at a house I was minding. It was late at night and I stumbled through the unlit and unknown back garden, through the laundry to find the hidden key. I could sense the vastness of the large garden surrounding the house, and saw the interior of the house by light, but I was unsettled by that beyond which I could

⁸ The curatorial premise for *Undone*, 2002. An exhibition of five artists based in Darwin, curated by Peter Adsett and Anne Ooms.

only imagine. I was unable to close the floor to ceiling louvres due to corrosion, which made me nervous, and throughout a predominantly sleepless night a bush turkey kept up a constant screeching. I was unable to distinguish whether this noise was a woman crying for help or a native animal.

Reflections on Darwin, J.Daw⁹

This chapter is as much concerned with delineating the parameters of my focus on *Tracks* as it is in exploring particular elements of their working practices. The scope of *Tracks*' work is broad, and spans a long period of time. In addition, the cultural groups they engage with are diverse. This chapter provides an overview and a context of *Tracks*' practice, and it aims to encapsulate my experience in Darwin, a short, insightful period that resonated throughout the research. My initial understanding was that observing the company at work would somehow be a *contained* exercise that occurred within the four walls of the dance studio. In reality, my experience in Darwin was an awakening to how much of *Tracks*' dance making was concerned with building relations outside of the studio. This in turn informs the dance that is produced by the company.

***Tracks* in Darwin**

Darwin is a remote city with a tropical climate and distinct geography, located in the Northern Territory of Australia. Darwin is a small city with a population of approximately 150,000 and with a younger demographic than is found in other Australian cities. It has significant populations of Indigenous, Indonesian, Filipino and Greek communities. Geographically, the nearest capital city is Dili, across the Timor Sea in East Timor, and further south are the central deserts of Australia. The city has undergone two periods of major rebuilding: the first after it was bombed in a series of air attacks in World War Two, and the second, after the devastating effects of Cyclone Tracy in 1974, which wiped out seventy percent of the city's building structure. The city has a large transient population due to the military presence and the mining industry.

Tracks are a contemporary dance company, local to Darwin. The company began under the banner of the Browns Mart Community Arts program (1988 – 1993), and became *Tracks* from 1994 to present. *Tracks* is run by two Artistic Co-directors, David McMicken and Tim Newth, who have been involved with the company since 1991 and 1988 respectively. Other staff members include a full-time General Manager, and various part-time roles, which include two dance Animateurs, a Professional Development Consultant and a Bookkeeper. They describe themselves as a cross-cultural dance company, as their work relies on volunteer

⁹ Throughout this chapter I insert paragraphs that describe my own experiences of Darwin, which I hope serve to illuminate the fieldwork in other ways.

performers who come from various cultural groups in Darwin and the Northern Territory. They are largely a project-based company, committed to producing between three or four new works each year.

Tracks' vision is to *Give Voice to Territory Culture* through a dance and performing arts company based in the Northern Territory. *Tracks* has a local and national reputation for its *core product* – performances that unite professional, community and cultural elements that powerfully connect place, people and spirit using sites that are linked in important ways to the narrative of the performance.

Tracks specialises in intercultural expressions. It has developed strong relationships and ways of working with traditional Aboriginal, South East Asian and Pacific communities. With different value systems relating to things such as extended family, reciprocal learning, the inter-relationship between people, place and spirit and notions of Country and Law, these complex and fruitful relationships give *Tracks* an innovative perspective.

(Tracks 2005, p. 2)

My initial interest in the company began with an article I read in 2003,¹⁰ which described the company's work in Lajamanu, a remote Indigenous community, 1000 kilometres south of Darwin, where *Tracks* have established a long relationship with the Warlpiri people. Newth, a co-author of the article, described an experience where *Tracks* travelled to Lajamanu to work on a planned project with the community. The process involved negotiating the particular social, geographic and cultural climate(s) they encountered along the way. The article describes how the choreographers were forced to abandon their original plans for a collaborative performance after the community had gone into 'sorry business', a period of mourning after the death of a community member (and key artist on the project), and were unavailable to begin the project. *Tracks* adopted a flexible approach to these changed conditions, responding by waiting and discussing in conjunction with the community what might be a possible way to continue the project. As Newth explains:

In a Western individualistic way of thinking, if the key artist dies then the project cannot go on. In Aboriginal culture, there is a collective ownership. It was just a matter of following the right protocols and waiting to be told who was the next right person or people.

(McMicken & Newth 2003, p. 34)

Several points within this article interested me. First, this responsive attitude to changing conditions signaled to me a committed approach to working with others in ways that seemed to disrupt the traditional hierarchy of a dance company with the Artistic Directors in a position of control. Second, the temporal duration of this project, which occurred in stages

10 RealTime Magazine, Issue 54. April/May 2003, p34.

over the period of a year, but was built on a relationship with the community that had begun in 1988, indicated a rethinking of the boundaries of a traditional rehearsal period. And third, the article questioned who dance is being made for. Co-author McMicken describes a dance artist, removed from a community and struggling to connect with an audience that is 'unidentifiable, dreamed, the great potential through, an infinitude without faces, anonymous, the entire world, applauding and invisible' (McMicken & Newth 2003, p. 34). He proposes a refiguring of this relationship, to one where the artist is located within a community and then begins to make dance *for* and *within* that artist's community. The article suggested a company who was potentially refiguring Western frameworks of dance making practices, which resulted in my decision to approach *Tracks* to be the subject of my research.

Entering the Field

Before I travelled to Darwin, I had the opportunity to spend a weekend with *Tracks* in regional Victoria at the 2006 Australian Youth Dance Festival in Horsham. McMicken and Newth had brought a group of youth dancers from Darwin to participate in the festival and I was able to conduct two preliminary interviews with McMicken during this time. I was also able to see their work, as Newth was the Artistic Director of the festival and had facilitated the integration of disparate styles of dance (learnt over the preceding days) into a performance that involved hundreds of youth dancers. I gained an insight from this experience into the history and philosophy of the company, and through the performance a sense of aesthetic and artistic approaches to the work.

I did have a past link with the company. I knew David McMicken socially when he lived in Melbourne in the late 1980s and early 1990s, and I was familiar with his early choreography. In addition I had seen McMicken and Newth perform in Melbourne through *Dance Works*, a professional dance company based in Melbourne. I had not kept in contact with McMicken, although I was aware through the wider dance network that he was Artistic Director of *Tracks Dance* in Darwin, and the company was quite successful, receiving triennial funding from The Australia Council for the Arts. In 2004 they were the recipients of the prestigious Sydney Myer Performing Arts Award and in 2009 they received an Australian Dance Award for Community Dance. The company has a home base with a studio, a web presence and a reasonable level of critical and public success.

After a period of time communicating via email with the company and setting up a suitable time in which to undertake my fieldwork, I travelled to Darwin in July 2006 to begin a month-long period with *Tracks* as they made a new, youth dance work, *Mr Big*. As a researcher, I expected my presence to be 'somewhat passive - visible but not intrusive in collecting data' (Holosko 2006, p. 55). I intended to observe rehearsals, conduct interviews

and record video and still images of the company as they worked. I wasn't sure what to expect from Darwin, what outcomes would emerge, or how I would analyse my findings.

Over the course of the month long period I spent intensively with the company, I observed rehearsals and workshops and I conducted a series of interviews with the key creative personnel of *Tracks*.¹¹ I attended creative development meetings, a photo shoot, and site visits to the performance venue. I also attended arts functions with the Artistic Directors, visited their homes, and had a number of insightful anecdotal conversations with the staff of *Tracks*, as well as past audience members and dancers. I collected still photographs and video footage from rehearsals and presented a paper on the company at the Charles Darwin University, School of Indigenous Knowledge Systems. During this period my increased presence in the field moved my position from a 'somewhat passive' collector of data, to one that was 'more active', as my increased visibility in the field meant I became 'part of the setting' (Holosko 2006, p. 55).

'Meeting' Darwin

On arrival in Darwin, I was struck by the how the experiential element of simply being with the company at their base informs my perceptions of them. The *Tracks*' studio and offices are situated in the city centre of Darwin itself. The surrounding location, despite being a few streets away from the main city streets, is like much of Darwin, green and tropical with a surrounding sense of space. The studio is part of a sprawling complex, which houses other spaces and groups connected to the arts community in Darwin.

The company's base has a professional appearance with clean surrounds and separate rooms for different activities: offices for the manager and the directors, a kitchen, a store room, an archive room, a costume and props room and the studio. Large, mounted posters from the company's productions adorn the walls, and Macintosh computers are in the offices, with shifting screen-savers of photographic images from the company's past productions. While nothing is elaborate, and the telltale signs of a tight budget are present in rudimentary furniture and some shabbiness, it clearly is a functioning and workable atmosphere.

Tracks see themselves as a professional company who work within the specific social, cultural, and geographic environments of the Northern Territory. They prioritise building relations between the company and a number of community groups they have connected with over the past twenty years. As such, their work is steered by these groups.

¹¹ Although I interviewed Dance Animateur, Julia Quinn and choreographer, Nicholas Power, in the appendix I have elected to include only the interviews with the Artistic Directors.

The core groups *Tracks* work with are:

- Indigenous. *Tracks* have been involved with the Warlpiri community of Lajamanu since 1988 and over that time have worked on numerous occasions with the same group of Senior women.
- The Grey Panthers. A group of approximately thirty senior citizens from Darwin, all women, predominantly sixty years of age and over. They meet every Friday at *Tracks*' studio for a movement class and then rehearsals for *Tracks* performances and other community events.
- Youth. This focus of the company is important, and they produce a youth project approximately every two years. *Tracks* see the youth projects as an attempt to build links with youth, particularly to strengthen male involvement in dance and to promote the company to a wider audience. This group fluctuates, although some core members have an ongoing connection to the company.
- Cross-cultural. Exchanges have occurred with Sri Lankan, South Pacific Islander and Filipino communities.

The company produces up to four major works a year and are performance driven, meaning the company is in a constant state of working towards the next production. Although they maintain a pressing schedule of productions, the staff's professional development is valued, and the Artistic Directors schedule individual professional development periods through the year.

Tracks work within parameters that in a Western theatrical context may appear artistically restrictive. They are mindful of presenting work in an environment where contemporary dance is a relatively new form and as a result they take care to maintain what they term 'accessible' work, where the thematic content is clear and defined. They are dependent on volunteer performers, many of whom have limited knowledge of western dance styles. Due to Darwin's isolation, the pool of other creative artists who are able to collaborate with *Tracks* is small. *Tracks*' performances often have a narrative thread or attend to a series of research-style questions, which are made explicit in the advertising surrounding the productions and through notes in rehearsals and programs. For example, the accompanying program notes to *Mr Big*, which addressed the booming development of Darwin, asked 'What do we value in

our town today I wonder? Are we determining our developments with our community in mind' (Paspaley, 2005)?¹²

The boundaries could be seen as inhibiting, however *Tracks* have developed methods to eschew that element by operating in a way that subverts restrictions and uses the elements to their advantage. Former Artistic Director of Dance North in Queensland, Cheryl Stock, describes how she changed her working methods during her time in the tropical climate of Townsville. Her approach to work while remaining 'energetic' became more 'fluid' as she began to reappraise and question her own 'learned aesthetic' (Stock 1991, p. 34). She credits the interaction with the local community through dance education programs as a persuasive influence on her choreography, explaining the change in her working style not as a compromise but 'merely a continued appraisal of one's work' (Stock 1991, p. 32).

The many realities of our situation, often seen by others as negatives – isolation, small population, vast distances between population centres, small Western- trained base, limited performance opportunities – are what we seize on as opportunities.

(Tracks 2005, p. 2)

In their literature, *Tracks* identify at various times as a cross-cultural, multicultural and/or an intercultural company. Their current website neglects to use any of the above terms and instead describes the company as building on an extended 'history of trusted community collaboration' (McMicken & Newth 2009, p. 1).

The basic concept I think stays the same for us, in that Tim and I are two artists who live somewhere, and we are creating work about where we live. The difference is that we use, not what is in our head to do that, but we use the place we live and the people in that place. And so we need to find out what that is. Living in Australia in the Northern Territory where 30% of the population is Indigenous and most of them are in remote communities, you've got to learn a whole new cultural thing. You've got another 30% of the population from non-English-speaking backgrounds so the Western background is the smallest part of what we work with. But we utilise that to make contemporary statements. We certainly don't throw all of our Western practices away. We're looking at using that Western... and...it's quite a fusion of practices.

(McMicken, 2006)¹³

French scholar and expert on intercultural theatre, Patrice Pavis, explores the differences between multicultural and intercultural theatre. He defines the term 'intercultural' as an exchange where aspects of two or more cultures are amalgamated into one performance, forming a hybrid of the cultures. Pavis suggests intercultural theatre should not be seen as an

¹² The program note was taken from Marylynne Paspaley's 2005 Eric Johnston Lecture, 'Finding the Spirit of Darwin'. Reproduced in part in the program notes to *Mr Big*, 2006.

¹³ Appendix 4, First Interview with David McMicken.

area which simply describes difference, or focuses on the specifics of the cultural practice in question, but it should be located in a ‘crucible in which performance techniques are tested against and amalgamated with the techniques that receive and fashion them’ (Pavis 1996, p. 2). By contrast, Pavis describes *multicultural* theatre as that which acknowledges the identity of separate cultural groups and in performances keeps this identity separate. The performance acts as a frame to the discrete groups and is a method that *Tracks* use in their large-scale ‘spectacle’ works. An example being their works that open events such as the Arafura Games (an Asian Pacific Sporting event), where less emphasis is placed on the intermingling of cultures, and the separate groups perform alongside each other aiming to ‘explore the way that diversity sits side by side in our world’ (McMicken & Newth 2009, p. 1).

Dance scholar, Sally Ann Ness, believes the process of ‘crossing’ the intercultural divide between researcher and subject (or director and performer) illuminates the ‘unstable, confused and dynamic territory of cultural study’ (Ness 1996, p. 246). I observed the process as *Tracks* engaged with the various groups they work with and identified *negotiation* as the foundation for discourses that emerge through the cultural exchange. Writing about *Tracks*’ relational work is problematic as it is always in a state of flux and therefore resistant to description. However, Pavis points to several indicators in the intercultural relationship, which I have used to sketch out *Tracks*’ work.

Identification with foreign themes and performance

Culturally, the demographic of Darwin means that there are far more frequent meetings of different cultures than may be found in a more homogenous environment. I would posit that the Artistic Directors of *Tracks* are interested in the interface between themselves and the other cultures they encounter through their work. This interface is particularly connected to spirituality and ritual found in the disparate cultures they encounter.

Goals of the adaptors

Both Artistic Directors of *Tracks* have identified their intentions as seeking to explore the depth and breadth of the dance groups they engage with. Within this broad lens, the artistic directors have aesthetic goals (Newth is interested performatively in an expression of balance and harmony), as well as thematic goals (McMicken’s research-style questions preface the start of a process).

Preparatory work

This stage signals a level of deep understanding of the particular community in question, understanding that unless this occurs, that the relationship will remain cursory. For example, *Tracks*' long relationship with the Warlpiri community of Lajamanu has contributed to Newth and McMicken's understanding of some of the community's cultural laws and rituals. For example, they understand that the preparation the Senior women undertake as they paint their bodies prior to the dance, is as important as the dance itself. For *Tracks* the process of dance making begins long before the company enters the studio. It is centered in the philosophy of the company, which privileges relational aspects between the company and the groups they engage with to determine the way they perceive, transmit and create dance.

The choice of a form

The company uses dance as the primary form of communication. They generally use performers who have little knowledge of Western dances forms but specialize in their own cultural dances. The company accepts that in addition to the cultural background of the individual, bodies continue to be shaped through dialogue with others.

Theatrical Representation of a culture

Pavis suggests that to represent a culture is to grasp hold of its conventions 'charting its rhetorical and stylistic figures, (and) its narrative strategies' (Pavis 1996, p. 18). Importantly he notes that through the process of representation, the performer is placed in the position of having to *show* the work as well as represent it. Thus the performers need to engage in a dialogue of words and actions that cross into other forms communication.¹⁴

I have touched briefly *Tracks*' cross-cultural work to provide a context of practice. My research stops short from critically entering their productions with a view to valorize (or not) the types of representational strategies they employ onstage. I understand that dance pedagogy and rehearsal processes serve to embed cultural representations at such early stages of performance making, and are therefore significant topics of investigation. However, my focus was on the company as they made a youth dance work and this particular focus did not expose me to the representational complexity that may be found in one of the company's large-scale cross-cultural pieces. However, my focus does not ignore how difference is constructed, and I identify several 'fields of production' which differentiate the company's work practices from those that predominate in a Western mode of dance making. I propose

¹⁴ Such as that indicated by Tamisari in her dancing with the Yolgnu.

these 'fields of productions' have emerged from a particular engagement with place. The following section focuses briefly on *Mr Big*, the performance I observed for my study. I describe briefly the context in which the work was made to provide the reader with a sense of how the company produce dance.

Mr Big

I arrived in Darwin just as *Tracks* were preparing for their new youth work called *Mr Big*. For this work, the company employed Nicholas (Nick) Power, a young, specialist breakdancer as guest choreographer.¹⁵ At the time of my arrival, Power, McMicken and Newth along with Julia Quinn, the dance animateur, had organized the initial structure of *Mr Big*. Six youth dance leaders had been selected to act as guides for those cast members who were new to dance and their leadership roles were reflected in the performance as lead parts. Preliminary choreography for *Mr Big* was developed by the youth dance leaders and the staff of *Tracks* before introducing the cast of thirty male and female dancers (chosen by an audition process) to the work. The rehearsals occurred part-time over a two-month period.

Mr Big was an opportunity for the company to connect with young people in Darwin, and this was an important focus for *Tracks*. The work was part of the Darwin Festival so it had a relatively high profile through the marketing support of the Festival. Thematically the work, with its theme of development, was relevant to the youth in Darwin, many of whom move out of Darwin due to a perceived lack of opportunities. The score was a combination of current and classic popular music orientated to a youth audience.

Then we bring the young ones back into that and say, 'Okay, this is the idea. What do you think of it?' So this year we chose six young people that we auditioned as our youth leaders. We bring them into workshops and say, 'Okay here's the basic idea. What do you think of it? Where might it go? Who is Mr Big to you? What makes Darwin what it is for you?' And then we do a lot of brainstorming, a lot of talk at that point with them and then, usually with the youth, (we've done this for the last three show with a group of leaders), we start choreographing ideas - enough to see if it is going to work. Then we audition for the larger cast and the young people are able to teach the material that works and then we can shape that.

So a lot of the finer details of the work don't exist in the choreographer's or the producer's or the director's heads. It exists as a concept and then we try and get that to come through from the young people because they do most of the choreography.

McMicken, 2006,¹⁶

¹⁵ In Australia, Breaking is taught frequently in school curriculums as it is successful in engaging students, particularly boys, in arts based activity.

¹⁶ See appendix 5, Interview Two, between David McMicken and Josie Daw

I often watched the rehearsals for *Mr Big* with the youth dancers. A typical rehearsal began with a warm-up led by Julia Quinn or Nick Power, which consisted of a mixture of floor and standing exercises. Loud music accompanied the warm-up which was then followed by several sequences of movement aimed to extend the performers' technique. These exercises, as well as the choreography for *Mr Big*, were reasonably challenging and this meant a high degree of concentration was required from the dancers. Later, the dancers split into groups and worked on smaller group sequences. During these times the atmosphere was noisy, punctuated by sharp exclamations, laughter and teasing. At times it became slightly uncontrolled and wild, and when this occurred, either McMicken, Newth, Power or Quinn would raise their voices to regain control.

Julia Quinn¹⁷ for example, will go away and take what we've talked about and usually find a stimulus to begin the choreography. So she might say, 'Okay, I want you to create.... you're the cowgirl. I want a thing that is about real action of working on the farm stock.' or whatever 'Erwin, you're the military one..... I want you to think of it being in these particular ways.' And she'll set a problem for them to solve. Tim and I sit there and watch what they are doing (as well as giving feedback), but initially just trying to let Julia handle the shaping of the material until it's at a point where we can kick in. So then we finish and we can talk with the young people about taking it further or describing other directions to take it. We can see where there are issues.

McMicken, 2006,¹⁸

A playful atmosphere permeated the rehearsals. Breakdancing was the main movement style taught by Power. A third of the cast were young men which lead to much comparison of physical ability, testing new movements and challenging each other to mini competitions. Breakdance (or 'Breaking' which is the preferred term of the participants)¹⁹ is often performed in 'battles' or challenges from one group to another. Stylistically it includes movement designed to 'diss' (disrespect) an opponent and irony and humour are the primary expressive qualities used in the battles. The women also were involved in many of the hip-hop sequences (a free-flowing style of street dance), although the majority of the 'power moves' (acrobatic stunts) were performed by the men. Unlike the men, many of the women typically had some form of dance experience through recreational dance schools and were more familiar with the structure of rehearsals. Their movement experience encompassed ballet and jazz styles and the range of technical ability was quite broad. Both men and women appeared focused and challenged by the physicality of the choreography.

¹⁷ Julia Quinn, Part-time Dance Animateur at *Tracks*.

¹⁸ See appendix 5, Interview Two between David McMicken and Josie Daw

¹⁹ The influential breakdancing film *Breakin'* (1984) shuns the term 'breakdance' and prefers the term 'breaking'.

Mr Big was performed outdoors in a space owned by Shell, the petrochemical company. It was a large open space with a split-level 'stage' consisting of a poured slab of concrete. Around the concrete were shipping containers which served as dressing rooms and storage areas, cyclone fencing, which served to both contain the audience and was later used as stage sets, a block of seating for the audience and a lighting rig. The audience looked onto the stage from a frontal orientation. Behind the stage was a crane (supplied by an uncle of one of the performers), with the city of Darwin skyline clearly visible (scattered with other cranes), making for a dramatic setting.

Essentially I'm really interested in space. I love working with space and yeah, absolutely right, I do have a sense of simplicity that I really like and I do have a sense of order. I do know as an artist I actually need order to begin, although that's not necessarily where it ends up. But I need that sense of space and order before I can see anything else that might end up being somewhere completely chaotic. That's a part of my personality type. Very different to David's where he can work with heaps of people around him saying many different things. I can be there and operate, but I actually need to do my creative thinking outside of that in that much more peaceful, still space. Then I can think about it, and bring that information back in to that more chaotic state.

Newth, 2006²⁰

The site was nominated for development by Shell, so a sense of transience pervaded the setting - it was not going to exist long in the present form - and this sensibility was seized upon and used by the Artistic Directors. The audience was ushered in to the site at dusk by ushers wearing building vests and hard hats; they stepped along narrow temporary walkways to the seating block. It was in fact, an ideal site for a work about development. I was often present at rehearsals at different times of the day, mid-afternoon, dusk and at night. By day, the stage seemed overwhelmed by the vastness of the space around it, by night the darkness had closed in and with the addition of the stage lighting the performance area was a focal point.

So there is that thing of the site and that's one aspect of it. Then once we've created the dance work itself, the choreography, it's placing that within the site. There is the site which the whole audience and the performers inhabit, and then there is the bit of the site that we want people to look at the most. How we make that work is a different set of equations because it's not about the audience. It's about the choreography. It's about the dancers and the dance. It's about the capabilities of the dancers.

Newth, 2006²¹

²⁰ See Appendix 7, First Interview between Tim Newth and Josie Daw.

²¹ See Appendix 7, First Interview between Tim Newth and Josie Daw.

Although I was ostensibly in Darwin to observe *Mr Big* being made, the rehearsals were conducted in the late afternoon to accommodate the youth dancers, leaving me free during most days to be at the company's office and studio, observing administration procedures, meetings, and other workshops that were occurring. Outside of the offices, I was able to observe how the company interacted with other groups and how they managed their relationships with board members and other prominent arts figures in Darwin. As noted above, *Mr Big* was attached to the Darwin Festival and hence had a visible marketing presence through television and other media sources. During the festival, there were many shows I attended in company with the staff members of *Tracks* and these too, were informative.

The following section of this chapter focuses on the two key areas I worked with as guiding influences through my performance ethnography: one, the relational side of *Tracks*' work, and the other, the way the company uses site-specificity in their work.

A Non-hierarchical Way of Working

In Australia, most publicly funded dance companies are structured with the Artistic Director at the top of the hierarchy. The Artistic Director conceives, choreographs and ultimately carries responsibility for the style and reputation of the company's output. When this paradigm is fractured, as it is in *Tracks*, with the Artistic Director(s) moving through different roles as teacher, student, facilitator, performer and director within the same project, an unstable company model is created. This instability causes the participants to reassess preconceived notions of the respective roles of dancer(s) and choreographer(s) and opens up spaces for a collaborative and dynamic process to emerge.

Architect and academic, Ruth Morrow has outlined a number of characteristics of what she terms a feminised (architectural) practice. She argues for a consideration of not *what* is practiced but rather *how* it is practiced.

A feminised practice is:

Collective, not always individualistic

Listening, not always telling

Facilitating, not always controlling

Non-hierarchical, not always hierarchical

Fluid, not always fixed

Doubtful, not always certain

(Morrow 2007, p. 193)

It was apparent after spending time at *Tracks*' studios that the traditional hierarchical structure found between choreographer and dancer in mainstream dance is far removed from how *Tracks* work. A number of identifying factors pointed me to this direction: first and most compelling, is the company's dependence on the participation of community members who work as dancers on a voluntary basis. Immediately this exchange impacts significantly on the first four characteristics on Morrow's list. The reliance of *Tracks* on volunteer performers means the community-based company must move beyond an autocratic style of directorship, as the participants have no financial incentive to remain involved. To keep participants connected it is vital that the company responds, and is sensitive to the needs of the participants, which suggests an approach that is inherently more democratic. Morrow's suggestion of a 'listening' approach is the predominant philosophical base of the company. Morrow makes a key statement about the value of this approach in pedagogy which could well be applied to the rehearsal processes *Tracks* employ. That is, a feminised practice seeks to 'expose rather than impose values' (Morrow 2007, p. 199). McMicken and Newth structured the process of *Mr Big*, to include the youth leaders as co-producers of the choreography. The resulting performance was marked by an energy and vigour particular to the youth dancers that would have been difficult to achieve without their input.

McMicken and Newth both cite the complex Aboriginal kinship naming system as an important influence on how they manage *Tracks*. The skin-naming system is a complex law network that prescribes social interaction between different Aboriginal people within a clan.²² As the system is innately part of Aboriginal culture, non-indigenous people are often given skin names when they spend a period of time with Aboriginal people. Both McMicken and Newth have received skin names from a Lajamanu family;²³ Newth is Jampijimpa, McMicken is Japaljari, which relates them as cousins, a relationship McMicken describes as '(Tim) manages my Dreamings and I manage his'. They see this relationship as one in which they can equally manage each other's business, a concept they have implemented in the management of *Tracks*. If one of them is responsible for directing a project, the other is supporting and assisting with advice from a less prominent position.

Seeding Ideas and People

The first week I was at *Tracks* I asked McMicken and Newth to provide me with a listing in chronological order of the company's works. I then met with each Artistic Director separately and mapped out significant milestones and seminal works in the company's history. It was

²² The skin naming system is common to all Aboriginal groups although the systems differ from group to group.

²³ Desmond Jampijimpa Patrick gave McMicken his skin-name in 1992.

apparent from these conversations, in which both directors verbally jumped from work to work in their recounts of past performances, that there were multitudes of intersecting connections sourced from past works that extended into their current projects. They both used the term ‘seeded’ to describe beginnings of projects that may have started years before an idea was conceived. The beginnings of projects went back a surprisingly long way, sometimes years before the project was actually realised.

Similarly ‘seeded’ were people, whose specialized skills in such areas as choreography, sound design, or multi-media design were sought after by the company. Nick Power was an example of a ‘seeded’ relationship. Another dance company had recommended him to *Tracks* and his first job with *Tracks* was a series of workshops in Lajamanu. He worked well under the particular circumstances of Lajamanu and was later employed for *Mr Big*. Since then he has continued to work on specific projects for *Tracks*. His situation is just one of many similar long term relationships with artists from different parts of Australia as well as Darwin. The relationships are actively managed by the Artistic Directors, and although the initial connections may seem tenuous and slight, the relationships often develop into strong partnerships over multiple works. The map I drew with Newth and McMicken eventually formed a tangled mass of lines intersecting each other showing a complex linking of people and projects.

I felt I needed to get out of the office. As I walked past David and Tim’s office I stuck my head in and said ‘I’m going to head out for a while. I just need to get out, have a walk around and look at a few things.’ David said ‘Oh, I call that professional development. Walk around a bit, talk to people, have a look around. I use to write it on the message board outside our old office. ‘Gone out for some professional development.’

Longevity

The idea that we are the choreographers and they are the dancers simply does not mean anything to them.

(McMicken, 2006)

The above quote came from David McMicken during a meeting between McMicken, Newth and Quinn as they were planning a proposed new cross-cultural work.²⁴ I enjoy the quote as it signifies to me the chasm between what I was expecting to observe in my fieldwork and the reality of what I did see. In effect, the whole time I was in Darwin I saw a lot of dance being

²⁴ From my notes of a creative development meeting between McMicken, Newth and Quinn at Tracks’ studio, Darwin.

learnt, taught and rehearsed and I saw very little dance being devised through choreographic techniques such as improvisation and task-based movement explorations that might be considered usual practices of movement generation in my own and other choreographers practices. This type of devising is used in Tracks' work, although not to the extent that it may be used with professional dancers. The age of the youth meant that much of the choreography for 'Mr Big' was devised by a smaller, more experienced cohort and then taught to the majority of the cast.

My interest in relational art practices,²⁵ with regards to *Tracks*, is their conviction that the defining feature of their work lies in their relationships with others. As *Tracks*, (generally) use non-professional dancers in their productions, their work has to move beyond the display of technique. While the youth group and the Grey Panthers both use Western dance techniques in their work with *Tracks*, the other community groups usually perform their own cultural dances framed within a *Tracks* performance. Within this relationship the individuals that make up the community groups have a strong degree of agency and are in the position where they are able to disengage from a project at any stage. To avoid this happening the dynamics of *Tracks*' relational practice must centre on negotiation – watching, listening, translating, instructing. There is a constant stream of dialogue between participant/performer and choreographer/director. It is a physical and verbal form of communication that is centred on the immediate and the real presence of bodies in space, bodies that are in the process of breathing, sweating, copying, exploring, moving and learning.

In the visual art world, Dialogical art is used to describe a type of artwork that is characterised by relationships with others in its production. This type of art, also termed participatory, littoral, and relational (Bishop 2006; Bourriaud 2006; Kester 2004), serves to disrupt the traditional notion of the individual artist as the sole producer of art works.²⁶ Dialogical art emerged in the 1960s as a reaction against the power of the art institution and a counter action to the production of art objects. The focus shifted from the art object to those artworks that used ephemerality and transience as primary forms. For French art critic, Nicolas Bourriaud, relational art practice takes as 'its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and *private* symbolic space' (Bourriaud, 2002. p14). Although there are many diverse branches of

²⁵ My preferred terminology of this type of work as it highlights the concept of relations.

²⁶ Kester describes art projects that "share a concern with the creative facilitation of dialogue and exchange. While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue amongst viewers, this typically occurs in response to a finished object. In these projects, on the other hand, conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself. It is reframed as an active generative process that can help us speak and imagine beyond the limits of fixed identities, official discourse, and the perceived inevitability of partisan political conflict." (Kester 2005, p. 8) While this statement can be seen a broad brushstroke of description about dialogical practice, it is important to note that the range of art works that may be described as relational are varied and complex.

relational art practices, I am interested in how relational practices may be explored in the process of choreography.

Grant Kester, an expert on dialogical or relational art practices that have at their core a focus on the relations between the artist and others, questions the motivations of the artist working in community based practice. He points to the altruistic objectives of the artist, but doubts if the exchange between the artist and a community can really be meaningful. Kester believes that the personal agenda of the artist has the potential to obstruct meaningful exchange with a community, arguing that the power structures that exist in the relationship between artist and community are often in favour of the artist. He proposes a preferred model of collaboration that is:

less invested in the routinized application of unexamined theoretical tropes, and committed instead to an open and searching investigation of the specific conditions of a practice that operates across the boundaries of phenomenology and social theory, cognitive and somatic knowledge and aesthetics and ethics.

(Kester 2005, p. 4)

The compelling factor of *Tracks*' work that counters many of the concerns expressed by Kester, especially the contentious area of speaking on behalf of others, remains their longevity in the community. The model of community art practice (now widely condemned) where the artist arrives, makes work with the community, and then leaves, is the opposite of what *Tracks* have done. The company's presence in the community is notable. They have been operating for over twenty years and in that time have built up long-standing relationships with many people they engage with, including performers, audience members and others. The threads that connect the company to others are formed by multiple connections over a long period of time. The relationships might not be perfect, some have fallen by the wayside, new ones emerge, yet throughout this period an exchange *is* taking place.

I am sitting at one of two trestle tables in Tracks' studio with the Grey Panthers, assisting with stuffing envelopes for a mail-out for the forthcoming production of Mr Big. I get the sense that this is a well-oiled and regular operation. I chat to the women sitting near me about various topics: getting to the studio, how important the weekly Tracks' time is for one, minding grandchildren, families that are scattered in different parts of Australia, and the seasonal Darwin weather 'I tolerate the dry and I love the wet.'

Disrupting the Sanctimonious Studio and Site-specificity

At *Tracks* I was given the use of a small, spare office which directly opened onto the dance studio and which allowed me to sit and observe the activities of the studio, largely unnoticed. I felt this technique of ‘data’ collection through passive observation was advantageous as my presence was much less prominent and I would not be inhibiting people by pointedly observing their behaviour. My location also meant I had to cross the studio to use the office facilities and to enter and exit the building. This meant if a rehearsal was on, I literally had to walk straight through the space and the dancers. Initially I limited the need to cross the studio when it was being used, by timing my entrances or exits to coincide with breaks or interruptions in the rehearsals. After doing this for a week, I loosened my timing as I felt my pathways through the studio caused very little disruption to the participants - in fact I suspect it was barely noticed. This was in stark contrast to my own rehearsals. If someone walked through the space while I was rehearsing with the dancers we would usually stop what we were doing and pointedly wait until they were gone.

The frequent studio users during the time I was observing the company were The Grey Panthers and the youth cast from *Mr Big*. Both groups were noisy and much laughter accompanied their sessions. Despite this rowdy atmosphere, dance was still being made, learnt and rehearsed. The youth dancers watched each other a great deal and they asked each other information as to how to ‘get’ a movement. They were challenged by much of the choreography and for some of them it was the first time they had been exposed to this type of dance. They listened to corrections, they learnt how to correctly and safely manage contact work and they were introduced to dance and stage terminology. The Grey Panthers appeared just as relaxed, walking in to the studio slowly, talking with other participants as they arranged their belongings. They would begin their studio session sitting on chairs in a circle and discussing social activities and concerns as well as information relevant to any performances they were involved in. The reverential atmosphere, often found in the dance studios I am familiar with was simply not apparent. Both groups used the studio as just another living space and consequently the type of work that was being made within these spaces signalled a different level of engagement with dance than what I was personally experiencing through my own solitary studio practice.

Tracks’ site-specific works are defined by their inventive use of sites for their performances. The majority of the company’s performances are staged outside a traditional performance venue, and instead are scattered throughout Darwin often in iconic or visually spectacular sites. The choice of site is generally made very early in the work’s development and then the work forms around the site. Newth’s interest in the design and balance of the sites is a strong

factor for the site to be chosen. The following selected performances occurred in various locations throughout Darwin:

- *4WD, Sweat, Dust and Romance*, Darwin Botanic Gardens (1997)
- *The Land, The Cross, and The Lotus*, Jingili Water Gardens (1998)
- *Rivers of the Underground*, Boom Shed, Fort Hill Wharf (2001)
- *Ignite*, Roof Top, Casulinga Square Shopping Centre (2002)
- *Struck*, East Point Gun Turret (2008)
- *Endurance*, Marrara Sports Complex (2009)

For *Tracks*, choosing a particular site appears to include a mixture of (i) availability, (ii) consideration of the practical aspects of the site, and (iii) its particular aesthetic qualities. A further element, (and indeed a crucial one), is how the site connects thematically to the work. For example in *Mr Big*, a performance about development, the site chosen, (the disused Shell refinery), was earmarked for future development. Similarly, the work *Struck* (2008), set in the Second World War, used a disused and iconic military site as the stage. The company takes the stance that no site is neutral, and focus on the challenge of drawing out the tensions within a given site. For the work *Ignite* (2002), a youth project, the company chose the newly developed Casulinga Square shopping centre rooftop to present the work. Amongst the new mall-like shopping centre (a contentious development in Darwin at the time) the youth dancers performed a work framed by the question ‘What sets you on fire?’ The tension between the ‘new’ Darwin (signaled by youth and development) and the ‘old’ Darwin (resistant to change) was apparent in the use of the shopping mall as the performance venue. As the energy of the youths took over the site, the underlying message was they will accept the development, but they will use it on their terms. These themes were further developed in *Mr Big*.

Another work, *Bowls Club Wedding*, the site was again used as something more than a performance venue. Here, the site is not only a space where dance takes place; it also becomes an active cultural space where the particularities familiar to bowls clubs in Australia (the elderly participants, cheap food and drinks, the relaxed social atmosphere amongst the club members) are explored. The very ‘dagginess’ and the laconic atmosphere that envelops the perception of the bowls club is exploited within the work by signaling first a knowledge and understanding of those characteristics and then using them as the source material for a work about coercion and loyalty.

Conclusion

Through her work observing the nexus between artists, community groups and site-specific art practices, Kwon describes the interactions between community groups and artists as ‘circumscribed within a more complex network of motivations, expectations and projections amongst all involved’ (Kwon 2004, p. 141).

Under the particular socio-cultural and geographic matrix of Darwin, *Tracks* have grown and developed by responding to the particular conditions of a place. The use of the public in their performances, the untrained dancer, the importance of site-specificity and the sense of community are ever-present in their work. Throughout, negotiation becomes a primary communicative tool that is practiced primarily through the conditions of dance, that is, in the studio through the dialogue of bodies in rehearsal.

I meet the Directors of Tracks in a closed Nightclub that is the setting for a photo shoot for the company's next work Without Sea (Darwin, 2006). Assembled for the photo shoot for the publicity image (intended as a collage of different cultural groups) is a Greek woman, a young Irish man, and a group of South Pacific women and their small children. The South Pacific women have come straight from a performance and are in their full traditional dress. Two of the women are photographed but they are feeling awkward and tense as the professional photographer arranges the shot. The other women watching on are laughing and quipping at the two in the limelight. The kids are getting loose, a bit ratty, climbing over the furniture and the some of the women watching start singing one of their traditional songs. It quietens the atmosphere; we all sit and listen while the photographer finishes the shoot.

In the latter part of this chapter I have identified several areas of *Tracks*' practices that I experienced as significantly different to more conventional modes of Western dance practices. These modes of operation I considered and incorporated alongside my own choreographic practice towards the performance *Beyond Shore*, as a form of performance ethnography. The following chapter explores a framing of site-specificity I considered in *Beyond Shore* in relation to devising the dances.

Chapter Three

Moving to a Discursive, Local Site

Introduction

The previous chapter outlines my fieldwork experience in Darwin and how *Tracks*' work was influenced by the unique socio-cultural and geographic landscape(s) of Darwin. To respond to these findings through performance ethnography, that is, to make a performance that draws on aspects of *Tracks*' practice in order to understand it from an artistic scholarly perspective, I first need to contextualise my notion of site-specificity. To do this, I employ a somewhat telescopic focus in that I begin with space as a practiced place, move on to place as a constructed, enter site through the locus of the discursive site, and finally focus on how the body might engage with a local place.

My research is predominately situated within the framework of place. However, how *space* is considered and used in choreography is an essential element of the time-based form of dance. Therefore frequently in the creative processes towards the performance of *Beyond Shore*, the dancers and I moved between understandings and engagements with notions of place *and* space. Dance theorist, Valerie Briginshaw is interested in how subjectivity is produced through the intersection of bodies and spaces. She believes that focussing on the interface between bodies and spaces is useful in upsetting binary notions such as 'self/other, mind/body, outside/inside, male/female which are hierarchized' (Briginshaw 2001, p. 10). The types of sites I explore in the context of this chapter are discursive and concerned with eroding such boundaries.

Much of the literature on place now recognises that places are not isolated, fixed locations, but are part of a complex web of systems and meanings. The work of geographers such as Tim Cresswell, Doreen Massey, Linda McDowell and Gillian Rose describes how spatial practices impact on the *construction* of place, and these ideas have informed my own site explorations in dance.

It is socio-spatial practices that define places and these practices result in overlapping and intersecting places with multiple and changing boundaries, constituted and maintained by social relations of power and exclusions.

(McDowell 1999, p. 4)

Areas of scholarship on place which are pertinent to this research include descriptive and social constructionist, as well as phenomenological approaches to place (Cresswell 2004). My

interest in place is primarily informed by a phenomenological perspective, that is, a *lived body* experience, with the body acting as the sense-making scribe in place based explorations. Through my rehearsal processes, I have been preoccupied with how bodies might describe and negotiate a local sense of place through dance. In keeping with my focus on the choreographic process, my interest lies in the relationship between myself, the dancers and the notion of the 'local', and how this relationship can be enacted and possibly disrupted not only through dance, but through other corporeal practices such as psychogeography.

I engage with Henri Lefebvre's notion of the 'social space', that is, space constituted by human practices. I am drawn to this concept as the processes within my own dance practice, as I choreograph, seem to fit within this model of spatial practices. I understand choreography does not occur in vacuum between the choreographer and dancer, but is constituted through a network of socio-spatial practices that shift and alter according to power relations. As McDowell notes:

Places are made through power relations which construct the rules which define boundaries. These boundaries are both social and spatial - they define who belongs to a place and who may be excluded, as well as the location or site of the experience.

(McDowell 1999, p. 4)

Throughout my thesis I have operated from the position that gender is an important factor in the power relations which define boundaries. It plays a determining role in how men and women use space.

As *Beyond Shore* was created and performed by women, it was, for me, an inescapable reality that gender would feature significantly in the process towards *Beyond Shore*. As a feminist, my interest in the site of Williamstown was heavily invested in the question of how women are historicized in both the geographic and cultural landscape. For example, the studio explorations often focussed on ideas regarding women's occupation of interior and exterior spaces, including how these spaces may be transgressed through notions of journeying and the construction of memory and place. As my thesis resides in the predominantly phenomenological investigation that place is understood from the body, it follows that the gender of the body becomes important, just as do other traits and characteristics particular to the individual's body. My engagement with gender and place for this document becomes as it was for the performance, pervasive and implicitly present.

The Performance of Space

To theorise *place* I start by first looking at *space*, in particular Lefebvre's notion of 'social space' as it promotes the idea of a space as constructed through the social actions of

humans. Lefebvre is interested in how space is produced by subjects 'constituted through social practices, thus permitting fresh actions to occur' (Lefebvre 1991, p. 73). Lefebvre understands space as *performed*, which moves our understanding of place from a fixed locational marker to one that is constantly changing and therefore capable of producing new understandings. The term *performed*, is used in a similar way to Denzin's 'performed' world. It suggests a state of moving forward, of connecting to the future and is constitutive of change. Two aspects of Lefebvre's investigation of social space are relevant to my investigation into dance and place. First, space is made by people and their activity and production, and second, the role of process or practice in the constitution of space (under the first assumption), becomes particularly important.

Lefebvre's production of space is less concerned with the economic outcomes and forces that shape space, and instead looks at alternative ways of perceiving space as complex, shifting and evolving. He uses the example of a house to illustrate his point. On one level the house is a solid example of what is fixed and rigid: four walls, constructed from a mass of building materials, and designed to last for some time. This way of conceiving the house relies on a fixed and unchanging vision of stability. Lefebvre calls for another reading of the house in which the energy streams such as electricity and water that come in and out of the house are rendered visible. Suddenly a picture emerges of a dynamic and active 'machine' in which the house occupants are responsible for triggering various energy systems that move in and out of the house. For Lefebvre, re-visioning space from a fresh perspective allows for a shift from an economic-led paradigm to one in which process is more highly valued. This could be a useful platform from which to look at modes of process in choreography. It may reposition the importance and centrality of the *process* in dance performance, not just as a means to an end product, but as a 'work' in its own right, capable of offering the participants and others who encounter it along the way an experience that continues to live on through those bodies.

Human geographers, Heidi Nast and Steve Pile explore how bodies become '*corporealised*' through encountering body spatial practices. Again, using the model of the house, for Nast and Pile it becomes:

A place which simultaneously expresses and disciplines the individual, locking them into spatial practices which define and reproduce the body. The house becomes a site of intense significance: capturing and releasing desires, fears and fantasies; defining and making a permeable and shifting inside-outside; linked and crossed by multiple, variant connections to the world; a place where bodies stay, move, reproduce, stop; where memories are housed.

(Nast & Pile 1998, p. 408)

This way of envisaging spatial practices is significant in thinking about how site-specific dance may be created and performed through the body. The understanding of site as *practiced* is aligned with Lefebvre's concept of 'social space', along with others (de Certeau 1984; Thrift 2008) who see place as not fixed or established, but instead 'constituted through reiterative social practices' (Cresswell 2004, p. 39). Nast and Pile's quote reminds us of the emotional implications of practicing in a place. My premise in my site-specific dance was not only to consider the formal elements of a site, such as the dimensions and physical materials that constitute it, but also the cultural and social matrix of the site. In a conversation I had with David McMicken from *Tracks Dance*, he stated, 'No site is neutral'. My interest in site-related dance focuses on the discursive site, one that can consider the dual constructs of the physical and conceptual nature of a site.

Proxemics

The concept of place as practiced, begs the question of how place may first be perceived. The term proxemics, first coined by anthropologist Edward T. Hall in 'The Hidden Dimension' describes proxemics as 'the interrelated observations and theories of man's [sic] use of space as a specialized elaboration of culture' (Hall, E 1969). Proxemics describes the ways that space may be perceived by the body. Space may be perceived as fixed and immobile, semi-fixed or informal, depending on the positioning and movement of objects within the space. Hall delineates certain modes of reception as to how the body perceives space.

The distance receptors – those concerned with examination of distant objects – the eyes, the ears, and the nose.

The immediate receptors – those used to examine the world close up – the world of touch, the sensations we receive from the skin, membrane and muscles.

(Hall, E 1969, p. 41)

My work in dance has also shown me that many choreographers and dancers experience space through a range of sensory perceptions that favour the immediate receptors that Hall describes. These other ways of sensing offer an alternative comprehension of space to one that is primarily visual. Working with the dancers I applied this knowledge to the creative process of *Beyond Shore* as we proceeded to 'map' the site of Williamstown, gathering ideas and movement as we perceived the spatial landscape. As some of our rehearsals took place outdoors in Williamstown and consisted of walks in the landscape, we were able to engage the 'immediate receptors' as important listening devices. The skin, membrane and muscles were crucial to the dancers' understanding of the site of Williamstown, particularly when they were walking around the landscape.

Nast and Pile provide a further consideration of how proxemics may be utilised:

Proxemics teases out the simultaneously fixed and fluid nature of spatial arrangements by articulating the sense that networks shift, alter and stabilize around effects of power, meaning, subjectivity and objectivity. These effects are both bodily and spatial, but are rarely explicit or open or conscious. Instead they are felt; thought through the body rather than the mind. Thus, proxemics describes an ‘unconscious’ relationship between the body and spatialities.

(Nast & Pile 1998, p. 407)

Part of the creative process of the performance *Beyond Shore* included myself and the dancers moving in the site of Williamstown. During this time my intention was to explore the effects on my choreography when I used my own body as a permeable surface and moved in the site of Williamstown. Dance writer Sondra Fraleigh describes a body that can ‘listen’; this is a body in such a heightened state of awareness that it comprehends not only through visual sensing, but also through tactile and aural means (Fraleigh, Susan Horton 1987). Williamstown is a peninsula and therefore the water was a constant presence in our site visits. It was felt and smelt through the moist sea air and heard through the sound of watercrafts and birds that occupy the bay and the shoreline. Notwithstanding that the body is the means through which we engage and understand the world, my approach was to use this knowledge more blatantly, exaggerating my usual sensing of my local area through activities such as walking, psychogeography,²⁷ and recording visually (through photography and video), and aurally (through the digital recording of sounds) from the landscape.

This form of collection of ‘data’ was then recalled in studio explorations as well as the performance. As this approach was (in keeping with the process) emergent and somewhat experimental, *how* this active listening would resonant in the creation of the movement material remained to be discovered in the studio. I felt sure that experiencing the Williamstown landscape so directly through the body, without the walls of the studio as barriers to the ‘immediate receptors’ at the very least would inform the dancers’ performance of *Beyond Shore*.

Encountering the landscape through the listening body with a view to make choreographed movement, meant I became preoccupied with gathering and capturing images, ideas, thoughts and physical sensations I encountered in my search for material. In order to provide a framework to describe these encounters I found Foucault’s notion of the ‘inscribed’ body, a body that is formed and shaped by sociocultural encounters,²⁸ useful and one which served to

²⁷ I define the term psychogeography, the practice of walking with close attention to detail, in relation to my own process in “Archive Seven”.

²⁸ See Archive Four.

give weight to the historical underpinnings that make up the site of Williamstown. Some feminists have found the concept of the body being inscribed as somewhat negative due to the implied passivity of the body in this equation. This was less of a concern for me as the physical nature of the project served to impel the body at the forefront of the investigation and hence the subsequent knowledge gathered by myself and the dancers always situated the body as the primary source of information.

The Discursive Site

Miwon Kwon has written extensively on the way site may be perceived and investigated, primarily through focussing on the genealogy of site-specificity in the visual arts. Kwon describes a discursive site as a site which is not necessarily bound by location, but one in which the site's meaning is formed by the way it is understood by the artist and/or viewer(s). She posits that a intermingling of the site's social conditions and location can produce a site that becomes a 'field of knowledge' (Kwon 2004, p. 26). It is no longer bound by its location, but is one that moves into the realms of the intangible. The physical and geographical features of the site are overtaken by the subject's perception of it, and consequently space is transformed into place as the subject adds meaning to what he or she is encountering.

For dance and performance, the discursive site can embrace the particularities of performance elements such as transience and ephemerality. Moreover, the notion of a site-related work that is not bound by a physical location, sits well with the understanding of place as composed of a network of systems and signifiers that feed in and in turn are fed by the site (Cresswell 2004; Massey 1991; McDowell 1999).

The notion of the discursive site offers expanded parameters that are able to open up conceptual possibilities of site-related work. An example of a performance that used site discursively can be found in the work of performance group, Forced Entertainment. Their work, *Nights in This City* (1995), was in effect a guided bus tour, with the performers and audience driven in a vehicle, which became a moving performance space. This work 'staged' in Sheffield and later Rotterdam, literally expanded the boundaries of the site by venturing outside of a specific location and into city streets.

The IRAA Theatre, a Melbourne based company, evolved their *Interior Sites Project* (2000), which was a series of intimate and intense performances set in a house and performed over a twelve-hour period. The house/set/site became a place imbued with an emotional resonance. It was 'not a performance presented in a house, but rather a theatricalisation of the nature and functions of a house' (Cuocolo & Bosetti 2009, p. 1). In this case, the house becomes hyper-

real, a space/set that requires the audience to reposition their expectations of what they may encounter as they enter it.

My own performance, *Beyond Shore* was performed in Williamstown in *Seaworks*, a disused ship building workshop - a site that was clearly not a conventional theatrical space. Within this site I engaged with the formal structures and characteristics of the *Seaworks* space, although my conceptual explorations into the site resided primarily in the creative process leading towards the performance. These explorations were concerned with a wider engagement with the site of Williamstown and developed from a lengthy series of corporeal investigations of site. The use of the performance venue *Seaworks* I saw as a final embellishment to the site-driven performance process that had come before it.

Beyond Shore, while sourced from a specific geographical location (Williamstown), was often rehearsed at studios located *outside* these geographical boundaries. The majority of the rehearsals occurred in studios at Victoria University.²⁹ The crux of the relationship between the site of Williamstown and the choreography lay in the *separation* between site and the performance, and how this was to be negotiated. As *Beyond Shore* was a choreographed collection of dances, the immediacy of the experience of the site in movement was lost in pursuit of a choreographed language. The distance between site and movement meant there was a period of transition where the site was 'held' in the body until it was explored at a later time in the studio. How to address the perceived distance and lack of immediacy of the site was a provocation that influenced the work. The concept of the discursive site allowed for an embodied and corporal experience of site to be at the forefront of site investigation. Importantly, it opens the possibilities for the *distance* between site, and in this case, the studio, to form an integral part of the work.

A Framework for Site-related Dance

Dramaturg Karen Vedel believes it necessary to expand the assumption that emerged from the 1960s that 'art should be informed by the materiality of its actual location' (Vedel 2007, p. 2) to a somewhat more complex set of procedures that 'relate to the repertory of techniques of the performers, the complexity of site, and to the relationship between the two' (Vedel 2007, p. 2).

Vedel focuses on Bodyweather practitioner Tess De Quincey's performance *Dictionary of Atmospheres* (2005), which took place in Arrernte Country, Central Australia. Vedel, a dramaturg on the project, observed the process and performance of this work, which

²⁹ Later rehearsals were also held at Dancehouse, a dance centre located in the inner city of Melbourne.

highlighted a particular exchange between bodies and their environments. Bodyweather as a movement practice foregrounds how the body senses and perceives its relationship with the environment. As Bodyweather practitioner Frank van de Ven writes: ‘Bodies are not conceived as fixed and separate entities but are - just like the weather – constantly changing through an infinite and complex system of processes occurring in – and outside of these bodies’ (van de Ven 2009, p. 1). Vedel cautions it would be simplistic to reduce the practice to an exploration and response to the immediate environment and she describes De Quincey’s choreographic approach to site as extending ‘itself far beyond the physical features of the actual place to include also institutional, historical, ideological, social and cosmological characteristics’ (Vedel 2007, p. 1).³⁰ The defining feature of De Quincey’s work is the *immediacy* with which it senses and responds to place. The performers based in the community over a number of weeks, pursued a rigorous system of training in the morning and moved into the site in the afternoon. The requirement of a deep corporeal sensing is of the essence in this work, which aims to perform the effects of ‘weather’ on the body. In addition, living within an environment, even for a few weeks, markedly influences the work, as the artists experience and enter the cultural and social mix of a community.

Vedel proposes three pre-requisites for a deeper understanding of dance and site-specificity: consideration of the performers’ technique, the complexity of the site itself, and the relationship between both. Below I analyse the site-related performance *Beyond Shore* according to Vedel’s framework:

- 1) the performer’s technique

In *Beyond Shore*, the three dancers that performed and created the work in conjunction with me were tertiary educated dance practitioners. Their dance backgrounds were not dissimilar to my own; their formal education and subsequent performance experience had exposed them to range of Western performance techniques.³¹ They are competent in performing an articulated style of movement that requires control, flexibility and strength. As *Beyond Shore* was choreographed, the movement was devised, (re)worked and repeated, requiring the dancers to be able to work in this manner.

A less evident quality of this training is the expectation for the dancer to adopt an approach to exploring dance-making that requires them to remain ‘open’ in the process of dance making.

³⁰ I note that Bodyweather work can be an improvised process of movement that may occur around a clear structure or set of directions.

³¹ Noting that our training occurred in different institutions and in different periods of time.

Australian choreographer, Sue Healey, likens this state to *navigation* ‘as it implies a degree of not knowing, of trusting in the process of getting somewhere, but doing so in a somewhat blinded fashion’ (Healey 2005, p. 59). The dancers and myself ‘navigated’ through much of the creative process of *Beyond Shore*. In keeping with the emergent nature of the research there were many times in rehearsals or in our site explorations where we experimented with different techniques, with no knowledge as to what might occur. The dancers accepted these sometimes unclear and uncertain terms.

2) The complexity of the site

Williamstown, situated approximately twenty kilometres from the city of Melbourne, is a quiet, middle-class suburb filled predominately with period weatherboard cottages and houses. It is a tourist precinct, a place where people come to visit to enjoy the atmosphere. Like other Australian ports such as Fremantle in Western Australia, it is purported to have ‘character’. Historically, Williamstown was an important colonial port. In the 1850s, Gem Pier in Williamstown was the place in Victoria where people arrived, unloaded from ships and set off to the goldfields. For over fifty years, while the port was being developed in Melbourne the pace of development in Williamstown was remarkable. In this time many of the significant buildings and piers that are still standing today were built, and roads, sanitation and gardens were developed. Remnants of historical monuments and icons of its past, often labelled with plaques to identify them and explain their historical significance, are situated within the radius of the town.

The outward stability of Williamstown belies the reputation it once had as a wild and unruly place. For me, the tension within the site of Williamstown lay in how this unruliness is submerged, and how traces of this past are found within the site of Williamstown and in turn may be (re)enacted in the site.

3) The relationship between the performers’ technique and site.

In this framework I consider the performers’ technique to not only describe physical qualities of the dancers, but also their approach to the site and therefore Healey’s term ‘navigating’ is relevant. In *Beyond Shore* I was the sole resident of Williamstown, the only local, and hence my intimate knowledge of the site of Williamstown informed my work. Similarly the dancers’ understanding of the site of Williamstown as visitors and thus in a transitory relationship with

the site, informed their work. Part Two of the thesis provides a listing of the archives,³² where I explore the notion of the visitor in more detail.

Local

Geographer, Doreen Massey, in her essay 'A Global Sense of Place' (Massey, 1993) explores how expanded spatial boundaries challenge a local sense of place. She describes her local area, (Kilburn in the UK), as being a place where 'localities are produced by the intersection of global and local processes – social relations that operate at a range of social scales' (McDowell 1999, p. 64). Massey highlights the diversity of cultures within her local area and questions whether places can exist as static locations. For her, there is a possibility of connection with a place that resides beyond a fixed or historical knowledge of place. Massey asks 'is it not possible for a sense of place to be progressive; not self enclosing and defensive, but outward looking?' (Massey 1991, p. 64).

An image of Williamstown photographed at night for research material for *Beyond Shore* shows a proliferation of takeaway outlets found in many developed countries, and challenges the common perception of Williamstown as a quaint seaside village, largely untouched by global forces. Williamstown can no longer be considered as homogeneous as it was even twenty years ago. I have described some ways in which the dancers approached the site of Williamstown using the body as sensing. Yet the site visits meant that the dancers also had daily business in the site, that is, they were involved in economic transactions to arrive or leave Williamstown, and to eat or shop in Williamstown. Through these transactions they formed opinions of different parts of Williamstown and the people they interacted with. Again, how much of this absorbed into the dance is unknown, although I would be reticent to say it had no impact on the creative process or even the performance of *Beyond Shore*.

In her book *The Lure of the Local: Senses of Place in a Multicentred Society* art critic and writer, Lucy Lippard focuses on what might constitute a local sense of place. Her simple premise, 'space combined with memory defines place' (Lippard 1997, p. 9), is a comprehension of place that is mediated through the body. Her kinaesthetic response to place, is a lively engagement with sensory perception, as she moves through landscape inhabited by people. She carries the impact of place in her body as she notes:

If one has been raised in a place, its textures and sensations, its smells and sounds are recalled as they felt to a child's, adolescent's, adult's body. Even if one's history

³² I am aware the term archive has been discussed in contemporary art theory through the work of artists such as Sophie Calle who uses forms of documentation and collection in her practice. I define the term archive in relation to my own process in Part Two of the thesis "Archive Listings".

there is short, a place can still be felt as an extension of the body, especially the walking body, passing through and becoming part of the landscape.

(Lippard 1997, p. 34)

For Lippard, to have a sense of the local rests on familiarity of location. She discusses the premise of local knowledge only being available to those that inhabit an area. Drawing on the work of Kent Ryden on regional folklore, she describes a type of topophilia, a knowledge that is available only to locals, and inaccessible to visitors. This topophilia includes:

Local and material lore including names for flora, fauna and topography;

Handed down history, much of it intimate, some of it apocryphal;

Group identity and place-based individual identity;

The emotions or affective bonds attached to place.

(Lippard 1997, p. 34)

Throughout the course of my research my own topophilia intensified and expanded. I had monthly contact through a book club with twelve women, all of whom live in Williamstown. From this informal gathering I discovered information through the women's reflections and stories that expanded my understanding of how Williamstown is perceived and experienced by others. Over the ten years the group has been running, I have had discussions about local places with the women, some who were born and raised in Williamstown, and recall childhood events with details that render their knowledge of Williamstown as deeply embedded in their selves. Often throw-away comments by these women provide as much insight as an elaborate narrative would, as they signal a type of knowledge that can only be gleaned from the familiarity that comes from growing up in an area.

I am aware, as a Williamstown resident, I am collecting my own knowledge particular to the area, some of which is able to be recounted and described, and some which resides in my body as felt experiences. These experiences are infused in my corporeality and appear at different times to inform my experience of place. My sense of 'the local' has built up over the fifteen years I have lived in Williamstown. My relatively mobile life before living in this area initially made me uneasy about identifying with a bound and fixed identity, that is, of being a Williamstown local. However, an exploration of the local draws out the close, personal, and familiar relationships and accounts for the significant experience of attachment. For me, describing a sense of local in Williamstown is detailing the minutiae, the blandness, the *suburbaness* of the area, along with describing the wonder of the geographical landmarks such as the shoreline, the skies and the water. I have maintained a scepticism in my

relationship with Williamstown, possibly due to my ‘outsider’ status³³ and I feel more comfortable in positioning myself as a ‘local’ who identifies with Massey’s sense of place – one that accounts for place as an evolving and dynamic entity.

Memory and Place

The process I engage with as I map ‘place’ in my local environment addresses geography, architecture, navigational points that relate to the skies, imagination, constructed worlds and memory. My interest also lies with those histories that are submerged, silenced, or forgotten. This knowledge is not readily accessed through records or texts of Williamstown, yet traces of these histories are still present in the external landscape. They can be the carved cross on a bluestone wall made by a prisoner, a scratched piece of writing on the pavement - ‘Scott loves Sally’³⁴ - or a desolate piece of land, waist high in grasses, seemingly forgotten.

Anthropologist Barbra Bender states that landscapes ‘contain the traces of past activities, and people select the stories they tell, the memories and histories they evoke, the interpretive narratives that they weave, to further their activities in the present-future’ (Bender 2001, p. 4). Recently, with the advent of a global society through travel and technology, as well as the reality of diaspora communities, links between place and people have become increasingly tenuous. Once location determined who you were, how well you lived, and what prospects you might expect from life. Increasingly these pathways that delineate self and place have become more complex and not so easily navigated. Bender suggests within displaced communities, where people have been forced to move away from their homelands, that the imagination or memories associated with the former location of that community may be more powerful than those that occur within a stable community (Bender 2001). This suggests a close association between place, memory and desire that Lippard has also explored in her notion of the local.

While it is common to connect place with objects, the body also connects viscerally and kinesthetically with place. These sensory traces of places are deeply embedded in the body and can be recalled unexpectedly through a trigger moment that allows the body to unlock memories. These embodied traces of the past, once released, can unleash a powerful flood of memories to surface. The body and the way it makes sense of the world is as Bender suggests, fluid and changeable. In the creative development of *Beyond Shore* our focus on

33 Williamstown residents often joke that to be a local you have to have been born in Williamstown.

34 See Appendix 3: Dancers’ voices.

sensing site through our bodies allowed for a variety of memories, narratives and ways of being in the world that are diverse and individual.

Conclusion

This chapter introduces an approach to site-related dance-making that understands that spatial practices produce places. My investigations into place privilege the body as the sense-making scribe as its sensing abilities connects viscerally with place. I indicate that the dancers, through their highly developed skills of the ‘listening body’, were able to collect material relevant to their interest in site and develop it later in rehearsals or performance.

In the following archive listings, I explain in greater detail the application of these ideas through a series of processes that explored mapping, borders and location in connection with the site of Williamstown. These processes connected initially with a *phenomenological* exploration of site that occurred through the site excursions, before moving to the studio where my (and the dancers’) engagement of site relied on the recall of memory to access sites embedded in the body.

Part Two

Archive Listings

Overview

In the second part of the thesis I trace the development of the performance project through discussion of the ‘archives’, ten discrete dances that together made the performance *Beyond Shore*. In the creative process of *Beyond Shore*, the site of Williamstown was envisaged as a discursive field of operation (Kwon 2004), a location connected through a network of relations with other sites. The fluidity inherent within this concept of site was fundamental to devising the archives, as it moved beyond the notion of a fixed, located site and allowed the exploration of place to be conducted through the body. There were many times in the process when our explorations also encountered objects and architecture that formed the physical characteristics of this site. In the performance, the site of *Seaworks* became a physical entity with which we engaged and the spatiality, the immediateness of this site (within the larger site of Williamstown), was a significant element that influenced the performance of *Beyond Shore*. This dual reckoning of site recognises the body’s capacity to traverse through fields of kinaesthetic and conceptual understandings of place.

Dance writer Randy Martin states, ‘dance lies at the point at which reflection and embodiment meet, at which doing and anticipation are intertwined’ (Martin 1998, p. 1). In my site-specific research this manifested in the dialectic tension between the reflection and contemplation of site, contrasted with the action of devising movement in the studio and site. The immediate ‘becoming’ of the dance, in some instances, overshadowed and challenged the reflective process that came before.

To further articulate this tension I liken my process to one that initially privileged a method grounded in phenomenology, where the body is the locus of exploration and understanding. Linking the corporeality of this experience to my interest in post-structural accounts of the body, led to a direct unfolding of the experience of materializing a duality through the body. How these two methodological approaches existed in the project was non-linear; they circled, repeated, and embedded themselves in the dance as the project developed. Locating these modes of understanding within a site such as Williamstown with its (seemingly) fixed geographical, social and cultural markers, was a deliberate challenge to what I thought were limitations in my own established readings of this place.

An important influence on the direction of the work was the impact of the dancers during the unusually extended development period of the work. The dancers' presence in the site and their individual perspectives opened a number of avenues from which further explorations extended.³⁵ Their shifting agency – how they approached the work, how they embodied it, how they made sense of it - was central to its development.

Thematically, I was interested in unpacking the weight and presence of the history that pervades Williamstown – a mixture of folklore, nostalgia, historical objects and structures, and geographical sites. I approached this process determined to forefront the body in the equation. As the work was made by women and we were directly engaged with the landscape(s) of Williamstown, the question of how women traverse site is implicit in many of the processes described in the archives. My fieldwork experience in Darwin had reminded me of the powerful force of dislocation, and how the body is privileged when one is met with the experience of journeying. My focus on the site of Williamstown as a place of arrivals and departures, and also dislocation and journeying, inhabits the archives.

The Dance as an Archive

The word 'archive' is defined as a collection of records and documents of an institution, family, etc.³⁶ and is not something normally associated with dance except in the use of items used in performance such as programs.³⁷

My use of the term 'archive' requires some explanation. Within this project the term encompasses each separate dance as a unit. For example, dance or archive number five, which I call *Claw Tree Park*, I remember as a dance that was performed as part of *Beyond Shore*. In addition to this memory, I consider information that surrounds its development including: particular landscapes of Williamstown, several key rehearsals, particular movements of the dancer(s), and conversations (amongst other things) that led to its creation. While the ephemeral form of the dance no longer exists, the physical objects that were important to devising the dance remain, such as texts, video images and photographs, as does the recording of the performance. While I make no claim to be unique in the way that I use images, texts and other objects as influences on my choreography, I was determined in this project to acknowledge the scale and breadth of these influences. In contrast to how I have previously

³⁵ See Appendix Three "Dancers' Voices" for an example of the different responses the dancers recorded as they experienced the Williamstown landscape.

³⁶ Collins Dictionary (Australian Edition).

³⁷ A more traditional dance archive might include video footage of performances and programs.

choreographed, which has not involved such deliberate gathering of physical elements, in this project I made it a habit to actively list the tangible elements pertinent to each archive. These materials varied in degrees of relative importance to the devising of each dance, and in some cases their influence extends and crosses into other archives. For ease of categorisation I have included materials within the archive they informed the most.

Thus the ten dances that made up *Beyond Shore* I termed archives as a way of encompassing the scale, breadth and duration of the dances, that is they extend backward in time to when the dance was first conceived.

In the second part of this document, I list the archives separately and chronologically as they appeared in the performance. The ordering of the archives in performance rested largely on dynamics, timing, ease of the transitions from one dance to the next, and was based on my own aesthetic choices. It is likely that if another choreographer were presented with the same ten dances they would order them differently. Several decisions regarding the ordering of the dances were made in the final rehearsals. For example, in Archive Ten, Kororoit Creek Road, I moved this dance to its final position at the end of the performance in the third last rehearsal. Other decisions were made earlier, for example, the first archive, Blister, was always conceived as the beginning of the performance. In this written thesis the order matches that shown on the accompanying DVD.

In each description of the Archive listing that follows I have included:

- The title of the archive;
- A physical description of the archive's contents (for example: photographs, recordings, text, etc.);
- How long the archive was in development;
- A brief description of the way the dance appeared in the performance (confined to physical description of performers and their basic actions);
- How the archive unfolded during the creative process;
- Finally, an analysis of significant outcomes or findings during the development of the archive.

Archive One - Blister

Geographical Location:

The Lava Blister near Shelley Beach, Williamstown

At the rear of the shore platform is a raised, kidney-shaped basalt structure that has been interpreted as a lava blister. Lava blisters develop when fluid lava crosses a shallow body of standing water or swamp ground, causing the water to boil, and the confined steam pressure is sufficient to raise the surface of the lava into a closed domal form.

The structure at Williamstown is a shallow elliptical open bowl, measuring 4.8 m by 3.4 m with a rim 30 to 40 cm deep. If it is a true lava blister, the upper part of the dome has been removed by weathering and erosion.

While there are many types of raised and uneven surfaces on lava flows, true lava blisters are unusual in the volcanic rocks of Victoria. As the structure is now seldom over washed by waves, the truncation of the upper surface of the blister could be due to wave action at slightly higher sea level.

Department of Primary Industries³⁸

Physical Contents

A selection of photographs of the Lava Blister taken by visual artists, Nicola McGaan and James Smeaton.

A selection of photographs and video footage of Shelley Beach taken by myself.

Three pages of notes from my local walks.³⁹

Video Footage of Amelia McQueen in rehearsal

Order of Construction

I began work sporadically on this archive, approximately eighteen months before the performance, through improvisation in the studio, although its final form was only finished a month before the performance.

³⁸www.dpi.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/portreg.nsf/pages/werribee_gg_significance_m1

³⁹ In Archive Seven, I discuss how I incorporated psychogeography into my creative process.

In Performance

The work begins with the audience entering the performance venue Seaworks, guided by ushers to a corner of the space. The audience remain standing and form a half circle around a solitary dancer seated on a stool near an industrial-sized, red fire extinguisher. The dancer, dressed in red with her blonde hair covering her eyes, begins with small foot movements, shuffling and twitching, before expanding her movement to shift away from the stool and closer to the corner. Her hesitant and stuttered movement passages progress fitfully, until she finishes the dance by leaning towards the extinguisher as the low light on her is suddenly turned off. She can be dimly seen and heard as she runs through the audience and exits the space.

Development of the *Blister* Archive – Meeting the Landscape

As a long-term resident of Williamstown I was aware of the unique landform locals termed ‘The Blister’ for many years. On having it first drawn to my attention while walking with a friend, (she casually announced ‘That’s The Blister’), I remained confused about its formation for some years. I thought that it was fashioned through human intervention in the early 20th century, either through blasting or arranging the stones in a circle, to act as a small bathing pool for women and children. When I discovered much later its form was a result of natural causes, the residue of the (imagined) image of the bathing pool still entered my thoughts as I occasionally passed the Blister on my walks.

Choosing to centre a dance work on a geographical formation was designed to explicitly address the difficulty in ‘dancing’ geography. Although I spend some time in chapter three describing a discursive site, one that is not restricted by geographic or architectural forms, dancing the Blister was a direct challenge to address a fixed form structure. How was I to proceed with exploring through movement, such a rigid structure that seemed so far removed from a lived body?

Liminality

The Blister was the one geographical formation in Williamstown that was a concrete manifestation of a rupture from inside the earth’s surface to the outside. This rupture had formed on the shoreline, a space seen by geographers as a liminal or threshold space. I became interested in the concept of liminality through Grosz’ exploration of the body as a Möbius strip turned ‘inside out and outside in’ (Grosz 1998, p. 42), and how this refiguring impacts on the way bodies ‘reinscribe and project themselves onto their sociocultural environment’ (Grosz 1998, p. 42). A liminal or threshold state is one in which boundaries

dissolve and ambiguity is present. Blurring the boundaries between inside and outside, both in the body and in the landscape, allows other ways of experiencing place. A liminal place is one imbued with possibilities, potentially an interesting area for a choreographic investigation.

Not only was the Blister significant as a geographical marker of liminality, but the notion of liminality extended to the dancers' relationship to the site of Williamstown. How the dancers experienced the site of Williamstown - as visitors - and hence in a transient relationship with the site, was quite different from my own residential experience. I discuss the implications of this sense of liminality in more detail in Archive Three, *Shoreline*, yet this approach to site I considered fundamental to how many of the archives were devised.

Moment One – Molten Trio

As a starting point for *Blister*, I began in the studio constructing an image that had emerged through some of my own solo studio explorations. This image was a rather a crude starting point, connected to the idea of molten larva moving under the surface of the earth and an attempt to replicate physically the pre-state of the blister form. It involved all three dancers, working as a trio, maintaining contact with each other and staying low to the floor as they moved from one side of the room to another. I expected the perfunctory start of the movement exploration to thicken and deepen through increased awareness of the physical detail in the phrase.

Trio. All dancers maintain constant contact throughout this piece.

Excavating a shape until every possible connection with the shape is explored. The movement is mined for its energy, its shape, its timing, how it exists with others; how it might be seen collectively as one shape, and how it exists individually within the trio. An energy of falling.

A shape that is angled.

An off balance crouch.

A head drop.

An internal position.

Balanced and symmetrical.

Blister will in some way reference the word itself; festering and slightly angry. It will look quite tight, yet remain fluid. It will move from the back of the space to the front on one trajectory.

September 2007. Rehearsal Notes

Although the image I had for this archive was very compelling, my memory of the initial rehearsals spent working on the image was awkward and stifled. It was not as straightforward

to come at the archive from such a reductive angle. From this experience, I decided to address the notion of liminality starting from the body itself.

Moment Two – Liminality through the Body

This solo for Amelia McQueen began as we explored the idea of being ‘caught’ in a liminal state, using a key phrase ‘find the tension in the act of waiting’. This was another way of envisaging the pre-state of the blister without being as literal as the previous Trio exploration. My own images and thoughts of the body in a liminal state drew on adolescence, travel and time-based states of dusk and dawn, amongst other fragments of ideas that moved in and out of my consciousness while devising movement for *Blister*.

Here the *timing* of the movements was critical to achieving the sense of waiting and this became more important than the movements themselves. Bit by bit we built small movements using the feet and hands, while Amelia remained seated - a physical restriction decided as a further addition to experience a caught state. In this way, by emphasizing the timing in the choreography we were able to work towards creating a sense of tension and anticipation, envisaging the state of the blister before its rupture.

Moving the work into *Seaworks* was the final phase of this work. Near a corner of the space was a collection of red pipes that formed an industrial sized fire extinguisher, an appropriate mechanism in relation to how I saw *Blister* with its focus on simmering heat. Amelia was situated near the pipes and a spatial relationship formed as she adjusted her movement and literally worked off the extinguisher. We spent some time working through the nuances of the space – the section of wall we were using was covered with hessian, creating an unstable area to work on, the concrete floor sloped up towards the wall which caused the stool to wobble and the large spatial capacity of the venue reduced the presence of Amelia, more so than I envisaged. Amelia and I spent some time reworking this piece to address these spatial issues.

Situating the Relationship between Choreographer and Dancers

The relationship between myself and the three dancers involved in the project, Amelia McQueen, Sally Grage-Moore and Cobie Orger was an important aspect of the research process. The dancers, through their long-term connection with the project, effectively were co-producers of the work as they gathered, worked through and eventually performed the choreography of *Beyond Shore*.

Prior to *Beyond Shore*, all three women had worked with me on several dance projects since 2002.⁴⁰ I began the rehearsal period for this project aware that the relationships I had built over time with the dancers would contribute significantly to the project, due to our past experience and knowledge of each others methods of communication and abilities. Six years had passed since our first project together, and the professional and personal circumstances of each of us had changed, which in turn impacted on our working relationships. The dancers' own practices had deepened through their solo work and work with others, evident through their increased expertise as dance makers and performers. Although I am between seven to fourteen years older than the dancers, and was the instigator and driver of our past projects, I was no longer the expert in our working relationship(s).

Dance academic Sally Gardner cautions against assuming the choreographer/dancer relationship in modern dance operates in the same way as it may in ballet, noting that these forms have evolved from different philosophical concerns:

Appreciating distinctive, historical modern dance values, therefore, requires the development of concepts that recognise the intimate, intercorporeal and personalised social configurations of modern dance transmission and choreographic practices.

(Gardner 2005, p. 9)

Gardner likens the type of relationship found in modern dance to that of the medieval artisan – one that is specialised and intimate and hence often driven by dancers accessing the choreographer's specialised bodily practices. Gardner observes that the choreographer/dancer relationship in modern dance is often intimate, and extends to social connections, both of which were present between the dancers and myself in *Beyond Shore*.⁴¹ I would surmise that the dancers interest in working with me is less about accessing a specialised bodily practice and stems more from my interest in the interface between visual art and dance and how this is rendered through the creative process.

40 The following works were devised by me and performed by Grage-Moore, McQueen and Orger :

Borderland (2002) Dancehouse

A Calculus Affair (2003) North Melbourne Town Hall

Corpus Delecti (2004) *Dance Works*

Vast Park (2005) *Theatreworks* (Orger, Grage-Moore)

41 In my own experience with the dancers on this project, both Amelia and Cobie have house sat for me over extended periods, we have shared meals and socialised together.

I now turn to a passage from a series of letters written in the 1960s, between Brazilian visual artists Lygia Clark (1920 – 1988) and Helio Oiticica (1937-1980). Both artists were at the forefront of exploring interactivity and participation with audience in their respective practices. The following excerpt from Oiticica describes what he sees as vital in Clark's practice - the potential exchange between participant and artwork:

The idea of creating such relations goes beyond that of a facile participation, such as the manipulation of objects: there is the search for what could be described as a biological ritual, where the interpersonal relations are enriched and establish a communication of growth at an open level. I say open level, because it does not relate to an object based communication, of subject – object, but to an interpersonal practice that leads towards a truly open communication: a me-you relation, rapid, brief as the actual act; no corrupted benefit, of interest, should be expected – observations such as 'this is nothing' or 'what is it about?', etc., should be expected...

(Oiticica & Clark 2006, p. 115)

Although Oiticica is using these words to articulate a relationship between artist and audience, it is nevertheless a useful way of envisioning the type of relationship between dancer and choreographer that can exist in a modern dance process. Although in *Beyond Shore* time limitations⁴² caused me to work in a particular way, (where half the archives were developed by my solo explorations in the studio), this did not negate the sense of exploration that the dancers employed as they learnt the *set* movement for the first time. Within this pre-determined movement, they were still able to find difference and/or embellish the phrase with their own personal movement language and histories. The possibilities expanded when the dancers worked on task-based exercises, designed to generate movement. There was a sense of genuine inquiry that afforded a way into the unknown, a commitment to exploration with no expectation of an outcome.

The key concerns that participatory arts writer Claire Bishop believes motivates a participatory art project – that of activation, authorship and community, were explored by the dancers in *Beyond Shore* in the creative process. While we did not extend these practices to the performance of *Beyond Shore*, I found it useful as a model of research focus that allowed for a deep analysis as to how dance and choreography can move beyond the confines of the studio. In effect, this situated the dancers as co-producers of the work through the entire project, not only in the final performance.

⁴² Although the duration of this project was unusually long, there remained a sense of time pressure due to the part-time nature of the rehearsals and the collective time limitations of the dancers and myself.

Although Oiticica's description of the exchange between artist and audience (participant) is almost idealistic in its depiction of the *potential* of exchange, ('a truly open communication') he is aware of the fractiousness that can also exist in this level of exchange ('what is it about?'). In a modern dance rehearsal pinning down an exploration to *what it is about* in some way negates the sense of exploration that may be found in the ease and flow of an improvisational sequence. The question 'what might it reveal?' is perhaps more suited to a modern dance rehearsal.

Architectural theorist Helen Stratford is interested in what she terms 'micro-strategies of resistance' (Stratford, 2007 p 127) – small but definite tactics that occur when the intersections of space and power occur. She draws on Foucault's theory of power where 'individuals should not be seen as simply as recipients of power, but as the 'place' where power is enacted and where it is resisted' (Mills 2003, p. 35). Stratford focuses on the potential for these strategies to exist in architectural projects where the planning and creation of spaces around human activity can be both restricting and/or liberating but never neutral.

Micro-strategies of resistance are particular confrontations with and resistances to the local impositions of dominating power. These incremental moves are not assembled from direct confrontations but rather operate as discrete traces within a plurality of resistance.

(Stratford 2007, p. 171)

Stratford is interested in how these micro-strategies may be deployed not just within architectural projects, but also within other feminist identified projects. She discusses the implications of a model of a feminist project that disrupts the traditional monumental patriarchal framework by offering a series of smaller and more discursive structures. Within these linked models there is potential for 'fragmented and diffused' dispersions of power (Stratford 2007, p. 132).

My role as a choreographer and director in *Beyond Shore* positioned me as the leader of the group. Within the creative process of this work, I was in the position of driving the project and making the majority of the creative decisions. Some of the tasks within this project, notably the visits to the site of Williamstown, assisted in disrupting my domination of the project by situating the dancers more powerfully as contributors to the work. My personal relationship with the dancers, built up over a number of years, offered a particular set of circumstances that promoted trust, familiarity and respect, and I believe diffused the hierarchical power structure of the traditional choreographer /dancer relationship. Although I don't suggest we radically interrogated this model, how the dancers contributed to the work, devising movement material through the dialogical tasks we employed, allowed for a multiplicity of power deployment within our relations.

It is not enough to say the dancers were deeply involved in this project from the beginning. The outcome of the work would have been different in the *process*, and following that in *performance* if other dancers were involved. In effect the dancers' experience in the site of Williamstown mirrored the very elements I was actively thinking about: how women negotiate particular landscapes. Their interpretation and meeting of the Williamstown landscape were significant to the project as they were in effect in a position to embody the landscape through a contemporary perspective.

In the end major decisions about how the work was arranged spatially, and the design and structure were made by me. However the dancers remained powerfully vibrant within this framework by the simple fact that they were responsible for bringing the movement into being. In performance, the way they performed the set choreography, with slight shifts and subtle nuances unique to every performance, wholly informed the way the work was received by the audience.

Archive Two - Breakwater Pier

Geographical Location:

Altona Pier, Altona

Breakwater Pier, Williamstown

Gem Pier, Williamstown

Ferguson Street Pier, Williamstown

Contents:

Short Dance Video (Josie Daw on Altona Pier).

Tape recording of sounds collected from Ferguson Street Pier.

Series of photographs of a child on Williamstown Beach Pier.

Amelia McQueen's and Cobie Orger's video diary footage from Altona Pier.

Order of Construction

Breakwater Pier came eighth in the order of construction of the archives. The loose structure of the piece had been in place for a year prior to when it was set. Once set, the movement required a following two months of rehearsal to settle into the final timing and rhythm.

In Performance

Breakwater Pier is defined by a clear diagonal pathway the two dancers traverse as they run from corner to corner of the space. In the beginning of the dance, one of the dancers completes a phrase of movement while the other runs along the diagonal pathway. Over a period of time (this archive lasts for seven minutes and is the longest out of the series of ten), each dancer either accumulates a movement or discards a movement, interspersed with their running until a gradual switch occurs. Eventually the dancer that began running, finishes with a joined phrase of movement, and the dancer who began her joined phrase of movement finishes by running.

Moving towards Breakwater Pier

In the previous archive I introduce my interest in liminal sites and how they may be explored choreographically. In fact several of the archives, including *Breakwater Pier*, used the notion of liminality to explore the discursive site, in this case as constituted by the pier as both an object and a transient site.⁴³ The pier is a place where arrivals and departures occur, an object that encompasses both part of the land and part of the ocean, and a length of space that is occupied in transient ways. The pragmatic framing of the space of the pier, especially the unusually long stretch of Altona Pier⁴⁴ drove a linear exploration of a narrow space. The confined width of the pier was explored first-hand by myself and the dancers through site visits, and later in the studio, where the dimensions of the pier were marked out on the floor. This promoted a certain velocity and channelling of movement exploration, somewhat akin to a wind tunnel.

The following four ‘moments’ were key elements in the process towards the dance, *Breakwater Pier*. I note them as discrete experiences that informed the final appearance of the dance. The construction of each was similar to the way many of the other archives developed, in that the accumulation of the materials and studio work was assembled together, collage-like, to make the dance. In Archive Nine, I explore this process of collage in more detail, although I note now that some of the gathered moments can be either explicit or implicit in the final rendering of the dance.

Pier Photos

The development of this work began with a set of photographs I took of my young daughter sitting on a small pier near Williamstown beach in April 2007. She was dressed in a small tartan skirt, a cardigan and white socks, with her hair plaited. I was interested in capturing an image similar to a photo I had seen of my mother as a child, newly arrived as a Scottish migrant in Perth, Western Australia. I intended to digitally alter the photographs later so they looked aged.

43 The first four archive listings specifically deal with liminality.

44 Altona Pier is an exceptionally long pier, built in 1888 and used primarily for recreational purposes. www.vhd.heritage.vic.gov.au/places/heritage/22235

Dance Film

A further development of this archive came from a short dance video I made of myself on Altona Pier. The two-minute video was shot with a fixed camera which framed the length of the pier. In the opening shot I am leaning over the pier looking down. In one motion I sink down, roll on to my back and over to my side and stand up. I then run the entire length of the pier until I reach the end. As the pier is unusually long and the camera remains fixed, my figure recedes until it blurs and is difficult to see. There is a moment in the film where there is visual confusion as to whether I am running away from the camera or whether I have turned around and am running towards the camera. During the time it takes me to run the length of the pier, a cloud moves over the sun and the light in the film changes.

The Dancers on the Pier

A further addition to this archive occurred when the dancers visited the Altona Pier on the first day of the two-day Williamstown Workshops.⁴⁵ Together we walked the length of the pier and took video footage and photographs. It was a cold and blustery day and we were heavily rugged up in layers of clothing. Although I was in front of our group,⁴⁶ and hence reached the end before they did, my memory of the walk is drawn from video footage that Amelia took of Cobie running back along the pier to escape the rain. Amelia was behind Cobie when filming her, and although my actual position was in front of Cobie, as she ran towards me, my memory of the event is Amelia's recorded vision. This blurred remembering of the event, a confusion of real and recorded movement from a double perspective, contributed to the eventual form of the dance in performance.

During the same visit more video footage was taken by two of the dancers, which focused on the physical structure of the pier and transpired as an important stimulus to the dance. Two particular images: one of swirling water around the base of a pylon, and an extreme close up that seemed to split the frame -- half a pier board and half blurred water -- were a reminder to me of the value of an alternative perspective. While much of my own personal interest in the pier was connected with the emotional significance of a pier as an object, a space where arrivals and departures occurred, a place of trade, a place of flux and a liminal space, the video taken by the dancers was grounded in the pragmatics of the space. It prompted me to look again at the pier as an object in its own right.

⁴⁵ A focus on the workshops is discussed in Archive Three – Shoreline.

⁴⁶ The group consisted of the three dancers Amelia McQueen, Sally Grage-Moore, Cobie Orger, my Co-supervisor, Jude Walton, and myself.

Studio Exploration - Running the Pier

When I made this film I was using a large studio at university for my movement practice and I was able to find a momentum in the space as if I was running along a section of the pier. I discovered the running almost immediately I started to kinaesthetically explore the pier. I would run forward and back - I usually worked with a clear sense of running away from something or running towards something. I incorporated movements interspersed with the running that were to do with a physical sensation of throwing or gathering.

The photographic, film and studio work occurred over a six-month period in late 2006. I often returned to working in the studio alone on the *Breakwater Pier* archive, but I never felt compelled to set the movement to it. I used it as a good warm-up, and a way of quickly changing the energy level if I was feeling emotionally or physically hindered. This archive was clear, the simplicity of the movement, largely running, offered a certain freedom; there were no specific movements to recall and the energy level and dynamics of this dance could be quickly accessed.

Much later, three months prior to the performance, Cobie Orger and I were in the studio with the aim to complete *Breakwater Pier*. We began with a task I developed, which was to run from one side of the studio to the other, and with each change of direction we would accumulate a movement. At each turn we would repeat the previous movement and add a new one to the end until we eventually had fifteen movements joined together with no steps between them. We determined we would spontaneously collect the movement as we ran, rather than gathering it beforehand. This way we had to think instantaneously and remember the accumulation sequence. I used the idea of reaching forward and looking back as a movement directive as we worked.

In this manner, in the space of an hour, the dance for *Breakwater Pier* was built. Cobie gathered her own movements and set them while I worked out a sequence that Sally Grage-Moore later learnt and performed. Over the next few weeks I clarified and refined certain parts of both dancers' phrases and on moving into the performance space we organized the movement spatially to travel diagonally across the performance space.

Spatial Pragmatics of the Pier

The clear spatial arrangement of *Breakwater Pier* drove and shaped the final outcome. The narrow linear confines of this dance were set very early on when I first visited the pier and began to work physically with the pier in mind. Formalising my use of the pier site

consequently altered my approach to it. Suddenly it became important to generate something from that site and in making that choice I altered the way I viewed that site.

Dance academic, Susan Melrose has made some inroads into the difficulty of describing the complex action of dance making by observing how choreographer and dancer Bernadette Iglich and Kate Flatt, use dance, in particular improvisation, to interpret written prose. Melrose spent some time observing the women working together and subsequently she identified a number of schematic frames at work, which she describes as relating

quite tightly and specifically to a pragmatics of space, both fictional and performance space; a similarly double poetics of space; an orientation of some kind within that space to an imagined spectator; an orientation to a notion of 'the event'; and orientation to the notion of disciplinary mastery coupled with an aspiration to innovation, singularity, and signature.

(Melrose 2003, p. 5)

These schematic frames can equally be applied to choreography where the focus is not only upon the *immediacy* of the movement generated, but on recall and reworking of movement. Melrose suggests that these schematic frames leading to dance making can and do operate simultaneously.

If I were to break down into point form my engagement with the archive of *Breakwater Pier* it may look like this:

- * An interest in the liminal.
- * Following this, an interest in a liminal *object*.
- * An imaginary realm of space connected to a personal imagining of my parent's experience of migration.
- * Dancing a space that has a particular shape and form. In this instance, the elongated form of the pier.
- * A compositional working of the pragmatic and poetic understandings of this space.
- * A desire to find the 'held' moment first encountered in the short film (where I couldn't distinguish whether the figure was coming or going) in a live context.
- * A desire to extend the timing of the work to a point where the visual reckoning of it is overtaken by an (other) multi-sensorial encounter.

Reflecting on how this dance was created is to recall the degree and effect of the above elements actualized as a multifarious interface in the studio, the pier and the performance space. The dancers video of the pier interrupted this markedly different aesthetic from my heavily weighted poetic imagings, and offered other possibilities of reading the space of the pier.

Archive Three - Shoreline

Geographical Location

A two-kilometre stretch of shoreline from Point Gellibrand to Williamstown Beach.

Contents

Video footage of Williamstown Beach.

Video footage of flags fluttering

Still photographs of Shelly Beach at dusk.

The dancers' written notes from the Williamstown Workshops.

Cobie Orger's photographs of Williamstown Beach and surrounds.

Creative writing of 'Crouch Voice'

Creative writing of 'Still Voice'

Creative writing of 'Shore Voice'

Order of construction

This archive was fifth in the order of construction and was developed over a period of one year.

Description of Performance

This piece begins with the three dancers in the centre of the space. Standing in a slight diagonal formation, they are evenly spaced. The dancers perform a three-minute passage of the same movement, each with slightly different timing. The movement seems hesitant; alternating between tension and smoothness. When the timing 'works', the effect of the three dancers moving together is somewhat like water moving along the shoreline. Overlapping, with a syncopated rhythm.

Travel Encounters in the Body

My intention with creating *Shoreline* was to examine reflectively my experience as a researcher when I travelled to Darwin. My experience was of a rich sensorial mix of the

cultural and geographic surrounds of Darwin. My body was compelled to make sense of a turbulent and unfamiliar time. This initial stark reminder of the experience of arrival in a new place, and the necessary energy required to forge forward from that point, led me to explore whether it was possible to extend and transfer the physical impact and resonance of this liminal experience from one site to another. A further adjunct to this problem was how this information might manifest in a site with which I was inherently familiar, in my case Williamstown.

The first rehearsals spent on this dance were focused on the notion of travel. Prior to this, I had spent some time reflecting and writing about physical states associated with arriving in a new place. The first rehearsal at Victoria University was held with Amelia and Cobie, both of whom have travelled widely in the past few years, and thus have their own travel experiences from which to draw. Together we discussed our experiences and through this conversation several words and ideas began to emerge which included: disorientation, sensory overload, uncertainty, and returning (or not) to a state of equilibrium. We began with a series of improvisations around these words, in order to find within the movement a spontaneous gesture, a sensibility, or a sensation that connected to a sense of displacement in the travel experience. Several more rehearsals occurred along these lines where the material was gathered through a process of discussion, improvisation and selection of movement, until the beginnings of the dance were devised.

I later worked on my own in the studio to continue to develop the movement content for *Shoreline*. Over the course of a month I developed the movement for this archive, which was approximately four minutes in duration. I later taught it to Cobie with the intention it would be performed as a solo.⁴⁷

The Williamstown Workshops

In April 2008, I held a two-day workshop for the dancers at the Williamstown Surf Lifesaving Club. The club, located on Williamstown Beach, measures approximately 10 x 20 metres, has a wooden floor and walls lined with trophies and pennants from Club competitions. It is a space filled with local memorabilia, imbued with a sense of community; it is a place that has filled an important purpose for over fifty years. Indeed it was the antithesis of the neutral, clean-walled dance studios we had been using to that point. I hoped that our time within the

⁴⁷ Cobie and I presented a version of *Shoreline* in July 2008 for the World Dance Alliance Conference in Brisbane, Australia. We presented *Shoreline* as a performative presentation, where I spoke and 'performed' around Cobie as she danced. This naturally caused the dance to be shaped again as it moved into another venue and we responded to the particular circumstances of the performance.

Williamstown Surf Life Saving Club might contribute, not just to *Shoreline*, but to the other archives as well. I saw the workshops as an opportunity for the dancers to experience first hand, not only visually, but kinaesthetically and imaginatively, some of the sites I had been pre-occupied with personally.

I was interested in how the dancers after experiencing the sites first-hand, might use their embodied knowledge gained from simply being in the environment, in the performance. I was aware that the performance was ‘mine’ in the way that it was driven by me and was composed of my personal interest and feelings about my local area. However, the dancers had been inherently involved in the composition of the work to date (when we began work on *Shoreline*, four other archives were in development) and had already invested much time and commitment to the project. I was interested to see how the dancers might explore the landscape of Williamstown through written and photographic tasks. In the following workshop task, I describe an exercise that connects to *Shoreline*, which took the dancers out of the studio and into the landscape of Williamstown.

One of the tasks I devised was to give the dancers a carry bag that contained a number of selected items (listed below), and drop them off at sites in Williamstown. Over the course of two hours they were to walk back to our base, the Williamstown Surf Lifesaving Club, and on their way observe and record notes of their surroundings.⁴⁸ The following lists detail the drop-off point and the contents of the dancers’ bags. The dancers’ notes from this task are included in the appendix to this thesis, and as I wish to preserve their anonymity, I have identified them only as Dancer One, Two and Three:

Dancer One was dropped at the Lava Blister on the shoreline close to Point Gellibrand in Williamstown. Her bag contained:

- A letter with instructions;
- A piece of creative writing (Crouch Voice);
- A black velvet choker with a purple glass pendant hanging from it and a label inside marked ‘Alexandre/de paris/ Made in Italy’;
- A photograph of the lava blister;
- A digital still camera;
- A notepad and pen;
- A map of Williamstown;

⁴⁸ See appendix 3 for dancers’ responses.

Dancer Two was dropped at Nelson Place, near Gem Pier. Her bag contained:

- A letter with instructions;
- A video camera;
- A pale blue nylon handkerchief embroidered with blue thread
- A notepad and pen;
- A map of Williamstown

Dancer Three was dropped at the Williamstown Botanical Gardens. Her bag contained:

- A letter with instructions;
- A blue glass earring;
- A slightly blurred photograph of a woman with blonde hair wearing large sunglasses;⁴⁹
- A piece of creative writing (Still Voice)
- A notepad and pen;
- A map of Williamstown

A further addition to this task, and a significant factor in its overall design, was the way it began. Believing they were going out together on an outing, (as we had done the previous day), the dancers were instead driven and dropped off by me at their location abruptly, with no spoken instructions. Instead they were handed a carry bag and left alone in the landscape. The bag held their letter of instructions with details of when and where to meet. Although they were in a safe environment, I was hoping that this slight flash of disorientation might serve to contribute another layer to their embodied experience of Williamstown.⁵⁰ When they returned to the Williamstown Surf Lifesaving Club we sat together and discussed what they had experienced on their two-hour outing. As I later typed out the dancers' notes,⁵¹ I was surprised at the complexity of their responses given the short period of time allocated for the

49 This photograph was taken by Nicola McGaan as part of the Artists' Photographic Project which I explain in Archive Nine - Racecourse.

50 All the dancers were familiar with Williamstown to some degree prior to the workshops. Their visits had ranged in length from a few hours to a number of weeks.

⁵¹ See Appendix Three "Dancers' Voices".

task. Dancers One and Three, both of whom received the jewellery and creative writing pieces, followed similar directions, whereby they constructed narratives that were connected to an earlier historical period. Dancer Two discovered the package with the map and letter with instructions late in the time allocated for the task and her focus centred mainly on using the video camera. Her written response was much looser and grounded in the present. This may have been a consequence of not having been directed in any sense by my written composition.

The dancers' discussion with me following this exercise focused on how they felt in the environment. Interestingly, all the dancers described feeling vulnerable in the landscape, either in their notes, or in their conversations after the exercise. I noted in the written documents as well as the recorded video footage, the difference in rhythm between each dancer's responses: one is fluid and continuous, the other, more deliberately experimental. I also noted that the dancer responsible for capturing the video footage accidentally left the video on in her bag as she walked back to the clubhouse, with the resulting footage mirroring her physical rhythm as she walked. These individual rhythmic encounters emerged in the improvisations the dancers worked on in the workshop following the exercise.

Final Stage and Performance

The final stage that formed this archive occurred when Amelia and Sally learnt the movement after the dancers had a six-month break. I wanted this stage to reconnect the material back to the site of Williamstown, particularly the shoreline where I felt I had centred much of my spatial imaginings as I developed the movement. Our first session with *Shoreline* was spent clarifying and piecing together the original movement from memory, embellishing it with small details of new material. As Amelia and Sally learnt the dance, some misunderstandings in the translation of movement resulted in some interesting 'mistakes', which I incorporated into the original dance. In this way the physicality of the other two dancers crept into the original movement. Once they were familiar with the movement, I set the positioning and timing, which for me established a connection directly back to the Williamstown shoreline.

In a later rehearsal, when this dance was by chance performed with the video image of the fluttering flags,⁵² I decided to keep the two forms together as the fluttering assisted in drawing out a hesitation and flickering in the movement. The image of the flags with their functional use, yet with a homely, domestic quality in their construction, lent a feminised tone to a practical object - a theme I was drawn to in many of my visual collections. My own viewing

⁵² The flags were a line of triangular pieces of coloured material, hung on a string and tied across a boat, designed to keep birds (and their droppings) off the vessel.

interest lay in the balance between the individuality and subtlety in each dancer's movement, and the way the timing played out amongst the trio.

Locating the Sensing Body

Early on in the making of *Shoreline* I spent some time explaining my intentions for this piece to the dancers, which centred once again on the effects of travel on the body. I was not aware of the form this piece would take, yet I felt sure in the knowledge that it would develop as a result of protracted creative exploration that would occur both within the studio, and also outside of it, as we engaged with the site of Williamstown. I had no fixed images or expectations for this piece, except for a desire (common to all the archives) to work with a sensibility that set it apart from the other nine dances.

It would be fallacious to suggest that the dancers' experience in the Williamstown workshops played an important part in how this archive *formed*. As I explained, I developed most of the material in the studio alone. Nevertheless, I felt the experience of the workshops contributed immensely to the *performance* of *Beyond Shore*. It is difficult to quantitatively measure exactly how this occurred, particularly as my focus was on devising during the workshops rather than observing and measuring results. However, the highly developed observational capacities of the dancers in this archive cannot be underestimated. They spent time in the environment of Williamstown, focusing on looking at, thinking through, imagining, and describing the landscape. Their experience with studio activities that required complex leaps of faith in cognitive activities such as examining, imaging, and reflecting physical states of the body, extended into the external environment. This information was held in their bodies and later recalled in performance.

Employing the simple device of locating the dancers outside the studio was a clear signal to the dancers that their perception and understanding of the site was central to the project. They could employ their kinaesthetic sensing, (which may be 'virtuosic') to gather information and they could also consider the conceptual possibilities of the site. The difference between moving within an external environment to assist in building a performance, and more conventional methods of influence (such as text, visual images or sound) that might be explored into a studio, is the *direct* embodied experience.⁵³ In my case, my own site explorations found their way into the construction of the movement material for *Beyond Shore*, in the dancers' case, I suggest they were felt in the performance.

⁵³ I recognize that dance can and is created daily without any need for these influences.

Dancing Insideness: the Visitor's Status

In Chapter Three in discussion of site-specific dance practices, I delineate a sense of place through the sensing body, one that perceives and explores. As I have mentioned earlier in this thesis, much of the understandings of the local site are drawn from my own personal topophilia. I was clear in my understanding that the dancers having not lived in Williamstown, were therefore unlikely to experience Williamstown in the way that I did.

In Vedel's characteristics for a site-specific performance she mentions the relationship between the performers and site as being one of the central features of a site-specific work. In addition, anthropologist Barbara Bender describes the multiple ways that people may experience and make sense of place, including:

(E)xperiences that are always polysemic (they work at many different levels), contextual (the particularities of time and place matter) and biographical (different for different people and always in process, happening).

(Bender 2001, p. 10)

In an increasingly global, networked society, our experiences of places no longer reside in fixed geographic locations but have extended to transient occupation of places and even virtual sites, where the physical body no longer needs to be present. These varying levels of experience point to the complexities and individual responses to place, exposing the difficulty in pinpointing similar place experiences.

My experience of visiting Darwin was significant in that I was reminded of previous travel experiences, where unencumbered by everyday realities associated with a fixed domestic environment due to the 'foreignness' of the immediate environment, my body/self assumed a position of greater significance. My status as a visitor to Darwin meant I still experienced Darwin, but my knowledge and experience of Darwin was different from that of a resident. Geographer Edward Relph, describes the differences in outsider and insider knowledge and behaviour in relation to understanding place, as *looking* and *experiencing* respectively (Relph 1976). Distinguishing between different ways of comprehending places, Relph describes a category of *emphatic insideness* which he identifies as the desire to intimately know the place through an increased level of perception.

(Emphatic insideness) demands a willingness to be open to significances of a place, to feel it, to know and to respect its symbols.

(Relph 1976, p. 54)

I propose that the dancers approached the site of Williamstown as visitors who displayed emphatic insideness. It is an approach that mirrors what occurred in our choreographic studio

work. It is an approach that privileges an open and trusting state of discovery. I see this approach as a technique, which is as significant as being able to perform a physical exercise. My assumptions with the Williamstown workshops was that the dancing body, with its experience of sensing and deploying sense experiences into movement practices, would be well placed to explore emphatic insideness. If I were employing formal qualitative techniques of research, the dancers' experiences in the Williamstown Workshops could be seen as an *intervention* into more commonplace studio practices. Mindful that a creative arts practice with its discursive and emergent qualities doesn't allow for measurable data, my ability to measure the impact of the Williamstown Workshops on the performance remains limited. However, I believe that it is reasonable to assume that in *Beyond Shore*, the dancers were able to increase their understanding of place centred activity in Williamstown. This occurred through their familiarity with sensing in a highly sophisticated manner, and then further accessing that information through studio practice or performance. The dancers' experience of Williamstown aimed to stimulate conditions that privileged the somatic positioning of the body.

Archive Four – Zone 7

Geographical Location

Seaworks

The Secret Boat Harbour, Williamstown

Blunt's Boat Yard, Williamstown

Contents

Video footage of ships passing in front of Point Gellibrand.

Order of Construction

This archive was constructed last in the series of ten. It was devised primarily in the performance venue where the wooden boat was the main set piece.

Description of Performance

From a blackout, the lights slowly come up to reveal the three dancers, centred in and around the boat in the middle of the space. One dancer is seated on the side of the boat, while the other two are standing with their backs to the bow of the boat and their faces turned to each other. The two standing begin by moving their arms slowly up and down in a wave-like motion. Halfway through this short dance they turn towards the boat and repeat the action, maintaining eye contact throughout. The dancer positioned in the boat is focussed on gentle unfolding and stretching of her arms. After some time she rises and paces back and forth inside the boat.

The Boat in Williamstown

In *Beyond Shore*, the performance space operated as the stage 'set', which included a central object - a sixteen-foot, wooden Couta boat.⁵⁴ During my process, while investigating the 'local' in the site of Williamstown, the boat had become for me an intriguing symbol and in the performance the presence of the boat marked the work. Topographically, Williamstown is

⁵⁴ A 'Couta' boat is a style of wooden boat (developed circa 1930 and originally used for Barracouta fishing) now popular as a recreational sailing vessel.

a wide and blunt peninsula and except for one border, is surrounded by water. Living in Williamstown, the water has a presence that is pervasive; it is often sensed by smell or touch through the sea air even if it is not in sight. With this geography, as with many places defined by water, come a profusion of boats. Some considerations of the boat in Williamstown follow:

- Boats occupy the coastline around Williamstown on moorings, on land in yards, and in the numerous boat-building workshops lining the shore.
- Boats may carry people, objects, animals, messages, disease, laws and ideas from one location to another, acting as a conduit from shore to shore. Williamstown's history as the first settlement and port of Melbourne meant that for many years it was the central hub of the maritime industry of Victoria.
- Boats operate under different laws from the land - maritime laws consider the boat a unity unto itself and therefore operational under the governance of the captain, and in transit, seagoing vessels operate under the UNCLOS agreement.⁵⁵
- Moving across water needs to be considered and negotiated.

The Heterotopic Space of the Boat

The use of the boat in *Beyond Shore* both as the central set piece and more implicitly as a symbol of transience, was a deliberate call to attention of the particular relationship the dancers had to the site of Williamstown. Much of my thoughts about journeying and location were connected with my own travels to Darwin for the field study, as well as the dancers' positions as visitors to the site of Williamstown.

I was interested in philosopher Michael Foucault's description of the boat as the ultimate heterotopic space. In his genealogies on the prison and hospital systems, Foucault theorised that such spaces were determined by a network of power relations designed to manage and deploy bodies in particular ways. However, with the heterotopic space, Foucault is interested in blurring the boundaries between spaces that are real and not real. Foucault spoke of the heterotopic space as a 'counter-site', a type of 'enacted utopia' (Foucault 1984). The heterotopic space is a real space, as opposed to the unreal utopian space, and Foucault uses

⁵⁵ United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea:
www.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Convention_on_the_Law_of_the_Sea

the analogy of the mirror to explore how the notion of the heterotopic space may be used to dissolve the boundaries between reality and illusion.

The mirror is, after all a utopia, since it is a placeless place. In the mirror, I see myself there where I am not, in an unreal, virtual space that opens up behind the surface...But it is also a heterotopia in so far as the mirror does exist in reality, where it exerts a sort of counter action on the position that I occupy. From the standpoint of the mirror I discover my absence from the place where I am since I see myself over there.

(Foucault 1984, p. 4)

Architect Susan Boyer describes the duality present in the heterotopic space ‘real spaces that show reality to be the illusion, or they are perfected places, more rational and ordered than normal spaces’ (Boyer 2008, p. 54).⁵⁶ The theatre is also a heterotopic space, able to enact a type of reality in a real space. In doing so it is also operating in relation to all other spaces in which reality is enacted. As Foucault describes it ‘the theatre brings onto the rectangle of the stage, a whole series of places that are foreign to each other’ (Foucault 1984, p. 7) Similarly, Foucault saw the boat as the most excellent of all heterotopic spaces, likening it not only to ‘a great instrument of economic development’ (Foucault 1984, p. 10), but also to an instrument of imagination and adventure, sailing between lands carrying hopes and dreams.⁵⁷

Working the Heterotopic Space

In *Zone 7*, I was interested in overlaying an imagined space, (in this case a small room where a woman was dressing), simultaneously onto another frame (that of the boat as a set). I was interested to the conceptual possibilities that might arise from the dancer traversing both places/spaces, one the solid, material construction of a wooden boat, and the other, a realm of imagined interior, domestic space, known only to Sally. We discussed her interior, place/space as linking to that within the solo movement passage of *Archive Nine - Racecourse* (originally devised for Sally although later performed by Amelia), including the short film that was part of the process. In the rehearsal space we had mapped out tight dimensions of the internal measurements of the boat used in the performance. For *Zone 7* Sally worked in this restricted area, devising movement (largely restricted to the arms) in conjunction with me. This was further developed through attention to the details of gestural

⁵⁶ Foucault’s concept of the heterotopic space has been a cause of much speculation in scholarship since his lecture in which he introduced the concept of heterotopias ‘Of Other Spaces (1967)’.

⁵⁷ Hilda Heynen points to questionable liberation practices of the subjectivity of agency in the heterotopic space, arguing that to many, the ship was a symbol of disaster, carrying slaves, convicts, disease and colonisation. Although I agree with the notion of subjectivity of spaces, my focus in this discussion is on the *illusion* of the heterotopic space.

movements in an imagined, enclosed domestic environment, such as a bedroom. By transposing this movement into the boat in the performance venue, I hoped to explore a somewhat telescopic notion of the illusionary space:

Sally in an imagined room;

Sally in an imagined room in a boat that appears to be floating;

Sally in an imagined room, in a boat that appears to be floating, in a theatre.

I describe this process as a physical working of the heterotopic space, yet I was mindful that an audience would be unlikely to understand the archive in those terms. My hope was that the actions of the dancer would act as a counter to what actions might be expected to be seen in a boat, thereby causing a slippage between the illusionistic space of the boat and the space of a room.

In keeping with this shifting of representational presence(s), I placed Amelia and Cobie at the bow of the boat, with the direction to float their arms up and down as if they were waves. The obvious replication of the simple movement, childlike in its straightforwardness, used *resemblance* as a representational device, common in the canon of dance history (Foster 1986),⁵⁸ yet the eye contact and connection between the two performers acted as a foil to disrupt a literal representational reading of waves.

Devising in the Performance Site

In the above paragraphs I sketch out a number of thoughts that were at the base of my conceptual engagements in this piece and are a simplified account of my intent with *Zone 7*. Although they may serve to contribute to an understanding of my interest in this archive, it achieves little in describing the context in which I was working. No matter how desirous, how entwined or how deeply I felt about some of these ideas, when I entered the rehearsal with the dancers this altered. When I began working in the performance space I was faced with two very strong and ‘real’ presences – one, the object of the boat as the set and two, the presence of the dancers in the performance space. Suddenly my imaginings and personal ties to the conceptual side of the work receded dramatically as I faced the task of dealing with these real and forceful elements.

⁵⁸ I am drawing on Susan Foster’s four modes of representation used in dance performances: resemblance, imitation, replication, and reflection.

Building the movement for *Zone 7* directly in the performance space was a marked change from working in the studio. It posited myself and the dancers in a relationship with the space where the body engaged with the spatial dimensions of the *Seaworks* directly. This removed the step that is often present when working towards a performance in a particular space – that of transference, where the choreographer needs to visually superimpose the rehearsed work into the proposed performance space. Removing the additional cognitive process of visualising the work in an alternate space from where it is being made, grounds the work in a different reality – one where it is concretely visible. The work is seen and felt immediately, not to be imagined later, as the pragmatics of the space/set become the primary working mechanism.

In Archive Four - *Zone 7*, the ambiguous title signalled an archive that like the previous three was connected with the liminal. However the reality of the concreteness of the set, the boat as object, countered the conceptualisation of the boat as a symbol. This meeting of space/places in performance mirrored how the dancers ‘met’ the site of Williamstown in the creative process. The status of the visitor in the site was an important concept to consider as a way of comprehending site. Although the physical devising of this archive happened shortly before the performance, at a late stage, it was clear to me that the entire weight of the creative process of *Beyond Shore* was present in the final rendering of Archive Four - *Zone 7*.

Archive Five – Claw Tree Park

Geographical Location

Nelson Place

Contents

Two five minutes tape recordings of two narratives ‘Leaving S-----’.

A series of photos of interior spaces of Melbourne airport.

A series of photos of the upper level of the two story Victorian shopfronts on Nelson Place

Photographs of ‘Claw Tree Park’, taken by James Smeaton

Order of Construction

This archive was created eighth in the series of ten.

Description of Performance

Claw Tree Park marked a shift within the movement vocabulary of the preceding four archives. The three dancers began in the middle of the space, in front of the boat, and performed a series of exaggerated gestures and posturing, that appeared to reference greetings. Each dancer demonstrated a movement in turn, and the movement eventually built into a larger and more vigorous passage of movement. The dancers then walked to nine key positions in the space and performed a greeting as they arrived at each new spot. They finished the last few movement by performing simultaneously.

Dialogical Pathways towards Locating Place

As I have mentioned in Chapter One, my methodology explores performance ethnography. I was concerned with incorporating aspects of *Tracks*’ creative processes into my own development of *Beyond Shore* in order to gain further insights into how *Tracks* engage with place. As *Tracks* consider their relationships with other artists a key component of their working processes, I was interested to explore this myself, through dialogical relationships with other artists towards the performance *Beyond Shore*. This archive describes a process I entered into with a friend, a Melbourne based actor and a migrant to Australia. An account of her migration experience formed part of the creative process of this archive.

In developing this archive I wanted to explore the distance between the recall of movement as a *technique* of choreography, and the area of transition within spaces of travel. I wanted to tease out the statement from Bender that had influenced me – that is, the body is a carrier of place (Bender 2001), an experience I had been reminded of strongly in my fieldwork. In keeping with the emergent nature of this project, I was unsure how my dialogical interaction would manifest in the final performance.

As Grant Kester explains in his critical framework for socially engaged art practices, dialogical art practices operate in a discursive zone whereby the *form* of the art work and the *way* it is communicated vie for prominence.

It is necessary to consider the (dialogical) work as a process as well as a physical product, and specifically as a process rooted in a discursively-mediated encounter in which the subject positions of artist and viewer or artist and subject are openly thematized and can potentially be challenged and transformed.

(Kester 2000, p. 4)

It is important to emphasise here that I was entering a dialogical process with another artist without the expectation that our work together would form the final artwork. This is quite significant, as dialogical art practices as described by Kester, et al., have the expectation that the final work would incorporate and explicitly engage a relationship between the work and the audience. My own process differed in that the dialogical exchange resided in my work with the actor, where her role formed an integral part of the process, but fell short of existing dialogically in performance. The audience of *Beyond Shore* were in an immersive environment, the large warehouse performance space, yet they remained as passive viewers. In *Beyond Shore*, the dialogical relationships with the four visual artists, the dancers and the actor remained focussed on and contained to the production of choreography.

In 2004 I had explored this type of exchange in my Honours year project, both with the dancers and with the general public.⁵⁹ In *Beyond Shore* I had made some initial forays into implementing these ideas, through the Artists Photographic Project (see Archive Nine for details). I also considered the Williamstown Workshops with the dancers to be grounded in dialogical processes.⁶⁰

59 My honours year project in 2004, titled *Reading Between the Lines: the meeting of dance and art in performance*, employed participatory practices with both the general public and the dancers. With the general public: I distributed 50 letters around Melbourne and received three responses, and with the dancers I asked them to ‘fill in the blanks’ of a videoed choreographed phrase with large gaps in it. I was influenced by the work of French artist, Sophie Calle, whose practice encompasses dialogical processes between her and (sometimes unwitting) respondents, and the subsequent documentation of these events. Her work often begins with simple statements or description of the project’s premise. For example in her work *The Blind* (1986) she states “I met people who were born blind. Who had never seen. I asked them what their image of beauty was.” (Calle, 2003).

60 I use the term dialogical rather than littoral or relational art.

Towards this archive I asked an acquaintance of mine, (who I will identify for this document as the Actor), who migrated from a European city in the mid 1990s, if I could record her story of the details of her last day in S----- as she prepared to leave the city with her husband and child. I explained to her that I was interested in her story as a way of encountering through choreography the transition moment of departure. Due to her extensive experience as a professional actor and her engagement with other creative processes, the Actor understood her story would stand as a trigger for a movement investigation and the resulting form the work may take was uncertain.

In addition to the Actor's story, I wrote my own version of what I imagined happened from a first person perspective. I was aware of fragments from her story, but had not heard a dedicated telling of the events. For example, I knew she left with her husband and child, yet I was not sure of the time, or what method of transport they used to exit the city. My own story was pieced together from this basic information as well as perfunctory research about S----- ---. Prior to our meeting for the recording, I sent the Actor my imagined story which undoubtedly set either (subconsciously or consciously) a certain tone and duration of her own narrative. For example, in my narrative I described the weather, and in her account she also described the weather, something she may not have done had she not seen my version.

The Actor agreed to read this five-minute story and then recounted her own story for the recording. As she is an experienced reader and fluent in her second language, English, she had no difficulty in reading the imagined story in such a way that it sounded like natural speech. This resulted in me obtaining two, five-minute recordings, 'Leaving S-----', one the Actor's account, presumably the truth, the other, my imagined account, both presenting as fluid narratives of an event.

Not long after this exercise, I was scheduled to present a showing of my performance work to my supervisors in which I presented three separate pieces of work, loosely linked together by the exploration of how the body holds place.⁶¹ One of these works was a ten-minute improvisation of the 'Leaving S-----' stories. I performed the improvisation accompanied by an audio track of the recorded 'Leaving S-----' stories. I performed the first improvisation to the first story, and then as the second story began, I attempted to recall the improvised movements from the first improvisation.

Leaving S----- – First improvisation

⁵⁰ The other two works in this showing included the short video of myself running along a pier in Altona (as described in Archive Two - *Breakwater Pier*), and a short five-minute set piece of choreography.

Two cognitive pathways were active here. In the first improvisation I was conscious that I would attempt to recall the movement I was performing very shortly. This made me conscious of the need to remember pathways, movement and moments that seemed more distinctive than others, while I was performing improvised movement. The movement I was generating was not mimicking the audio, that is, I was not performing actions that suggested I was getting in a car or carrying a suitcase, for example, yet I was conscious of being influenced by the recorded sound.

Leaving S----- – Second improvisation

The second improvisation was performed immediately after the first, with no interruption other than a short pause which left me enough time to resume my starting position from the previous improvisation. Performing this work, I felt embedded in the narratives as my mind switched between using the stories as impulse for movement and in the second reading, recalling the movement I had already spontaneously worked with.⁶² As I had deliberately not listened to the audio since the original recording, when I encountered it again in performance it felt fresh.

It was an interesting exercise, an opportunity to dance the space/place of memory as held in the body. Not only was I concerned with remembering locations in the performance space, I was remembering movements, some distinctive, some banal. Finally I was conscious of how these movements would appear to the audience. Would they remember the repetition or would they experience the absence of what they had registered in the first improvisation?

However, when I reflect on the dance of Archive Five – *Claw Tree Park*, the investigation of the ‘Leaving S-----’ improvisations seemed far removed from the way the gestural phrases appeared in performance. A second description of the production of the choreography for *Claw Tree Park* may go some way to closing this gap.

The Functional Site: The Production of Choreography for *Claw Tree Park*

Conceptually this archive explored how the body might locate place and to do this I looked to the notion of the *functional* site as James Meyer describes it:

(The functional site) may or may not incorporate a physical place. It certainly does not privilege this place. Instead it is a process, an operation occurring between sites, a

⁶² At this stage I had just finished a 30 day period where I improvised for thirty minutes a day. The improvisations were often broken up over the course of the day into three, ten-minute sessions. Sometime I worked in a block or I separated the sessions into separate times. This was possible as I was working opposite a studio and could access the studio at any time.

mapping of institutional and textural filiations and the bodies that move between them (the artist's above all).

(Meyer 2000, p. 27)

Meyer recognises process as a key indicator of the functional site, opposing the fixed site such as the monolithic sculpture. For visual artists, the implications of a shift to ephemeral art works were profound, corresponding with a critique of the art institution. For dance artists, working with a form that has ephemerality as a core attribute, the concept of the functional site is perhaps less radical. In this project, the functional site consisted of components of processes: recordings, texts, photographs, and happenings, as integral to the construction of the work. As I performed the 'Leaving S-----' improvisations the 'descriptions' of that improvisation remained in my body as presences and memories of that time.

Genealogy and the Functional Site

My research into how the body can be inscribed had led me to Foucault's notion of genealogy as 'a method of studying history through analysis of discourses' (Ramazanoglu 1993, p. 18) and in particular, analysing the network of power relationships as a tool to map history. Foucault's genealogies of systems of power in hospitals and prisons⁶³ are characterised by their attention to detail, and his focus on the small, seemingly insignificant details within systems of power offer new understandings of power relations within the subject, and assist in uncovering previously 'submerged voices' (Tamboukou & Ball 2003). A genealogical study is a tangled web of multiplicities, resisting one linear reading of truth.

A key distinguishing feature of genealogical study which is relevant to dance making is that 'genealogy highlights the importance of the body as a site of interaction of material and symbolic forces, a battle field of power relations and antagonistic discourses' (Tamboukou & Ball 2003, p. 6). Foucault saw the body as a site that becomes inscribed by social and cultural practices resulting in what is seen as 'the process of history's destruction of the body' (Burt 2004, p. 32). My interest in genealogy was not to perform a painstaking Foucauldian analysis of how the landscape of Williamstown was negotiated, but I felt my approach to how history was written in Williamstown was broadly genealogical in approach, one that looked for 'contingencies rather than causes' (Mills 2003, p. 114).

⁶³ See Foucault's "*Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975) and *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception* (1963).

Claw Tree Photograph

At this stage of the project I had received photographs from the The Artists' Photographic Project (see Archive Nine for details) and many of the photos that were taken by the artists were of the geography of Williamstown. One series in particular, by James Smeaton, was of photographs of bare-limbed tree branches that formed a claw-like canopy over a park. The park in the photo is a favourite tourist destination in Williamstown. Opposite a restaurant and café strip, visitors to Williamstown often congregate there. When I saw the photographs, I was able to identify the location of the image immediately despite the lack of visual clues, other than branches of trees. My deep familiarity with the landscape of Williamstown, the knowledge that no other trees in the immediate surrounds could form this canopy, except at one particular location, was a stark reminder of how intimately the knowledge of the landscape was located in my body.

The photo of the tree was an oppressive image and a counter to how the site was used in the present, as a site of recreational family gatherings. It is one that I had connected with my own photographs of the same location. The park at this site is on the waterfront and connected to Gem Pier, the first pier in Williamstown and one that has been the site of thousands of arrivals.

Using the two elements, the residue of the 'Leaving S-----' improvisations and the Claw Tree park photographs as primary source material, I worked on developing what became the key movements for this archive which the dancers and I called 'greetings'. Here I was making reference to the historical restriction of women in the cultural landscape of Williamstown. The deliberate choice of obvious gestural greeting moments, and then the continued overextended physicality of the gestures, was a device I used to simply show the effort involved in being seen – to be rendered visible - as a woman in the annals of history. The positioning of the dancers in the space was directly linked to the development of the solo choreography I had performed at the same time as the 'Leaving S-----' studio showing. The extension of the greetings, the connection and disengagement of the dancers from each other, was the result of the processes of enquiry as to the body's capacity to think through how place is carried within.

Archive Six – Beyond Shore

Geographical Location

No fixed location

Contents

A series of video footage of blurred lights of ships in the shipping channel.

Order of Construction

This archive was created eighth in the series of ten. It was the quickest to make and was created in two, three-hour rehearsals.

Description of Performance

In performance, the archive Beyond Shore is danced by Amelia and Sally and continues to be stylistically informed by the gestural 'greetings' that were seen in Claw Tree Park. The timing is arranged so there is a sense of tension built between them as they slowly make their way from the side to the centre of the space. The duet continues with the dancers working in a tight circular formation, continuing to alternate the timing with their individual spatial levels. The duet ends with the 'breath moment' - Sally moves into position on the floor, Amelia approaches her and surreptitiously uses her fingers to pinch Sally's nostrils together. There is a lengthy pause before Sally sits up quickly and gasps for air.

Development of Archive Six - Seawall

By the time I began to make this archive I was at the point where seven dances were already in various stages of production and I had a clear picture of how the work was shaping. This archive was devised directly from Archive Seven, *Seawall*, and Archive Nine, *Racecourse*, with Amelia and Sally performing the movement from each respectively.

This archive was pieced together in the studio over the course of one session. It serendipitously fell into place within a few attempts of trying out a single idea. I immediately felt that the connection between the dancers, the timing of the material, and the placing of the bodies in space, made for an interesting duet. As a result the material once set and captured on video in rehearsal, changed little from the initial workings. In the final month I devised the breath moment that comes at the end of the dance.

Archive Six - *Beyond Shore*, like the previous archive, looks at the body as a site where place is held and experienced. A further similarity it shares with *Claw Tree Park* is the discursive location of site, exploring the presence of history that pervades the site of Williamstown.⁶⁴ The relative ease in which this archive was made kept the dedicated rehearsal period on this piece to a minimum, particularly in contrast to one of the longer and more worked archives such as Archive Ten, *Kororoit Creek Road*. Rather than question what made this archive 'fall into place', accepting the simple and unexpected fact that it did, I turn instead to focus on what 'worked' in this archive that afforded me the opportunity to keep it in its first state.

In the studio, I suggest to the dancers that we try two separate dances, placed a certain distance apart, with their hands held behind their backs. They try it. Within the first minute I see a flash of potential with the timing, something that will make it 'more'. I ask them to stop, they revert to their starting positions, I ask Amelia to wait until I call her in. Sally begins, I see the right moment and call Amelia in, they start, they both continue on their pathways. It works, it continues to work, it finishes. We exchange limited words about the timing, some spacing. We try it again immediately to see if what I initially saw - the play between timing, the shifting states between figure and dancer - can be found again. I am happy to discover it can.

Notes towards Archive Six - *Beyond Shore*, Josie Daw

Sally's dance, taken from the Archive Nine - *Racecourse*, could be seen as a 'character study'. I devised it as a physical working out of a narrative thread that was present in my musings on the Williamstown historical landscape. In its initial workings I thought of the image of a Victorian woman, caught in a room, above a shopfront in Nelson Place, Williamstown. I used the wall and floor as supports as the weight and heaviness of the movement tipped the body around in the space. I saw the work more as a *figure* study than a *character* study, as the woman was not developed in any depth, but remained a murky presence, circulating in my thoughts as I devised the work.

I knew from the outset of making this work that whatever representational qualities this dance presented, the way in which I translated it to the dancers would dilute the representational qualities and the final dance would be quite changed by this process. So from the beginning, working so literally, I was never bound by the desire to represent the figure onstage. I knew that once the movement was learnt by the dancer, diluted by the process of translation from me, that it would take on another appearance. Traces of the figure would exist in the final

⁶⁴ The other three being Mapping, Borders and (Dis)placement.

performance, but they would be found through the weight and heaviness of the movement, as opposed to the facial expressions of a trapped woman, for example.

Amelia's dance formed along similar lines. I developed it myself in the studio before teaching the movement to the dancers. I was exploring how tension is held in the body when it is physically restricted, and once again a figurative representation emerged as I devised movements. When I performed both dances myself, I used the female figure as a device to attend to certain dynamics or expression in the movement phrases. As I danced, I was conscious of dancing it as myself without trying to *be* the figures. More often than not, either one or both of the two figures felt 'present' in the space, as I danced, often very close to the front of my body or next to me, but not inhabiting my body. I never spoke of this to the dancers or to anyone else, not because I considered it an unusual thing, but it felt inherently part of my own connection to the work's development. I resisted insisting that the dancers needed to manifest such an account in their own performances.

Blurring Representation through Corporeality

Visual arts and new-media scholar, Barbara U. Schmidt, explores how meaning is created in visual art, by foregrounding a sensing body where the force of corporeality both in the signifier and the viewer blurs representation. Schmidt discusses how aspects of corporeality are rendered visible in the work of two visual artists whose primary media are drawing and sculpture.⁶⁵ One of the artists, Miriam Cahn, uses representation within her figurative drawings of objects, yet the way in which her presence is felt in the artwork --through heavy and vibrant markings of charcoal -- neutralises the figurative nature of the work. The presence of the artist through the particular marking of her corporeal gestures remains vivid within the work.

The perceiving and experiencing body is exposed as a site of meaning as Cahn's process of production integrates the illusion of technical perfection and power into the instability of a corporeal gesture.

(Schmidt 1999, p. 288)

Schmidt's discussion explores how corporeality acts as a synthesis to consciousness and is able to blur the distinction between objectivity (the thing) and subjectivity (the autobiographical).

(S)ubjectivity and meaning are not based on a distanced self-image and or a fixed law. On the contrary, they are understood as the result of a specific relation between

⁶⁵ In her essay 'What Sense do the Senses Make?' Schmidt discusses the work of two visual artists, Swiss artist Miriam Cahn (1949-), and American Maureen Conner (1947-).

embodied consciousness and the exterior world, and therefore always remain temporal, unfinished and in motion.

(Schmidt 1999, p. 284)

Film theorist, Vivian Sobchack's understanding of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology is that the relationship between the subjective and objective experiences is non-hierarchical, that is, it 'horizontalize(s) the binary (and discursive) separation that divides' the two (Sobchack 2009, p. 2). She describes how 'our lived body experience – through gesture and action - is being concretely 'figured' in the world, it is always being imaginatively and discursively 'figured out'' (Sobchack 2009, p. 2).

Teaching the dancers the physical form of the movement while the emotional content remains largely under-described, was a technique I used to avoid projecting my own personal content from the archive onto them. I avoided discussing representational strategies that I might be engaging with myself as I devised the movement in the studio; instead preferring to focus on the dynamic qualities inherent in the movement. This allowed the dancers, as they learnt the movement, to make sense of it in their own way(s). This, in turn, meant the movement continued to develop in the process, remaining independent of any preconceived structures or meanings. In this way it was not locked off or finished but continued to develop even during the performance when the audience was in the process of 'figuring' it out. Even in this fluid state, in some of the dances (such as this one), representation was more obviously evident than in other archives. When this happened, the strength of the presence of the dancer(s) in space often served to disrupt a representational reading of the material. Instead the force of the performing body(s) come to the fore, and resulted in the blurring of the representation through corporeality (as Schmidt describes above) except in this case it was of the dancer, not a fixed art object.

The point of difference within the two separate dances that the dancers performed in this archive *Beyond Shore* was simply the omission of their arm movements as they held their arms behind their backs for the time it took to perform the dances. This manifestation of the absence of familiar body movement was a literal attempt to dance history. The dancers, adjusting to what is known and held in the body and then dancing the absence of that movement (the arms being held and unable to move their known pathways) constructed a further expression of their original dances that formed the origins of the archive, *Beyond Shore*.

Archive Seven – Seawall

Geographical Location

The seawall at Point Gellibrand, Williamstown.

Contents

Photographs of the hand-carved crosses in the stones comprising the seawall at Point Gellibrand.

Walk One: Caught words

Walk Two: Vegetation words

Order of Construction

This archive was created second in the series of ten. It took approximately six months to develop into a three to four minute piece of dance, and it remained largely unchanged until the final three months before it was performed.

Description of Performance

In performance, Seawall was a four minute piece of movement that began as a staggered phrase, each dancer beginning the phrase at different times, and as each one joined in, the phrase would restart. It was largely performed on the spot, with the dancers remaining an even distance from each other. The movement consisted of twists and sharp releases of movements around the central axis of the dancer. Each dancer built an individual momentum with the movement building to a frenetic pitch, which included the use of breath as a sound device. Amelia McQueen finished the last third of her phrase on the floor.

Development of Seawall

I began this piece very early in the creative process of *Beyond Shore*, so few time constraints meant it had a lengthy gestation period. The location of Point Gellibrand, a seven-hectare piece of land directly outside my house and bordering the shoreline was an important geographical place where this archive was conceived. Point Gellibrand was also a significant

site of colonial activity in the nineteenth century, a place where prisoners⁶⁶ were forced to labour. Part of their labour involved building the stone seawall, of which the crudely carved crosses (indicating a prisoner had shaped the rock) can still be found. The land is now used as a ‘historic park’, now landscaped with indigenous plants, yet it still retains a slightly wild and unkempt character.

The movement source for this dance was devised through a physical task of restraint and restriction, part of which I developed in the studio experimenting with binding my arms and legs with a theraband.⁶⁷ Detailing the development as reductively as the above sentence alludes seems a crude description of what I felt to be a rich, creative experience that accessed other ideas and connections with the bigger picture of *Beyond Shore*. This included physical matchings and counterpoints to previously learnt movement, connections to photographic and video imagery and a teasing out of a larger and fluid narrative that was present in the creative development of my past works.⁶⁸

Psychogeography

In the next two archives I explore an approach to my site-related dance performance that was concerned with the concept of mapping. In Chapter Three on site-specificity I describe a way of perceiving site that includes and privileges the unconscious elements of how the body may explore site. My interest in this area led me to examine the notion of ‘mapping’ as a way of comprehending the properties of a site and how this may be used chorographically. One of the processes I used in the development of this and the following archive was to undertake a series of walks around Williamstown as a way of encountering aspects of the site I later explore choreographically.

Psychogeography, the practice of walking with close attention to both physical and cultural surrounds developed in conjunction with the Situationists’ *derive*,⁶⁹ first practiced in the 1960s. The *derive*, literally a ‘drift’, required the walker to engage and subvert their relationship to spatial constructs such as forms of architecture, roads and pathways. The

66 Prisoners were not to be confused with convicts. The prisoners were ‘housed’ in hulks – out of service ships that were moored off the coast of Point Gellibrand between 1852 and 1855. The hulks were in service as prisons after the Australian Gold Rush had caused the population explosion of Victoria (Strahan 1994).

67 A long, thin piece of latex (similar to a giant rubber band), used as a tool to aid stretching in dance and other body work classes.

68 This narrative which was eventually dropped, has often been significant in the process of other creative development periods of mine, yet I have never fully developed it into a dedicated performance.

69 The Situationist International, formed in France in 1957, were an avant-garde group of Marxists interested in the interstice of art and politics.

derive, advocated a suspension of pre-conceived navigation in order to quite literally allow oneself to be drawn through particular pathways.⁷⁰

Psychogeography, by contrast, and explained by Guy Debord, Situationist and writer, is ‘the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organized or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals’ (Debord 1955, p. 5). Psychogeography is not so concerned with the drift of the *derive*, but instead relies on documentation which prefaces an initial, *visual* connection to place before expanding into a cultural and social reading of place. Contemporary psychogeographers, such as U.K. writers Iain Sinclair and Will Self, offer a dense poetic style of prose aiming to reframe historical, cultural and geographical points of interest. They focus on the impact of architectural and geographic forms on the individual and how these structures pervade and impact on people as they traverse and negotiate landscape.

A further point that interested me was the way psychogeographers Self and Sinclair position their work in a larger political context. Psychogeography, is an example of a socio-spatial practice, informed by politics and evolving as a theory in practice. The core aims of psychogeography are not only to observe the landscape, but also to practice ‘experimentation by means of concrete interventions in urbanism’ (Debord 1957, p. 23). One of Self’s recent psychogeographies was to walk from his house in London to Heathrow Airport, fly to JFK Airport in Manhattan, New York, and walk out of the airport to a location in N.Y. The walk highlighted the difficulties in navigating city streetscapes due to increased security measures around airports post 9/11 (Self 2007).

The contemplation necessary to record an ambulatory experience appealed to me in relation to the way I felt my process was unfolding. I saw parallels between my approach to choreography and how psychogeography is enacted. Both responses to place call upon memory, and the composition and the design of the response to place removes the *immediacy* of the body’s reaction to its surrounds. Although rudimentary notes may be written during the ambulatory journey, to be used as prompts for further development of the work, much of the material remains held in the body to be recalled at a later stage.

⁷⁰ One of the founders of the Situationists, Guy Debord, acknowledges the randomness of this action might not be so determined by chance due to the way on which public spaces are designed to deploy the body along particular pathways.

Mapping Site

In the process towards this archive, I researched the conditions of mapping a site before I undertook several walks around the site of Williamstown. I conceptualised a basic system of mapping - one drawn from cartographer, Alan MacEachren - to explore the nexus between choreography and mapping. The two disciplines have much in common, notably both are systems of communication and share commonalities between how they are designed and how they are understood. It is now recognised that cartography, like many of the discourses in the humanities and sciences is a subjective construction (Buisseret, 1998; MacEachman, 1995). A concept of mapping, that of *generalisation*, was of significance to this process. Generalisation in mapping is the reduction and elimination of the complexity of characteristics not relevant to the map's overall purpose. I liken this approach to the selection and refinement of choreography.

To counter my strong preference for a visual comprehension of place, I focussed on making more explicit other sensory engagements with place, giving preference to aural, olfactory and tactile means. With this engagement in mind, I set out to engage in psychogeography as a process to absorb site by walking along the borders of Williamstown - both natural (the shoreline) and of human construction (pathways and roads). During these 'terrain' walks I focussed on the soundscapes, the terrain, the architecture and particularly the sensation of environmental elements such as weather on my body.

My psychogeography captured sounds, primarily snatches of conversation which I wrote in my notebook as I heard them. These fragments of longer conversations spoke of the everyday: some were slightly shocking, some were of an intimate nature, many caused me to imagine what surrounded the conversations, wonder who were the protagonists either speaking or spoken about, and how much I could fill in the gaps. Within some of the conversations I recognised words I might use myself, words of encouragement, sounds of sympathy, disgust, anger or surprise. Voices included those that were not intended to be heard by me and others that were. These walks connected with memory, nostalgia and imagination.

I was initially less excited about the walks where I focussed on the terrain. It was not as easy for my imagination to soar as it did when I was able to construct narratives from the caught words that I heard on my previous walks. However, during these walks I was able to tune in to a very different sense of place, involving a subtle use of the 'listening body'. I was exploring a state of consciousness which privileged the notion of *absorbing*, as a way of comprehending information. This was in contrast to *obtaining* information, the method I had

previously been utilising.⁷¹ Absorb was a useful term that suggested an approach more in tune with the idea of the sensing body, allowing the perceptive filter to be open. During these walks I would stop and pay attention to the minutiae that surrounded me, the feel of wind, the smells, and the *atmosphere* of Williamstown. These elements affecting me were part of an indefinable and vast ecological system, and my thoughts were taken into a wide and expansive realm. By contrast, the action of then returning to recording the terrain, was a perfunctory way of returning to the real.

Grey rubble, crushed cigarette, small weeds with yellow flowers,

Notes from Point Gellibrand walk, 2008.

The Seawall phrase explored the tension between these two ways of comprehending the Williamstown site. The systematic reflection on space through the act of psychogeography is to ‘experience it and encounter it selfconsciously’ (Relph, 1976, p 9). Built around this dialectic tension, I explored movement manifested in the body as contrasting moments of tautness and release.

⁷¹ I credit my co-supervisor, Jude Walton, for drawing my attention to the distinction between these two terms.

Archive Eight – Boundary Road

Geographical Location

The geographical boundaries I considered for this archive were the shoreline from the Ferguson Street Pier, Williamstown, through to Pier Street, Altona. This accounted for the following streets: The Esplanade, Beach Street, Altona Road, Pine Scout Camp Road, Racecourse Road in Altona, and Kororoit Creek Road and Ferguson Street in Williamstown.

Contents

No other contents.

Order of Construction

This archive was created sixth in the series of ten, and was it was made over a period of two months.

Description of Performance

Boundary Road was performed by two of the dancers. It was the most sustained fast-paced dance of the ten archives. In it, the two dancers appear to engage with each other in a series of physical challenges that include chasing and following each other diagonally across the space, connecting physically with the walls of the space and the central boat. The movement phrases consisted of running, staggered skips, small jumps and scrambling. The pace of the movement extends past what might be an expected or assumed point where the velocity slows. Instead the momentum is maintained for the duration of the dance.

Development – Stage One

This archive had as its focus a delineation of both physical and geographic boundaries. I developed the bulk of the movement in this piece by myself in the studio over a series of six to eight sessions, interspersed with walks around Williamstown and Altona that followed a mapping of geographic boundaries of the shoreline and roads. Linking to the previous archive where I was undertaking a conscious exploration of mapping as I gathered material in the site of Williamstown, *Boundary Road* was concerned with exploring the geographic environment as a counter to the Seawall archive, where I focussed on psychogeography. I was aware through using psychogeography, that I was inclining towards the seductiveness of a narrative thread and characterisation in relation to the rich history of colonial and post-colonial Williamstown. To extend the possibilities of exploring site and choreography from other

perspectives and to resist the narrative impulse I decided to privilege the energy, force and dynamism of the moving body in the next series of investigations. I felt this would not only open up the research into other areas that would be fruitful to me, but may also connect viscerally with the dancers.

Through my research I had become interested in the activities of Parkour,⁷² a relatively new activity which started in France in the 1990s in which participants, called *traceurs* (male) or *traceuses* (female) aim to move through physical environments, cities, parks, etc, rather like an obstacle course, circumnavigating and scaling walls and other physical objects they encounter. David Belle, the creator of Parkour and founding member of the Yamakasi,⁷³ (a group dedicated to exploring Parkour), originally developed it as a type of combative action, aimed at escaping enemies by moving deftly through landscapes. The underlying philosophy of Parkour advocates the most efficient method of movement to achieve the goal of moving swiftly and easily through the environment. For this reason, Parkour purists shun acrobatic tricks and spectacle found in other spin-off styles of the movement such as Freerunning. In an urban environment, the political implications of Parkour are inescapable. The body actively resists how the constructed environment intends it to be deployed in space by actively moving over and around fences, walls, seating, buildings and roads. *Traceur* An Tran, states, 'Parkour is a movement of reclaiming the urban landscape' (Tran 2007 p. 1). Parkour requires the participant to have a high level of dexterity and strength (similar to that needed for gymnastics) to be able to manage feats such as vaulting and scaling vertical surfaces.

I began to incorporate elements of Parkour into the archive *Boundary Road*, as a way of challenging the assumed passage of pedestrian movement in the urban landscape around Williamstown and Altona. I noted potential ways of navigating around objects in the landscape as I walked from Point Gellibrand along the shoreline (diverting through the Williamstown Botanical Gardens) to the Surf Lifesaving Club. At times I tested simple actions such as dropping from a small wall on to sand, jumping over a low fence and swinging under a handrail, although my rudimentary attempts at Parkour demonstrated the gulf between what an experienced *traceur* might achieve and my own physical limitations. Nevertheless, I persisted with envisioning how Parkour might be enacted in my familiar landscape and wrote rough notes as aide memoires to use later in the studio.⁷⁴

⁷² Also known as *l'art du déplacement*.

⁷³ Eight *traceurs* (including David Belle) formed the group Yamakasi, dedicated to exploring Parkour in 1997 and later split. Some of the group's members released the feature film, *Yamakasi*, (2001).

⁷⁴ See Appendix 2: Parkour Activity

Stage Two

By contrast to the awkwardness and self-consciousness of being in the external environment, returning to the dance studio and exploring the possibilities of Parkour in an imagined landscape was a welcome relief. My generative actions towards phrase-building were more informed through experiencing the outdoor component, as the remembered actions of my body, including the feeling of impact and landings as well as self-righting in balances, the pull of arms muscles when leaning off handrails, were significant prompts that informed my development of the movement in *Boundary Road*. I built phrases that emulated movements such as swinging, vaulting and hanging and dropping, all activities I had seen and experienced of Parkour. An important element with this archive was for me to build and maintain a fast intensity, which left little room for the performer to consider anything but the concentration required to perform the movement. As I developed the movement in the studio, I kept extending my own physical limitations past the point where I might otherwise wind down the movement.

I then taught the dance first to Cobie, and later Amelia. Through this process of breaking down the movement into sections to be taught, the movement was slightly changed and refined. As this process occurred twice, the movement altered on both occasions. From the beginning it was a piece that required large energy expenditure from the performers, and the most frequent elements that needed addressing in rehearsal were safe alignment and breath. Once the dance was in its final form, the dancers chose to practice it at every rehearsal to maintain the stamina required to perform it.

Final Stage and Performance

As this archive was connected to the idea of Parkour, navigating the spatial components of the performance venue was important. The process of blocking the movement in the space was quickly done and the movement pathways were determined by the length and direction of the various phrases. As we blocked the movement we incorporated the physical connection with the dancers and the objects in the space such as the walls, pillars and the boat.

Mapping Boundaries, Contesting Borders

My intention with *Boundary Road* was to explore a geographical mapping of the site of Williamstown purely through the deployment of the body in the physical environment without resorting to an imagined realm. For this reason I explored a fast sequence of movement which left little room for the mind to access other areas except for the concentration required to perform the movement. As this archive was essentially concerned

with transgressing boundaries, in the following analysis of process I look at the potential for choreography to explore this area.

Dance academic, Jens Richard Giersdorf, describes walking across the Oberbaumbrücke Bridge linking East and West Germany on November 10th 1989, just after the fall of the Berlin Wall as a seminal moment in his life. Once a resident of East Germany, Giersdorf describes the act of walking as a 'double perspective' where 'the awareness of my corporeal senses even as I visualised myself among the other walking bodies created my own spatial and historical significance' (Giersdorf 2003, p. 415). He explores the implications of how a physical experience of border crossing (admittedly a momentous one) might extend to an exploration of border crossing through choreography.

The impact of the political situation leading to the rise and fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent reunification was experienced by Giersdorf first-hand. He explores how the notion of borders might be investigated choreographically by an analysis of the work of two German choreographers, Jo Fabian and Sasha Waltz. Fabian and Waltz, from East and West Germany respectively, both choreographed performances addressing East German identity⁷⁵ after the fall of the Berlin Wall.⁷⁶ Giersdorf examines in detail the background of each choreographer and explores how their individual choreographic approach manifested in performances, that, in his opinion, dealt successfully (Fabian), and less successfully (Waltz), with the representation of their subject.

Giersdorf's comparative analysis of these choreographers' work points to a concern with how agency is located in their choreography. Briefly, the essential point of difference within the works seems to reside in the interaction of the work with the audience. In Fabian's work, the audience entered and reacted to the work as witnesses, a viewing distinction I discuss at the beginning of Chapter One. The act of witnessing occurred through lengthy periods of stillness, repetition in the performance and the continued resistance of Fabian to engage the performers in 'dancerly' activity. Thus Giersdorf argues, this work 'vividly captured the stagnation of East German life by employing reduced and restricted movements onstage' (Giersdorf 2003, p. 428). Many of the audience became frustrated and enacted their frustration by initially showing restlessness, and eventually some finally venting their anger by leaving the performance. Fabian's point, that 'bodies are staged in history, and that they

⁷⁵ The works Giersdorf interrogates are Jo Fabian's: *Pax Germania*, 1997 and Sasha Waltz's: *Allee der Kosmonauten*, 1996

⁷⁶ The fall of the Berlin Wall occurred on 9.11.1989

respond to manipulation' (Giersdorf 2003, p. 432) is a point made by the actions of the audience. In effect, the audience departing the performance was an essential part of the work.

In contrast to this, Giersdorf posits that Waltz's work focuses on a representation of an imagined East German family through her choice to portray the dancers as identifiable characters. He points to Waltz's lack of reflexivity in the work, particularly demonstrated in her process where she door-knocked East German homes to find residents willing to be interviewed in order to gather material for her dance. Giersdorf takes umbrage at the insensitivity of this act, pointing to the conditions of surveillance the East German residents were subject to during the pre-unification period.

If I were to engage in a comparison with these two choreographers, it would appear that my own work is situated closer to Waltz's than it might be to Fabian's. Certainly Waltz's process of door-knocking contains elements of what I have attempted with *Beyond Shore* through the use of dialogical practices.⁷⁷ In regards to Fabian's work, as I emphasise in Chapter One on methodology, although I am interested in the type of performance that seeks to engage the audience as witnesses (such as Forced Entertainment's use of the tour bus), I don't claim that *Beyond Shore* ventures into that territory.

Giersdorf believes that the agency of the dancers in Waltz's work remains external to their bodies. In effect he laments the lack of agency as emanating directly from the dancers' bodies due to the physicality required to produce the movement. He writes: 'the location of the movement vocabulary emphasizes the bodies' complete absorption into a highly acrobatic situation without illuminating the social reasons for these situations, and without situating the initiation from the bodies themselves' (Giersdorf 2003, p. 423).

While not being in a position to fully critique Waltz's work myself, I am interested in Giersdorf's claim of the lack of agency on the dancer's part. Without knowing how the choreographer and dancer(s) in both Fabian's and Waltz's work interact, it would be difficult to assume where the agency resides in each group, and importantly how it was grounded in the work from the beginning. I maintain that the dancers' role in contemporary dance-making is perhaps more democratic and thus more likely to yield agency than Giersdorf suggests. Moreover, choreographic processes that spend time deeply considering effects of external stimuli on the dancers' bodies and how these may be transferred and transformed in the body to arrive at a movement, is in itself a powerful act. Whether the outcome translates into a

⁷⁷ I am referring to the Artists' Photographic Project, the Actor's Interview, and tasks from the Williamstown Workshops.

particular statement in performance is another matter and circumnavigating this area to create a dance is part of the choreographic process.

Perhaps the reason for Waltz's failed choreography is linked more to her insistence in representing an imagined subject, rather than the failure of dance per se to be able to address a subject as complex as post-1989, East German identity through choreography.

In any case, *Beyond Shore* was a performance that resisted the representation of any particular character. The performance used a more abstract depiction of women in the environment. Despite the strength of the historic female voice that pervaded archives such as *Claw Tree Park* and *Beyond Shore*. Giersdorf's 'double perspective' as a walker on the Oberbaumbrücke bridge, in which he simultaneously feels the act of walking and perceives the movement from a distance, as if he is being surveyed, is a concept I relate to as a choreographer. The connected moment is a combination of two elements: one that is concerned with the action of the moment and one that perceives the action of the moment from an external viewpoint. As I moved through my own rudimentary attempts at Parkour in Williamstown, I was conscious of how my actions may be viewed by other bystanders who happen at a particular time to notice my actions. In effect, the double perspective was a way of becoming aware of my own presence in the site and how this was noticed or ignored by other people in the surrounding space. Using a movement strategy such as Parkour which, has as its core a motivation to transgress boundaries, enhanced my perception of surveillance.

In addition, moving past the comfortable limits of the dancers' physicality was a way of bringing the idea of transgressing the landscape into the site of the body. Author and teacher on performance and physical expression, Lorna Marshall, discusses the concept of 'going further' in body work believing 'it engages the brain in fresh experiences and carves completely new trails through your neurological experiences' (Marshall 2008, p. 100). In rehearsal, pursuing the gut wrenching physicality of *Boundary Road* was an experience both I and the dancers were challenged by, and I believe, largely enjoyed. Whether that translated to an experience where the dancers were able to connect further with the site of Williamstown remains an unanswered question. As a choreographer, it was a way to develop other pathways for the dancers that were not exclusively drawn from my own experiences. The dancers experience and depiction of their own private and physical boundaries is what eventuated as they learnt and performed *Boundary Road*.

Archive Nine – Racecourse

Geographical Location

Kororoit Creek Road

Nelson Place

Contents

A one minute dance film *Ruined* directed by myself and danced by Sally Grage-Moore.

A series of photographs taken by myself of Victorian shopfronts on Nelson Place.

A further series of photographs taken by myself of contemporary shops and the high-rise flats, Nelson Heights, along Nelson Place.

Artists' Photographs

Order of Construction

This archive was created sixth in the series of ten. Like several of the others, the gestation period was lengthy; work began on it two years before the performance. The final workings of it were devised in *Seaworks*.

Description of Performance

Racecourse began with Amelia in the centre of the space, and Cobie and Sally flanking her, downstage, leaning back onto two pillars. Amelia begins to perform a weighted series of movements, remaining in the central area of the space. Cobie and Sally perform in unison, a series of six movements in quick succession before they run to the next pillar. They repeat the same movements before running to the next pillar further upstage, away from the audience. As Amelia continues the steady pace of her dance, the other two dancers continue their movements from pillar to pillar which takes them further away from the audience. As they recede into the space, Amelia's presence becomes more pronounced.

The Artists' Photographs

This archive was very influenced by the Artists' Photographs Project in which I designed a dialogical process with four, local artists in the community of Williamstown. I provided the artists with a disposable camera and asked them to photograph the local area. Over the course of a week, they each took approximately twenty-five photographs, which I developed and used as archive material. As might be expected the results were varied and interesting.

Several of the artists had chosen to focus half their shots on the shoreline (including the Blister formation), Point Gellibrand and Nelson Place, key sites I was using myself. Of further interest were the unexpected photographs of industrial sites, the skate park, cyclone fences -- places not normally associated with historic Williamstown. Two of the artists chose to focus on more feminine subjects such as flowers, wrought iron furniture, houses, and sea china washed up on the shore.

Studio Work

In my own studio work I used the photographs spread out on the floor as a method of dancing the artist's perspective. I arranged the photographs in a corner of the studio on the ground and then I improvised with my eyes closed in another part of the room. During the improvisation, as I became disorientated, I would open my eyes and locate the photos. I would steal a quick glance at one of the images and then resume my improvisations with closed eyes. Whatever image I was left with, I improvised with that in mind. In this way the work was built from an engagement with the notion of collage.

Further studio work built on these initial improvisations and the dance developed into a physical exploration of weight and heaviness.

Start with feet in parallel away from the wall with one hand on the wall supporting your weight, turn sharply away from the wall to the corner and lift your hands above your head, lean away from your centre line as your arms open up like a bow and arrow. Keep leaning until you are about to fall and as you do, catch yourself in a lunge and straighten up. Shoulders and arms settle. Hold out one hand as if it is to be touched and then replace the other hand with it as you catch yourself from falling again. Settle the arms and shoulders. Pause. Kick roughly towards the wall and once again lean on it. Feel your way along the wall, searching for grooves. Step back three steps away from the wall and raise your arms, looking through the framing shape of your hands.

Description of Dance Movements – *Racecourse*

Final Stage and Performance

The final stage of the performance project was moving into *Seaworks*. The work was assembled in the space after I chose to work more explicitly with the receding/advancing presence of the dancers within the spatial dimensions of *Seaworks*.

Using Collage

In this archive, *Racecourse*, collage was used quite explicitly in the process towards devising the dance. I used the photographs in the most obvious way I could imagine – I literally ‘danced the collage’, and the improvisations were a way of extending the conditions of the dialogical relationship with the artists – a way of insisting on ‘using’ their contribution to the project. I repeated this process several times in the studio and slowly fragments of movement solidified.

After this period, I discarded the literal workings of the photographs and used a second process of collage - finding, cutting and pasting – to work at the next level of devising. The elements that formed this next stage of the collage were: fragments of movement from the improvisations, the site visit to Kororoit Creek Road, the performance site of *Seaworks*, the photographs from the artists’ photographs project, and the process of the video of the *Racecourse* solo.

Splicing strikes me as a useful (if not altogether accurate) way of describing the choreographer’s relationship to the raw materials of the events. That is he approaches his older works the way a film or video editor manipulates his daily rushes: cutting, assembling and reassembling the fragments at will.

(Copeland 2002, p. 18)

The assembling technique common to collage eschews a unified holistic approach to artwork. In this archive, using the photographs in such a way meant my improvised sequences became less grounded in my own psychology, and were more of a response to external stimuli. In this spirit, I was able to add movements, gestures, and pauses into any part of the dance during its development. Processing information in the body through dance is, for me, a fast and multi-sensorial experience. As I work in the studio I perceive and process multiple perspectives that connect with spatial arrangements, timing, thoughts, memories and action. Some discoveries of actions or thoughts stay throughout the exploration and can be accessed multiple times, sometimes sessions apart. Different bits of information can be layered on top or underneath each other, but they can also lie next to each other, and they bleed into one another. They can exist as temporal phrases, sometimes simple metaphors and sometimes they can be found within the materiality of the movement itself. I mention this multiplicity, because it is this complex and shifting *becoming* of the movement form which makes dance dynamic (and I use the word dynamic in the sense that it is active, potent, a force in operation).

Working dialogically in art means the artist must discount claims of control and ownership over the work, and accept that the dialogical relationship may present unanticipated outcomes. Analysing the two principle methods in this project – dialogical practices and

collage – uncovers similarities at the root of both. Copeland claims that the activity of collage often ‘is divided against itself. One’s attention, one’s allegiances, are drawn in multiple often conflicted directions’ (Copeland 2002, p. 26). The fragmentation found in collage can be likened to the dispersion of ‘voices’ that might be uncovered in the dialogical process. The exchange with others weakens the sole voice of the artist without removing their presence.

Working with collage as a technique to make movement often disrupts pre-conceived movement pathways, allowing for an exploration that attends to the new. Although this may not always be a desired outcome, it can be useful to promote other ways of envisioning a subject or initiate new physical pathways. My own explorations in the studio are through my own body and are thus an expression of myself in the world. Without knowing intimately how others improvise, I am loathe to say what characterises my explorations. However, in the archive listings I have alluded to how my improvisations often connect unwittingly to representations of figures. Collage is a useful technique to counter these (sometimes) overly nostalgic ways of thinking through a subject. In this project, with its focus on place through the body, nostalgia and memory do play a part. The technique of collage can serve to both enhance and disrupt expectations of how these elements are figured in the work.

Dance is able to work constructively with collage and dialogical practices due to its ability to encompass free-wheeling methods of envisaging and devising way of being: not only through the assimilation of poetic and pragmatic understandings of space but through knowledge that considers temporal, cognitive and dynamic modes of operation.

Archive Ten – Kororoit Creek Road

Geographical Location

Altona Coastal Park and JT Gray Reserve (off Kororoit Creek Road).

Contents

Creative Writing – Voice

List of Indigenous Vegetation

Order of Construction

This archive was created first in the series of ten and remained in a fluid and changing state for the majority of the project's duration.

Description of Performance

In this archive the dancers begin in a tight trio formation in the middle of the space. Moving in unison they form simple walking steps to make a cross formation floor pattern. As the walking continues, it is interspersed with some simple phrases that become increasingly complex with the addition of tilts, turns, arms movements or changes of direction. Moving in this way, primarily in unison, while still maintaining the pedestrian rhythm, the group drifts towards the back of the space, making a long shallow arc as they go, eventually slipping out of sight.

Development

This archive was directly influenced by my experience of one of the key sites in *Beyond Shore*, a large grassy coastal park off Kororoit Creek Road. Briefly, the site's history has seen it used for various purposes: initially as the site for the Williamstown Racecourse (only the grandstand now reduced to rubble, and a lone pine tree remain), as an army camp in World War II, and finally, after the war, the site of a large-scale migrant hostel catering for the enormous flux of post war immigrants to Melbourne.

I was present on a wide expanse of grassland early in the winter season, when hundreds of migrating birds crossed overhead. I was struck by both their numbers, and the purposefulness of their direction. The impression of the birds unfailingly flying across the sky annually, and

over time, being observed by different eyes during their enduring migration to warmer climates, formed the premise for this archive. The large skies uncluttered by buildings also provided an unusually expansive vista. The dramatic cloud formations by day, the lack of lighting spill at night resulting in clear, starry night skies, the bleakness of the landscape, as well as the flight of the birds, all infiltrated my initial improvisations towards the movement for *Kororoit Creek Road*.

I was conscious of the stability of the natural landscape throughout the various manifestations, and how despite the changes, the landscape and creatures endured.

Stage One

As mentioned, this archive was developed first in the series and perhaps as a result of this it was the most 'worked' of all the archives. Initially it was a very simple structure, consisting of a walked floor pattern of a cross formation and two separate phrases of short movement that were designed to slot into the cross formation at particular passages. I deliberately kept the formation loose, so when I performed the work I was able to begin anywhere in the space and form a curving arc from one end of the room to the other. Initially this archive retained a loose and light feeling, the beginnings of which were developed from ideas relating to navigational points of stars, wind and bird flight.

Stage Two

As I taught this dance to the dancers, as often happens with seemingly straightforward phrases, the simplicity of the patterning combined with the insertions of the two set phrases, and the dancers' choice of spatial directions, made *Kororoit Creek Road* surprisingly complicated to learn. Much of the lightness and ease of the dance's initial workings became lost with the increased focus on clarifying points and setting detail.

During the site excursions we spent time at the large grassland expanse of the Altona Coastal Park to observe the crumbled grandstand, the lone pine tree, vegetation, the skies and the activity of birds. While on this excursion, I gave the dancers notes on vegetation found in the area, as well as a piece of text I had written. The dancers took video footage and photographs while in the landscape, some of which were later used in the performance.

After some time away from this dance, when we met again I was interested in trying to capture some sense of the bird flight I had witnessed at the coastal park, in order to regain the lightness that was originally present in this phrase. I showed the dancers some footage of starlings flocking. Their huge numbers and manner of movement is quite dramatic. My intention was that by watching the two-dimensional movement we might find a way to tease

out some nuances in our own movement. This was a pivotal rehearsal as introducing a vision of the quickness and radar-like behaviour of the bird group only served to enhance the gulf between our movement and that of the birds. At this rehearsal we discarded some of the already learnt material and together improvised to discover new material. My memories of this rehearsal are that it was difficult, and the movement discoveries felt forced. Subsequent rehearsals were spent reworking the original movement to eventually reach the final form.

Final Stage and Performance

The final stage of moving into the performance venue involved a significant spatial change causing much confusion as the dancers had to adjust to new directions. Yet again they learnt it in its new positioning, but by then the phrase had lost all traces of the lightness it initially had and the final rendering was more sombre.

Resonance of Emotions

Perhaps fittingly, the final archive discussion should rest with the resonance of the choreographic work *Beyond Shore* as a whole. In the previous archive I have discussed how assemblage works within each discrete archive, focussing on Archive Nine – *Racecourse*, as an example. Here I would like to discuss the positioning of the entire ten archives together to operate as a whole performance. Archive Ten is an apt choice for this reflective analysis to occur as it was the archive longest in production, the geographical site of it was one of the three key sites and it was situated last in the final order of performance.

The final movement of *Beyond Shore* consisted of all the dancers moving as a group upstage before they finally move out of sight. This passage is extended, and for me this moment offered a resonance to the work that suggested the enduring presence of the human body. I have mentioned in the introduction to the archive listing that my intention with this document is not to extrapolate on my musings and thematic drives within the work as much as to speak to the process of creating the archives. Arts theorist Nikos Papastergiadis believes the ‘melancholic moments that precede insight and discovery’ are part of the research journey (Papastergiadis 2002, p. 9). In this final archive I would like to include a discussion on the emotional status of *Beyond Shore*. Undoubtedly working towards a creative outcome can be an emotional time, however it is how the emotion exists in the work that is my focus in this discussion. For me, the emotion is inherent within the work, embedded in the dancers’ comprehension of the process of the work as well as in their performances.

Art critic, Robert Nelson, points to the subjective nature of emotions:

(E)motions aren't the constant that we might imagine just by feeling them, with their internal complexness and integrity in the heart. Emotions feature in each historical epoch in relation to a matrix of moral ideals; they don't arise directly from nature and express deterministic biological certainties. Rather, they're subject to the same cultural relativity that affects any human phenomenon that we handle through language.

(Nelson 2007, p. 1)

Nelson posits that in the quest to achieve emotion in their artworks, artists can be both analytical and manipulative. The postmodern era of dance, of which *Beyond Shore* is a part, ushered in performances that became something more than a representation of emotion, opening up stratas of the work that allowed for other viewer engagements.

This research investigated how aspects of the site of Williamstown might be rendered through dance and this happened to be through processes that related to journeying and (dis)placement. Many of the physical exercises to this end concentrated on the *feeling* body: a distinction Canadian dancer and performance theorist, Erin Manning, makes between the *feeling* body and the *emotional* body. In her manifesto that describes propositions for thought in motion, Manning cautions 'Don't mistake feeling for emotion. Emotion is the description of an affect, feelings is its force' (Manning 2008, p. 6). Her objective is to extend the nexus between movement and thought to move beyond merely knowing the world to being with the world. Manning's interest lies with movement that is 'of-the-moment', improvised and situationally responsive. While Manning's directive is particularly useful for improvisatory forms of dance, in my process, where choreography remains the primary mode of operation, the presence of recollection and remembering becomes more significant.

Consider the following quote from Peggy Phelan on artist Andy Warhol's oeuvre from the 1960s. When he made an abrupt shift away from his earlier illustrative work to reproducible techniques such as printmaking, Warhol was accused of making work devoid of emotion. Outlining the rigour involved in removing emotion from work, Phelan argues that Warhol's works could be considered performative. The way he addresses *how* the work connects with the viewer could be associated with performance and process rather than a complete or fixed work. Phelan:

In order to free the stage for the observer's reception, Warhol tried to renounce the trace of himself as maker. What he came to discover, however, was the impossibility of his renunciation, and he gradually learned to renounce this renunciation too. For in erasing his 'emotion' from the content of his work, he invariably created a smudge, a blur, ... that marked the effort of that erasure. The spectator confronts Warhol's expression of his desire to disappear, to be as dead, which is the backbeat to his equally intense effort to create the art work itself.

(Phelan 1999a, p. 224)

This performative aspect of Warhol's work, where he is 'as interested in the reception as the production of art' (Phelan 1999a, p. 224) requires the role of a viewer within the work to 'complete' it. This is now a familiar concept in post-modern art practices. Phelan posits that Warhol occupies a dual positioning in his work - he ostensibly removes his emotions from the work, while at the same time lingers to see what effect the work has on the viewer.

When the choreographer remains outside of the dance work,⁷⁸ how emotion might be staged and received is of significance, as remaining outside situates the choreographer as viewer. For large tracts of time as *Beyond Shore* was created, I felt the dancers were not emotionally invested in the work, nor did I expect them to be. In *Beyond Shore*, I had no expectations that the dancers were to reproduce emotions that I might associate with living in the site of Williamstown. I did not expect the dancers to represent characters or identities found in Williamstown, nor did I wish for them to explore onstage, emotions tied to geographical sites. I believed the subtleties contained within their performances would be enough for the viewer to remain attentive to the qualities of place, emotional or otherwise, in the work. Choreographer Merce Cunningham remarked on the abstract nature of his work 'I don't think what I do is non-expressive. It's just that I don't try to inflict it on anyone' (Copeland 2002, p. 18). Cunningham's work celebrates movement for movement's sake, without overriding thematic content or the expectation that meaning is to be gleaned from it.

In my own process I work more explicitly with expression by using sound, text and emotions in the studio. In *Beyond Shore* I experimented with emotional states in the studio to an extent where like a photograph, or a recording, they became another device to work with. My directions, 'try doing this as sadly as you can', 'feel bored', were attempts to explore, and even understand, what I was trying to find in the work. Using emotion 'manipulatively' is a severe way of describing these sometimes playful explorations, but in the end, these overlaid emotions were like other interventions and influences - they either remained as traces in the movement material, or were both consciously and unconsciously discarded, as the dancers' knowledge and own embodiment of the dances became greater than mine and became the driving force of the entire performance.

For a choreographer, Phelan's acknowledgement of the 'effort' involved in removing emotion from the work is pertinent. It is perhaps incomprehensible that a form such as choreographed movement, experienced repeatedly in rehearsal, and imbued with effort, labour and sheer time, could hope to negate emotion. Working with choreographed movement is the antithesis

⁷⁸ I propose that remaining 'outside' of the work as opposed to performing in the work allows for a vastly different way of knowing the work.

of mass production, so the analogy with Warhol's methods is perhaps tenuous; however the performative nature of both remains central to their production. I suggest in *Beyond Shore*, the removal of the 'emotion' in the work occurred as the dancers embodied the movement, and was in turn encountered by the viewer in their purposeful and resolute performances.

The 'smudge', that part of the work that retained a stain of emotion, was seen in my print. It belonged with my own directions, and lay in the transitions between archives where I used extended still moments, eye contact between the dancers, and slight gestural touches. These, along with the ordering of the archives, were my sole manipulations of emotion in *Beyond Shore*, meaningful in ways only I knew. The dancers performed the work, not as emotive representations of historical figures inhabiting Williamstown, but as contemporary women, moving through the task of dancing, *feeling* as they went.

Conclusion

Dancers and audiences are always already implicated in the power they may seek to oppose. This complicitous understanding nevertheless opens up the discourse of theatre dance and allows new kinds of presences to become perceptible, presences that exceed the literal meaning of the acts that performatively create them.

(Burt 2004, p. 44)

The second part of the thesis has focused on the creative processes that underpinned the performance *Beyond Shore* and were designed to explore the discursive site of Williamstown. Many of my 'findings' were ways of thinking through dance practices alongside frameworks of site-specificity found in the visual arts. Due to the ephemeral nature of dance, perhaps it is no surprise that my focus has centred on the unfixed and discursive envisioning of site.

My fieldwork experience, observing the work of *Tracks*, was framed by a performance ethnography methodology as a concerted effort to understand the company's work from a scholarly/artistic perspective. This enabled me to situate my findings within my own dance experience and to consider them through the time, space and materiality of my own site-related dance performance. Within this framework, a key area of engagement was how dialogical practices may exist in the dance making process, and how they contribute to the production of dance.

Articulating the methodological relationship between the Tracks Dance and the process of choreography towards *Beyond Shore* focused largely on the displacement and refiguring of the body in the ethnographic landscape. The immersive nature of the fieldwork resulted in my decision to work in a way that privileged performance as a way of knowing, as a method of critical inquiry and as a mode of understanding. Rather than mimic the key areas of Tracks' practice that for me were the most compelling - the notion of place, their relationships with others, and their longevity - and attempt to create a similar model to how Tracks work, I chose instead to reflect on these areas in a way that reflected my own choreographic practice. Thus, place became an exploration of site in Williamstown, relationships with others became an exploration of dialogical practices with the dancers and other artists, and longevity was reflected through my own long relationship with the site of Williamstown.

I have posited the view that the dancers' relationship to site was strengthened through their excursions into the Williamstown landscape. Their 'findings' through the site explorations were embodied in their performance of *Beyond Shore*. My own personal understandings about the potential of dialogical practices to contribute to the production of choreography were expanded. A further investigation of how dialogical practices might extend to include the audience remains an aim for the future.

The final performance focused on choreography that was able to be (re)performed. Thus the relationship between the devising and subsequent setting of the dance remained clouded in distance, as we relied on memory as the primary source to recover the embodied experience of the site explorations. The time and distance between the gathering of material in the site, and the subsequent process to reach the eventual dance, exposes the reality of losing immediacy and freshness in the work. For the purposes of this reflective research however, reclaiming the movement and ideas from which each archive was devised was helpful in theorizing the relationship between the location(s) of body and site.

My own explorations outside of the studio provided the performance of *Beyond Shore* with rich pickings of embodied understandings. Not only did this manifest in the performance of *Beyond Shore*, but the site experiences remain vivid and useful in my own (and the dancers') knowledge and understanding of the nexus of site and dance. In this sense my research has extended into the world through the dancers as they continue to work with others and develop their own practices. The resonance of the *Beyond Shore* experience will continue to filter through their bodies and emerge in multifaceted ways.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: *Beyond Shore* Program Information

Beyond Shore

Concept & Direction	Josie Daw
Choreography	Josie Daw and Dancers
Performers	Sally Grage-Moore, Cobie Orger and Amelia McQueen
Projections	Josie Daw and Cobie Orger
Lighting	Kimberly Kwa
Sound	Luke Paulding
Costumes	Josie Daw
Voice	Milijana Cancar
Understudy	Zoe Scoglio
Principal Supervisor	Dr Elizabeth Dempster
Project Supervisor	Jude Walton

Choreographic notes

Beyond Shore is the presentation of my PhD research. It explores the repercussions of moving dance making activities away from the studio and asks how choreographic practice might be challenged or transformed when it is pursued ‘on location’, to allow for other understandings of site and location to infiltrate the choreography.

Over a period of three years, I have made a collection of ten, short dance archives, all built from real and imagined geographies of Williamstown. The final rendering of the work has been to move it to *Seaworks* – into a space once used as machinery shed for boat and shipbuilding. Watching the dancers physically negotiate this industrial room, with its harsh floor and fine dirt, extended what I felt was central to many of the archives - how place is ‘met’ through the body.

Josie Daw

Sound notes

In first walking through Williamstown and into this disused boat shed, I was fascinated with the sounds of this seaside community: the perennial dialogue of people, birds and ships. When asked to construct an entirely electronic score, I felt inspired to reconstruct these sounds and images, yet still approaching the electronic sounds idiomatically and allowing transitions into more abstract territories. I attempted to use this reconstructed, stylised approach to create sounds and music that would enhance the concepts inherent in the choreography.

Luke Paulding

Seaworks
Nelson Place, Williamstown
4-7 December, 2008

Appendix 2: Parkour Activity

See Archive Seven pp 101 - 105

Parkour Activity (Some imagined, some experienced)

Route from Point Gellibrand to Surf Lifesaving Club

Running along footpath

Hurdle over Pt Gellibrand low post and chain fence

Three at a time steps across footbridge. Jump off before final five steps by one handed vault over side rail.

Running balance along side of kerb.

Jump off low wall into soft sand at Williamstown beach.

Duck under metal hand rail (elbow height).

Weaving in between pine trees near Williamstown Botanical Gardens (from South West corner to Gate of Gardens).

Scrabbling up slide at children's playground (now defunct).

Using tree branch to swing onto high picket fence surrounding gardens, drop onto other side.

Appendix 3: Dancers' Voices

See Archive Three pp 78-85

Voice One⁷⁹

Five things:

The sound of water

The bald apple

Return to reality

Boat Club – what's locked up inside?

Mystery

Scott loves Sally

Scott – convict

Sally – pendant lady: she discovers Scott in boat house

Boat locked up

He escaped and hid out in boat club

Sally – comes to boat house to feed pigeons and escape from family. One day she enters only to realise another presence has entered the space. She creeps around slowly quietly, slightly nervous. Looks through windows. Around corners. Underneath decrepit table. Eventually she climbs up to shored boat on stands in abandoned club and peers inside.

She sees blood on the hull and meters away from blood she notices the body of a sleeping man.

His wrists are bloody.

He's filthy.

Black toenails.

Resting on one arm, he breathes loudly.

Body is quite contorted but he looks peaceful.

⁷⁹ To keep in the spirit of the rough written notes of the dancers, I have deliberately kept the grammar within these documents unpolished unless it interferes with the reader's clarity.

She leaves him some bread - scraps that she was to feed the birds.

She covers him with a tarp lying nearby

She leaves quietly.

Everyday for five days she returns to repeat this ritual, on the sixth day the man is not there.

She looks around for him but he is nowhere to be found. A little disappointed she sits down in the boat and begins to think about who this man is and what his story might be.

She begins to invent stories about his history and character. How he was brought up by his older brother, who was uneducated and violent. But being a big brother he was idolised and respected.

They were nomadic, frequently sleeping under the stars, in docked boats, on the shore, under people's front verandahs.

She imagines that they used to play games. Physical games that involved lots of jumping and climbing (that is why he was so strong looking). She imagines that they use to steal food from local bakeries by sneaking in the back while the baker was wiping his hands clean from all the dough. Although their life was tough they were carefree and bound by no one or nothing.

One day the younger brother wakes up from a restless night of sleep to see his brother in the corner rocking back and forth, muttering, gibbering incessantly. He goes to touch his shoulder but his brother launches out at him, slapping his hand away and sending him flying to the ground. His head knocks the ground and sends him unconscious. When he comes to he finds his hands and feet bound and hanging from a tree.⁸⁰

She gets obsessed with inventing these stories so after a time she begins to believe that they're actually real.

She commits suicide.

Strips naked, hangs her choker on foliage, walks into the water and drowns herself.

⁸⁰ Sketch included with notes

Voice Two

Why isn't this young man at school? Can you learn something important from fishing? Why do I assume it is only good to learn things which are important? In the past fishing was important.

My sneaker is the most false thing here.

Wood, steel, hunting – and within these surrounds my Beijing 'Sonverse'. White shoes like some lady's fancy.

Williamstown

Look right

Look left

Look down

Temporary

Sticks on the ground

ba ba ba ba ba ba

ba ba ba ba

ba ba ba

- that's my feet on the ground-

empty

overgrown

bus

stop

tyre 'doughie' marks on road

vs

father and son doing the gardening

the coolest cricket pitch in the world

singular people in the landscape

person scaring seagulls

swimming laps in ocean

old man watching road then retreating

I was a solitary figure and I meant it that way. Every other solo walker in the world wishes they were as untouchable as me. The old man staring at the road then retreating back the way he came, he wishes he was as stoic as I am. You can't touch this.

I was going exploring. I knew through the fence there were more boats 'cause I could see them from the furthest edge of the pier. There were no people there now, so I wanted to get in. I found a side path and moved along the brick wall until it came close to the wire fence. I used my back on the bricks and my feet on the fence to push and slide my way higher, higher and higher. My calves started to hurt, my back was burning, adrenalin was shaking me. Suddenly I was blinded, intense glare in my eyes and my fear spiked madly, my muscles jerked to still.

Below me on the other side of the fence was a very small man. Next to him, moving excitedly, eyes fixed on me was a huge dog. He was only slightly shorter than the man. I had no time to become confused, the image said danger and I saw the man holding a small mirror. I let my legs go soft, causing my body to fall towards the ground. Landing was painful but I could still run. Run and run and run.

Voice Three

Answering text messages from B about moving her stuff in and my stuff out...

Gardener raking across the lawn behind where I am sitting.

Who is the woman in the photo?

Whose earring do I have in my envelope?

Are the earring, story and woman in the photo connected somehow?

Two young women, friends, walk past me through the gardens. Actually they were heading towards me (where I am sitting on the bench), but are now deviating to take the path further away from me, and now heading towards the gate behind me. I hear snatches of voices but can't hear words, or what they are talking about.

A wattlebird is busy on a tree directly in front of me – looking for flowers, now it's flown to the next tree, a small bush. Another wattle bird is directly above me in the tree which is hanging over the bench I am sitting on. The two birds fly to meet up on another tree...

Plane flies overhead. Not visible, heavy cloud. Train blasts a whistle. Train passing through crossing – I can hear the clanging bells.

Another aeroplane passes overhead.

Two lovers sit on a park bench....meeting for lunch in the rotunda on the beach.

Two young boys, brothers, one older than the other walking through the gardens. They are calling to a pet lovebird – bright green with a pink head, which is walking behind them on the path...

Waves, wind, sand, rocks as I eat my lunch...

Pine cones scatter far and wide across the grass beneath the pine trees keep the gardener busy. It is quiet amidst the trees and few people pass by during the day. Occasionally, fine gentry folk stroll by, skirts swishing, bonnets bobbing, canes tapping, top hats tipped to the gardener who bows ever so slightly as they pass. Sometimes rowdy, unruly children scamper after them, kept in tow by frustrated governesses. But long period of time go by which pass in relative silence – just the trees, flowers and occasional wildlife for company. Wattlebirds that fly into the garden in pairs, tripping from tree to tree looking for nectar. Sometimes big flocks of starlings fly overhead circling, darting, keeping formations moving as if like one single organism instead of a flock of sixty small birds. Their antics capture the attention of the gardener as he works, sometimes keeping him awe-inspired for minutes at a time with their playful antics, only to disappear suddenly and be gone.

Once, a rustling in the bushes suggested something more than an animal. A crumpled, scraggy form extracted itself from the undergrowth and stumbled away across the garden in the dim light that was falling with the dusk. A woman, young, unkempt, hair long and wild, rags for clothing fled to more cover on the edge of the garden amidst the large oaks and the shadows underneath.

Startled and curious, the gardener edged closer to the bushes from where she had emerged, searching the undergrowth, a mixture of excitement, and fear...

He found a blue glass drop earring amongst the leaves.

Kids riding their bikes in the distance outside the surf club. Sitting on the verandah of the club once I get closer, playing a complicated game. Kids inhabit a lot of these places/spaces.

Animal tracks on sand as I walk along the beach. Soft, round , doggy paw prints others with sharper, claw like toes, birdy three-pronged prints which go in crazy curved lines.

Houses prickling up along the esplanade, following the curve of the beach. What is happening in there?

Someone is standing on the breakwater, they stay there for a long time. As I get closer I realise it is a fisherman.

Appendix 4: First interview - David McMicken

Interview between David McMicken, Artistic Director of Tracks Dance and Josie Daw.
Held on 20 April 2006 at the Australian Youth Dance Festival, Horsham, Victoria.⁸¹

JD Okay. Thanks David for agreeing to be interviewed.

DM Pleasure.

JD Written in the Tracks delivery plan 2006/2008, is the statement that living and working in the Northern Territory and Darwin has led to a re-evaluation of both your and Tim's Western arts training. It seems that this premise is one of the unique characteristics about the company. Is this re-evaluation something that happened gradually since you started the company or was there one crucial work that you felt defined to this?

DM I think..... it was initially a gradual thing but at the same time fairly immediate. What happened was when I went to Darwin, I very quickly found out that people did not have predominantly a Western background in any training, so we didn't have contemporary influences of any sort, let alone modern or post-modern ones. Audiences didn't understand that all. The other thing that was very clear up there, is that the people that Tim and I had to work with, came from backgrounds more like South-East Asian backgrounds, or with strong connection to remote communities, Aboriginal communities. And all of those people in their art forms practice work in a much more collective way of creating and owning their culture and their output comes from that. So I had to learn relatively quickly, but it took time to implement ways of creating work that wasn't about 'I'm the choreographer, you're the dancer', or, 'we'll work in a headspace on a conceptual thing'. We had to start really developing ways of creating dance where ownership of the material became important. Relationships between the performers and the artists, or relationships between different cultural components were quite enmeshed.

JD Less hierarchical?

DM Yep, yep – there's...

JD And was that difficult for you to come to terms with, or were you expecting that?

DM After the first shock of me teaching dance to a group of full blood Aboriginal people in a community and I ran out of fifteen years of experience in the first five minutes [laughs]. After that shock of thinking 'What am I going to do here?' I very quickly, for myself, observed how things were operating. I think that, for myself, as a practicing artist, (because I'd had a theatre, dance, music, and literature background), I had a lot of things to draw on and to pull in. And Tim, who I work with, is visual arts trained and has spent most of his professional life working with dancers. So the cross-art form became a really important vehicle for us, and the non-verbal, (the visual and dance particularly), were the common grounds for anyone that we worked with.

⁸¹ McMicken was in Victoria for the 2006 Australian Youth Dance Festival, held in Horsham, Victoria.

JD So non-verbal..... do you mean a way of communicating?

DM Well a lot of the people we were working with certainly weren't from an English speaking background, and so partly doing some studies in linguistics and looking at how language defines concepts, we were able to, (sort of) translate that into performance arts, as well understanding the concepts in the visual and physical language of these people speaking to us.

The basic concept I think stays the same for us, in that Tim and I are two artists who live somewhere, and we are creating work about where we live. The difference is that we use, not what is in our head to do that, but we use the place we live and the people in that place. And so we need to find out what that is. Living in Australia in the Northern Territory where 30% of the population is Indigenous and most of them are in remote communities, you've got to learn a whole new cultural thing. You've got another 30% of the population from non-English-speaking backgrounds so the Western background is the smallest part of what we work with. But we utilise that to make contemporary statements. We certainly don't throw all of our Western practices away. We're looking at using that Western... and...it's quite a fusion of practices.

JD Yes. I feel one of the strong directions that this research is heading in is to do with the idea of space and location being primary in what is influencing Tracks and, I would hesitate to say, a lot of other companies that work in more urban settings but I think the location of the company certainly defines it a lot.

DM I think that a more suburban or big city company, the space that it works in and space that presents its work tends to be internal. It's indoors. It's studio based. It's still about getting the perfect lights and the conditions that you are in - controlling all of that. And certainly in Darwin where most of your living is outdoors, you've got a climate that is tropical and tropical activity suits that climate. Being stuck indoors doesn't work, so your head doesn't work in the same way. Your body feels differently in that environment. This is part of what I was saying where the gradual things happen. We reach a point often when we're..... I'd have to present a paper or something and we have to stop and think about what we are doing and were we find moments that define what the company is. And there was a moment about eight years ago where we defined the company as people, place and spirit.

But we are about what connects people to the place they're in, and what spirit is created around that, or what is the essence of that, and learning through working with that, particularly with indigenous or South-East Asians because that is what they do. It is very clear. People look at it and they are not talking about dance, they are not talking about art forms. They are saying, 'This is my culture.' And when, particularly from an indigenous perspective, a little kid stands and looks at you and you are asking them to do something and they go, 'Well you've got no culture.' It sort of is a bit of a shock and you think, 'Hang on! What do I have?' And you realize you do obviously have a culture but we've never had to articulate it and we've always said that we've got the right to manipulate that in any way we see fit. We can analyse it and construct and deconstruct it. We can say all of those lovely words, but to them it's living culture. It is not broken. So we have to try and find a way of creating work with people who think very differently about culture. So we have got to think about food, and we have got to think about people being chaperoned, we have got to think about what is secret and are not allowed to be shown, but also what you are allowed to see, or what would be inappropriate to see. I can't just say 'you're going to wear this, or you're going to do this.'

I had a Sri Lankan woman who has a very strong Bharatanatyam background⁸² and is a really firm Christian. In 'The Land, The Cross and The Lotus',⁸³ we've got a Buddhist country, with a Christian girl doing a Hindu style of dancing and, I mean, obviously that sits perfectly because that is who she is. But anything with the legs apart in second or in a squat sort of particular position was out, and she found it very difficult to tell you. You have to be sensitive to that because also being the male in that certain situation had a certain responsibility. That shifts and changes to people who you are working with and those are certainly things that most choreographers don't have to think about. It is often what you can't do.

JD Given that sort of ownership of the way that you work with people that is so collaborative and you are so sensitive to having them been such a part of the process, who do you then go to about, say, restaging a work or building a repertoire?

DM Yeah, we rarely restage a work and that is for a number of reasons. One, as you said, is that the work is very connected to the people that are in that work (and those people are usually very connected to the place), so if we are out bush in, say, a community such as Lajamanu which is a community in the middle of the desert, those people aren't going to get up and go somewhere else to restage a work. Also, the work has probably got..... last year we had a piece that had over 200 performers. We can't tour that. In Darwin, there are a few pieces we have restaged, 'Rivers of the Underground'⁸⁴ was one, which we did two years apart. By the time we had got to remount it, the key connecting characters in it, the Sri Lankan woman I was talking about before, and an Indian boy, were the key centralized figures and they had left town with a whole lot of cultural material. I couldn't just replace those people. They are so specific so we had to recreate the show around an Indonesian woman with traditional dancing and a Filipino boy. So it shifted the whole show. So repertoire is more about the process. We have a repertoire of processes rather than a repertoire of actual works.

JD Okay. Let's talk a bit about process then. I suppose I'm interested in what is your bag of tricks when it comes to making work? What do you bring into rehearsal that you know will be effective in breaking down barriers between artists, you and other assistants?

DM A very important thing that I know I bring now is longevity in the form. Tim and I have been workingI've been up in Darwin and working this way for fifteen years with the same prime collaborator, Tim. So it's really quite a rich thing, and alongside that are two very strong groups that we collaborate with regularly. One is the community of Lajamanu, some of those elders we've known for fifteen years, have probably done nearly twenty works with us over that time. And there is another group of old women, The Grey Panthers (senior women, predominantly over sixty), who started at the same time and so there is certainly respect that comes from looking at dance (I'm getting all over the place but I'm getting there) in those cultures which goes right until to the day you die.

Whereas in our culture, dance goes from, you know, fifteen to twenty five or thirty years of age and you're really worn out, or you become some old thing that nobody really wants. Whereas we've been interested in creating dance statements that go right through. So one of

⁸² Indian Classical Dance. McMicken is discussing Rukshana Sashankan (nee Ramachandran) trained in Indian Classical dance and collaborated with *Tracks* on several productions.

⁸³ *The Land, The Cross and The Lotus*, (1998) Jingali Water Gardens, Darwin.

⁸⁴ *Rivers of the Underground* (2005) Fort Hill Wharf, Darwin.

my bags of tricks, is a respect for the place that dance has inside the body through a longer period of time. One of the things in my bag of tricks would be a respect for diversity of expression, so I can't go and say, 'My way is right.' I go in from the opposite of a lot of choreographers. I believe that I treat the performers as experts (and they might not be experts in Western trained style of dancing), but if I'm working with, for example, the youth at the moment, I don't live in that culture so I can't actually make a representation of it as such.

But I can create... (and this is something Tim and I do, I think, very well)... we create structures or nests for those cultures whether it be youth or specific or seniors or whatever. We create nests for them to present themselves to the best that they can. And that goes right through. I can go in and do a job down in the middle of the desert in an Aboriginal community. I don't know Aboriginal dancing per se. I don't learn it and then re-choreograph or anything. We just find out how it exists in that culture and how we can make a contemporary statement about that. So I would spend much more time in the pre-production time working on what the concept of the show is and talking that through with artists before we get into the studio.

JD So, for example, when you arrive in this remote community, what happens when you get out of the car?

DM You faint because it's forty-five degrees, [laughs] and there's a zillion flies and there's rubbish everywhere and there's dogs all over the place. You go, 'I've just stepped off into Mars.' So the first thing usually, is to take a bit of time to adapt physically into the space.

JD And is it usually you and Tim?

DM Yeah

JD Anyone else?

DM We tried to get other people but some of those conditions are so harsh and people don't exist well in them. There is a whole lot of cultural sensitivity so you can't just throw anyone in. But we are gradually..... we try and train up younger people particularly, so that they can go. But Darwin has got a twenty percent population turnover, so as soon as you train them up they're gone. As soon as you train them in a particular way that is useful to anywhere outside of Darwin, they go and get into a tertiary course and don't come back. So we're our own worst enemy with that.

JD So you get out of the car....

DM Get out of the car and usually you try and find.....say in Lajamanu there's 600 people. There's no hotel, there's no...

JD Are they usually expecting you?

DM Yes. Because you need to get a permit to go down there, and you need to get permission to even enter into the community. Usually we would go through an organisation like a school, or the Women's Centre, or the Town Council. Tim and I have permanent permits now, but you still you have to stay somewhere, so you have got to either stay in a school teacher's house.....(you're not going to stay in a local house because they've already got eighteen people in the house and it's not air conditioned, so not many people would deal with it. You couldn't really stay there without getting sick very quickly). But because it's a long term relationship where we've maintained contact with people both in Darwin and down there (there are people who might come up with a school group), we're ringing backwards and forwards regularly. There is an artistic exchange that is going on in talk. We do projects

with each other. Last year I brought three senior women up. We did a really very contemporary multimedia work with them and the Grey Panthers (the older women) and Trevor Patrick⁸⁵ and two other local dancers that were all in their forties. We're looking at seniors.

JD What was that work called again?

DM It's called 'Angels of Gravity'.⁸⁶

So while they were up there, the women were able to talk about the next project that we were doing, Milpirri,⁸⁷ which was done down in Lajamanu. So you keep the exchange going and talk going for a long period of time rather than just for a single project. You see them as stepping-stones all the time and links of thread. So by the time we get to Lajamanu, the first thing that I would usually do is I would try and find one particular woman. I call her Auntie and Tim calls her Mum and that relationship is a really important thing. It is to do with the kinship and everything goes through that. How you behave, where you go, who you go with and what you are allowed to do or not do. So you have to instantly adapt to a completely different way of thinking of things. So the best way for me to do that is to get into that as quickly as possible. So I go and find a family and hang around with them and you talk about what you are going to do. We then do a few workshops gradually. Usually it is hot.

JD Inside?

DM A mixture. It depends on the time of year. When we went down last year it was in October/November and as I said it was 45 degrees. It was also pouring with rain and it is just mud. There's no power because they run on generators there and things like that. So the power is off and on. So we were indoors sometimes in the school with the kids and with the senior people, we were out on the dirt and they were practicing after school. They usually wait till it gets cooler until the sun is goes down. So you have got, sort of, an hour and a half where it is cool.

JD And how long would you stay in the community?

DM It varies. In the early days we tended to do longer residencies. Tim and Sarah [Calver]⁸⁸ would do three-month residencies. Tim and I now usually do about blocks of two to three weeks at a time. We find it is better to keep going back, you achieve more that way. While you're away, they are still working on things because it just takes a different time frame to get somewhere. So rather than just be there in a block so many other things come up that are more important to them, you can't demand that your way is more important. You have to meet halfway. So it is better to take, yeah, two to three weeks. And it is the same if they are coming to Darwin. They would get pretty homesick after a week or two and it would be best to go back home.

JD I'm interested in the roles that you and Tim have within the company. How are they different from each other for a start?

⁸⁵ Trevor Patrick is a dancer and choreographer based in Victoria.

⁸⁶ *Angels of Gravity*, (2005). Darwin Entertainment Centre.

⁸⁷ *Milpirri*, (2005). Larjamanu, N.T.

⁸⁸ In 1989, Sarah Calver, was appointed Dance Development Officer at Browns Mart in Darwin, a community organisation. Together with Tim Newth she was instrumental in creating the foundation for *Tracks* and has maintained a long association with the company as a choreographer and performer.

DM Although we both co-direct artistically, (co-direct the company) we operate very differently in how we create work. Tim will talk for himself I'm sure, but basically because Tim comes from a visual arts background and I'm from a dance background, he absolutely needs a team of choreographers and dancers to make his work. So he tends to work in a more semi-traditional direction. He tends to have a much clearer sense of the image he wants to create which he gets to by all those negotiations and long-term collaborations. He likes to shape work in what I call visual arts modes where the artists know what they want and they work towards it and they move things around.

I fit into work much more collaboratively with choreographers because I see myself as one of them as such. So within my role in the company, I usually have a stronger line through the physical with the dancers, and the choreographers, and the musicians, because I talk the language. We split works into three different ways of working. Sometimes we call them 'passion projects'. Tim might have a passion to do, um..... What is an example? There is a great show he did called 'Snakes, Gods and Deities' after he'd had an Asian residency. He connected with a company in Sri Lanka. We had Sri Lankans here, we had Indonesians... and he had this passion project. So he directed that and I worked with the dancers. I did some classes and came in clean.

I would do that with a show too. I would say, 'This is my passion project and I'm in charge.' So we act as a support for each other. And it is very different depending on who is the boss, because if I say that, Tim can't support the physical side of what I'm doing, he can only support the visual and say that it looks better like this.

JD So he might come in, say, when you have maybe set a fair amount of it, towards the end and assist you with critical...

DM Tim would assist me in the early stages because he wants a really concrete..... He wants to know what something is. So he makes me think about that earlier than I normally would.

JD So he would have visual pictures in his head before he goes into... for example with 'Mr Big'⁸⁹ do you think he...have you discussed the way the show is going to look?

DM Yeah. Tim nearly always starts with a venue. Every show we do is in a different venue.

JD Well then again it relates to the space doesn't it?

DM When we say our work is site specific, generally it is exactly what we mean. We find the site and we create the work into that site. And so for 'Mr Big' we're looking for...the concept in the show is that Darwin is in a building boom, a developmental boom and the concept is youth. Our young people have many connections to where the government is going, or a say in where it is going. So we're looking for a site that has got old Darwin and new Darwin side by side in one site. Well, that's a bit much to ask for but we found it. It's an old van and car yard with this amazing brand new block of flats (that is still being built) right beside it.⁹⁰ So there's this whole thing then that becomes something to workshop. It

⁸⁹ *Mr Big* was the youth dance work I focussed on for my field work. At the time of this interview the performance was scheduled for August, 2006 (four months away).

⁹⁰ *Mr Big* was not performed at this venue but at a disused petrochemical refinery.

becomes 'derelict building'. It becomes 'street ownership' and we take our young people down there and have a look at it. So, instantly, Tim starts using the real space as a model in his head. I start going, 'Oh okay, what's the show about?' We've got to start creating. We've got to get them to create phases of movement that we can gradually build the blocks together. I trust very much Tim's judgement on space and the manipulation of that space. So usually

JD So that could be a way that you...I suppose...learnt how to work at Rusden.⁹¹

DM Yep.

JD Quite organically? Where you might try and build the phase, and then what you get from that phase you then might keep going in some other way, and so it develops. Would you agree with that or....?

DM Two things that I got out of my training in Rusden that I still hold on to..... One is I didn't really go the post-modern way in my head. I didn't believe that dance shouldn't have meaning. I always felt it had to. It really had to have a sense of meaning even if that was just about what it feels like to do it. But you had to be conscious that you weren't just making a list of movements. And the other thing that was part of that course was we had to create dances for alternative spaces, and so I always found that very interesting, seeing dance occur out of a theatre space.

And although I would quite often intellectualise what my work is about, it is not what I try and get across to the audience, right? That's just me doing that to make sense of it in my own head. Because I think psychologically and because I think, you know, sexually about archetypes and this, that and the other. I just use that because I know it gets me..... it's just a vehicle.

Shirley McKecknie⁹² is my key.... still to this day..... always.... like she's my mentor. She still instills that mix of intellectual and physical and improvisation and exploration and everything that seems to be a much more European approach to creative work than the American approach (although I love the physicality of that approach). But it gave me things (by the end of finishing college and going and dancing with people like Jacqui Carroll and Tasdance) and I very quickly moved into working in new theatre.

My theatre background (I wasn't happy with just the dance) is the one thing that gave me a sense of looking at what narrative could potentially be. Now I'm not interested in dance that is storytelling, but I still see..... and this is where Tim and I talk about lines that go through...for example, we're looking at the narrative line, whether it is physical or visual, and it's like making a film in our heads much more than making a dance. So those sorts of ways where Tim and I collaborate, that is where the collaboration tends to happen (not so much on making the physical or making the dance), so we alternate sometimes, as I said, who is in charge of that.

But then there is another way we work which is like in the new show Mr Big we're working on down in Lajamanu, and that is where Tim and I actually do collaborate because it's other people's material and all we're doing is shaping it. So in the youth show, we want them to be creating the material about who they are, where they are, and what their response to the

⁹¹ Rusden College, now Deakin University in Melbourne, was an important tertiary training institution for dance and theatre practitioners.

⁹² Shirley McKecknie was the founder and Director of the Rusden Dance department.

concepts are (which have been developed through negotiation with them anyway). So it is much easier for Tim and me to work side-by-side at that point, because the ownership of the idea is belonging to one or the other.

JD So do you find that you can remain still critically engaged in a project like that or do you find you're more interested in your 'passion projects'?

DM It is difficult because our working relationship has gone for so long and because people love what we do. Because we're at the peak of our field where we are, there is very little critical engagement with the work and one can get very removed from that whole process. You can be scared of doing something in case you hurt the relationship or the collaboration. And also because when you are dealing with a lot of cultural issues along the way, it can be really hard to say 'that won't work', because someone could take that entirely the wrong way. But it is the next phase of our company. We're very much, at the moment, in the mode ...we've got someone working with us now to start looking at how do we engage critically with the work. Now that we're getting very good at making it, we engage critically with it. And we're not there yet [laughs]. But it's a very hard thing!

JD Absolutely! Just getting back to 'Mr Big'..., so you're at the stage now where you have your key youth, I mean what do you call them, workers or.... ?

DM We call them, at the moment, youth dance leaders. And because we're trying a new approach to our youth, in the last few years we've been trying to pick some key people and train them broadly (because there is no tertiary dance, there are not really dance schools or anything like what we do). So anything they do, we have to train them. We have to find a range of experiences for them. So this year we auditioned. We took six Indonesian boys and a bunch of Filipinos. It is very hard to find Western people that can go all the way with us and tend to get much broader representation there. And from there, we train them up to start pushing the ideas and concepts and to start learning phases of material. We've brought them to the Youth Dance Festival here at Horsham so that they get feedback. We've put them in three shows over the year and only one of them is in 'Mr Big' so they get a range of experiences. One of them we've sent down to Lajamanu to take workshops there so they get some experience of being remote. So we will train.... we train them by providing opportunities for them to develop the skills that they need in order to work in the Territory, which is different from native skills.

JD So do they come in during the day or are there a certain amount of hours a week with you?

DM One of them, Erwin Fenis, who we employ on a part-time basis (roughly between twelve and twenty hours a week- it alternates depending if there is a project), is what we call a youth dancer and his job is to particularly engage with young men in the community and to bring them into the company. He works as a break-dancer and is into hip hop (that is street hip hop not video clip style). He is a young Filipino man, twenty-one years old, so he comes in a lot more. We also get him involved in a little bit with the administrative side of the company and management side so he can see what creates it. Then depending on, and this changes....last year we had most of our youth leaders over eighteen so we could bring them in at different times. But they've also all left and got into tertiary institutions, this year so we're starting a little group again. Four of our six are still at school so we fit the training in on weekends and after school. They do, currently while we're not in production, about nine hours a week with us.

JD Now you are intending to use the guest choreographer and dancer, Nicholas Power. Is that still happening?

DM Yes it is.

JD Okay. He is from Queensland isn't he?

DM Yes.

JD So when does he come into...?

DM Mr Big has grown a bit bigger maybe since I last spoke to you. What happened last time was that we asked our young people who they wanted to work with. 'Is there anyone in Australia you want to work with?' And this guy's name, Nicholas Power, came up. We didn't know him and you don't want to lash out and spend too much money on someone you don't know. But he was strongly recommended. We spoke to Bec Reid at *Stompin*,⁹³ He had just done some work down there and she spoke very highly of him, and, really luckily, we had a project last year in Lajamanu when someone pulled out. So we spoke to Nicholas and said, 'Would you like to come for two weeks?' It gave us a chance to see what he was like.

So it went very, very well with him and the Lajamanu community. He worked very well in an Aboriginal community and a lot of people don't, so it was a real bonus. So what happened then with 'Mr Big' (because Nick's employed to work on it) is we've, such a strong connection with Lajamanu, they said, 'Can you come back again this year and run a week of workshops?' And we sent our Erwin our animateur, down with him and the two men went down and did workshops at the school. Then we encouraged the school to come up and audition for Mr Big as well. So there's a Lajamanu component and five boys have got into the cast from that, as well as two of them we've managed to bring to the AYDF. Two Lajamanu boys! So Nick is still.... he came to Lajamanu. He was there. We managed to do auditions at the same weekend he was there and he helped run those auditions so he helped choose the people. During the week, he ran intense workshops with our youth leaders as well. So we've already got a little bit ahead with him and them. He's connected with them and the ideas and we then contact him backwards and forwards as it develops. He is coming up for five weeks of which four weeks is rehearsal, and he'll be there for the first week of the season.

JD Okay. So he crosses over. So just before the season starts he's there for four weeks.

DM Yeah. So we've talked about the structure of the show, with him and the youth. There are certain areas that he will focus on, particularly the male areas in the show, and the Lajamanu boys don't come up until he finishes it. So he gets to really focus on that and we can leave the male sections.

JD And will that still be after school rehearsals to fit in with you?

DM Well the Lajamanu boys will be there full-time. So that will be daytime and Erwin is available daytimes as well. So they'll work intensively and create material which they can pass on to the younger ones. The youths work both ways with them - creating a lot of material but also then creating material at the upper end. The younger people down the lower end learning, so there is clear mentor line happening within that as well. We're training our young ones to make sure that they can, that their role model...(especially the Aboriginal ones because they don't have very many). The role modelling for Aboriginal dancers in a remote area is basically zero. They don't identify at all with any of the Western or *Bangarra*⁹⁴

⁹³ The Tasmanian Youth Dance Company.

⁹⁴ *Bangarra* is the national Indigenous dance company, based in Sydney.

dancers. They don't even look at that as Aboriginal dance - they relate much more to black, American gangster stuff unfortunately! [chuckles]. So we're trying to create role modelling within their own culture.

JD As far as documentation, visual documentation or any documentation of your work, how do you go about doing that? How do you prioritise that? Because it seems to me that history of the cultures, you know, is really important within the different communities that you work with and yet dance being such an ephemeral form, it's something that is there and then it is gone. How do you keep a sense of your own history with Tracks?

DM That's a very good question [chuckles]. One of the things that became very clear to us early, and this goes back to something we were talking about earlier, is that because our work doesn't tour or fall into repertoire...um...the maintenance of that work was a difficult thing. Also, funding predominantly used to be (for a long time in the beginning of Tracks), project funding. You could never get enough resources to do anything like making pictures. You could either spend all your money on getting a good video of your work or you could create the work. You couldn't do both. So we reached a point in about 1996, with a show called 'Four Wheel Drive'⁹⁵ which was, and still is to this day, the largest kind of work we've ever done. We used to get, like, \$80,000 from the Australia Council Dance Fund then and we got another \$50,000 from festivals and \$40,000 or something from state funding. So it was a large project for us and we, at that point, said, 'Okay, we're going to make sure that we get a minimum of two camera shoots of broadcast quality and edit every major show we do.'

So we've done that to this day including when we went to Lajamanu last year. We took a film crew down with us. So we've got full Betacam broadcast-quality video of our final products. We get very little documentation in the process though, because of a lack of resources. We have, (around about that time in '96 as well) someone just simply to market and promote the work. It was, like well, we haven't got good photographs and people are asking for them and everyone wants some. They're interested in the work that we do and so we now make sure that we actually employ a photographer from the local newspaper for every show. He used to be a dancer and is into karate now, so he's got a really good sense of movement. For every show we get pictorial documentation. We do a large amount of post show evaluation with the participants and keep that written up into report form and we try and keep our website up-to-date with pictures. Because we can't do everything, we try and streamline it. We try and make sure that the right information is in the program to go on the website so people can go on..... the aim is that website becomes.....it's our way of getting our work out into the world, around Australia and so people can use that. We want it to have a much more research capability than it has at the moment, but we've got piles...I've got them all on my desk, all the old projects and things and all the reports. Everything that we're compiling and shortening down, we'll start putting more and more of that onto our website to maintain. We would get, I reckon, at least two requests a week for our information and for research purposes. So we're trying to invest time in those sorts of documentations.

As I said, the Lajamanu women and the Grey Panthers have been going since 1988, so that's nearly twenty years that these senior women have worked with us. We've got forty job reports and we're grateful. So that's partly what we try and do with our documentation. We want to get other artists to engage with it and so sometimes we work with the writers and say, 'Would you like to write about the work and get it published somewhere?' Because you don't get anything from the newspaper and you don't really want anything but we can get into

⁹⁵ *4WD, Sweat, Dust and Romance*, 1997. Darwin Botanical Gardens.

RealTime ⁹⁶ or something and try and get a higher level of documentation of process that way.

JD Absolutely. With your own personal process, do you find that there is a point with your process when you're working on something with other people where you feel that there might be a breakthrough moment, where say, that you're having trouble with creating the work and it's been difficult for a while..... are you aware of that as something that happens to you or.....?

DM Yeah at times. It often happens because I like to look at friction points or rubbing points particularly between cultures that I'm working with. A really good example of a breakthrough was when we were trying to work with Lajamanu on a show and one man just said, 'Look you white people. All you do is your history and it's all, like, behind you. You just leave it behind. But for us, it's in front. That's the pathway we travel. We look at our history and it's going forwards' and suddenly I went, 'Yeah, that's what it's about'. I have been doing lots of research and reading about times and directions and dimensions and this, that and the other (which was all nice in my head), but when this old man out in the middle of the desert just goes... yeah.... and I went there as a visual...where I went bang. It makes sense of why it is important to use your past. Now, when I'm working with the young people, I'm able to physicalise that to say, 'You're not just doing all the new stuff and running as fast forward as you can.'

TAPE CHANGE

DM So I was talking about breakthrough moments and process.

JD So you use that sense of history even when working with youth. That's got a lot of implications for dance hasn't it?

DM Well it certainly does.

JD Dance is a form that, you know..... it's really difficult to actually find a sense of history in some ways.

DM Especially in terms of dance that seems to be eating itself up every chance it can. And as soon as you've done something, you're supposed to reject it and so long term collaborations or development of the form is really hard. It was, as I said, through working with cultures that have a sense of history and pride in that history, which again indigenous and South East Asian cultures generally do, and yet we can still have these amazingly contemporary outputs. I mean, you look at that indigenous work in the Commonwealth Games or the Sydney Olympics. It is so exciting because it is so rich and it is exactly that past thrown in front of them that that is what makes it work. Whereas, if we don't keep any sense of our past or the line that that has and our sense of history and dance, then you haven't got anything to do or to follow, and you haven't got anything to train young people into.

I did a show called 'Fast', two years ago with the young people. The concept was, 'Why do you young people go so fast? What is the hurry? Why do you need to get everything done before you're twenty-five? Why is it that you think life stops at that point?' So those are the sorts of questions that we were talking about and at the same time we were.....again I was reading a book called 'The Acceleration of Just About Everything'. ⁹⁷ Looking at how things

⁹⁶ An Australian arts magazine.

⁹⁷*The Acceleration of Just About Everything* by James Gleick. Pantheon, 1999

go on this curve and seem to shoot out of control and the thing that tied, for me, that piece into the show, was I did a section with the young people and said, 'Okay this is going to be about the dance history. What history, physical history do you have in your body?' We had a cast of thirty-five mixed cultural people and over forty different dance styles in it. You know, full on Indian and Filipino, folk, traditional, Indigenous styles, a range of different styles, stacks of Western styles, some band jazz, hip hop, break, Capoeira..... all from what we had inside our bodies and those kids themselves at that point felt proud of things that weren't just modern dance.

If you speak to any of the tutors that are here at this AYDF, they are glowing about our kids because they'll do anything. They'll just go for it because we give them the permission to do that. And I do that with my old ladies, and I do that with people out bush and I'll do that with the East Timorese group. You give them permission for so many other times people are creating work that is not about permission. It's about, 'I want you to do this.' And some people love that. They like being told what to do. But most people like being listened to.

JD Can I just finish by asking you a final question about influences? What other art forms influence you? You obviously read.

DM I get a lot from literature because I like, I like..... We've got a phrase for our company, 'Giving voice to Territory culture.' I like looking at how different art forms intercept. How do they weave through? What is the grammar or the syntax of this phase of movement? How does this packet of meaning, those themes, how do they develop and go together? And how do you get sense out of that?

I find literature does that for me in a particular way but it is sort of limited. Tim and I work..... obviously he is a visual artist, and that has totally changed how I look, over the years, of just working together. I look at shaping a work in a completely different way. I'm much more aware of the whole three dimensional work. Again, Shirley back in Rusden was very much saying as an artist, you can get a bigger culture and that music and visual arts and poetry and all sorts of things are important. So you grab what you can.

I tend not to, in my work, think about it as dance anymore. I tend to think about it as a cultural statement that uses movement but it also uses whatever I need to. I'm really interested in the multimedia stuff in connection with, especially indigenous concepts, because I think with any technology, that traditional people I work with jump in and out of multiple realities very easily and quickly. I think that multimedia really helps represent that to non-indigenous people. So I'm being strongly drawn that way for that reason.

JD Is that something you have experimented with in any particular work?

DM I'm trying to work with the medium which is difficult in dance. There is a woman I've had a four-year collaboration with. She is a Belgian. She does everything. But she has now just left and gone down to Melbourne so that collaboration stops.⁹⁸ So we're experimenting with the form. Last year when I did 'Angels of Gravity', I had three Lajamanu women and we were using multimedia in the filming. For example Myra⁹⁹ dancing a particular dance - an angel dance. This was a sort of Christian-based dance, but on the outside you would think it's a traditional Aboriginal dance because it's in that style. Then we filmed landscape around and placed her into alternative landscapes. You have the dancer in front and we had the women interacting with her. She's Myra dancing in a foreign landscape and then

98 McMicken is referring to Elka Kerhofs who worked as a multimedia artist on several *Tracks*' productions.

99 Myra Nungarrayi Herbert, Senior woman from Lajamanu.

she pulls the earth up so that anthills are being created around her and she's flying around in a way that..... you know, she had no trouble as a fully traditional woman. Someone that was born on the land that remembers their first white contact, she had no trouble going that way at all. It caused a lot of consternation from some of the audience who thought that we're being disrespectful of Aboriginal culture. But they (the performers) were choosing the dances. They were choosing the images. They were choosing the interaction. So yeah, I would like to go a bit further with that.

We did a show with a group in Alice Springs called 'Janganpa'.¹⁰⁰ We did a lot of their dances out bush and filmed them. We used the projection to give a sense of that on stage. We don't usually work on stage but did a theatre piece with them and so we were able to use the media to bring a sense of place into the theatre in a way that is quite difficult. To see those people dancing on the land out bush is completely different because they are so alone when they're out there. You know, in the sun, with the right colours and the right everything. It's all working and then as soon as you bring it into the city it drops. So we wanted to use the media that way. So slowly, bit by bit, we try a little bit more.

JD **Okay I'm going to leave it there.**

DM Alright.

JD **Thank you so much.**

DM It's a pleasure.

¹⁰⁰ *Janganpa*, 2003. Aralen, Alice Springs

Appendix 5: Second Interview - David McMicken

Interview between David McMicken, Artistic Director of *Tracks Dance* and Josie Daw.

Held on 22 April 2006 at the Australian Youth Dance Festival, Horsham, Victoria.

JD Okay David, thanks for coming again.

DM It's a pleasure.

JD Let's begin by discussing the primary stages of the development of *Mr Big*. You mentioned before, that the idea of the work began as a response of youth to the change in built and other environments of Darwin. Can you pinpoint a time when the idea first arose?

DM These are very difficult questions you're asking [chuckles]. We don't generally work in....as I was saying yesterday, in a project by project way, although we do produce productions. With the youth line, (we've been focusing on it for probably the last six years) we did a major production called *Ignite* where we were looking at what ignites the young people's passion to dance and to live in Darwin. We then took it to the next stage with a show called *Fast* which was 'Okay now we've said what ignites your passion, let's work out what makes the passion burn hard.'

During that time, we're training up a group of people who are able to constantly give us feedback and that, sort of, loops back into the project. So from talking to them, an idea started. About the same time, Darwin, over the last three years has been a boom town. And the young people have started saying, 'Oh, there's a bit more to do now around Darwin.' We started to see all the changes in the built environment of Darwin were upsetting a lot of people over forty. The young people were starting to see that the town was coming of age for them. So in talking to them, an idea developed of who is in control of that development. (Because there's a very strong feeling that there is a 'Mr Big'.) There is someone driving it.

In Darwin currently, a woman is the Chief Minister,¹⁰¹ and she is very contactable to the public. We always get her to events and make sure our young people perform at them. So we're able to have a fairly close relationship and an idea of where she's heading with the town, because she's very much wanting young people to stay in Darwin and build Darwin as a place that will keep them there. And then our Seniors are balancing that by saying, 'Oh all the old Darwin's dying.' So there is the question. Was there a point where it went bang? That's why it is not really quite relevant as in a set point in time.

JD So is it something that happens over conversations with the other youth that are involved? After rehearsals, in general conversation, or do you actually formally meet and brainstorm things? Or do you and Tim just talk?

DM We also employ a Dance Animator, a young woman of Filipino/Irish background whose job is to make sure she kept in touch with the younger people. She also teaches classes and things outside Track. She works in a high school as well as being a professional dancer.

JD So who is that?

¹⁰¹ Clare Martin, Chief Minister for the Northern Territory Government, 2001-2007.

DM That's Julia.

JD Oh Julia Quinn.

DM With Julia, we often give her the task of sussing out what is going on because she can find out from a range of sources, ideas and things. So that is one avenue of getting information. Tim and I, because we have to put a grant in and it's up to three years ahead, we have to say this is what the projects are. We have to come up with some concept that we can sell or market or get funding for.

Triennial funding has shifted that slightly for us because before, when we were going for project funding it had to be 'Bang! This is what the project is about.' The triennial funding from Australia Council allows us to think about not just the project but the importance of why the project is in a program. So finding the idea and going, 'Oh, here is an idea that kids have been talking about. Let's put this in.' Tim and I would then flesh that out in basic concept or structure, enough to sell it as an idea.

Then we bring the young ones back into that and say, 'Okay, this is the idea. What do you think of it?' So this year we chose six young people that we auditioned as our youth leaders. We bring them into workshops and say, 'Okay here's the basic idea. What do you think of it? Where might it go? Who is Mr Big to you? What makes Darwin what it is for you?' And then we do a lot of brainstorming, a lot of talk at that point with them and then, usually with the youth, (we've done this for the last three show with a group of leaders), we start choreographing ideas - enough to see if it is going to work. Then we audition for the larger cast and the young people are able to teach the material that works and then we can shape that.

So a lot of the finer details of the work don't exist in the choreographer's or the producer's or the director's heads. It exists as a concept and then we try and get that to come through from the young people because they do most of the choreography.

JD Yeah, I understand that. So when you say that you flesh things out with Tim, how do you....what do you mean by that? I know it's really hard to kind of pinpoint exactly what that is, but...would Tim say....would you have found the venue by that stage for example?

DM Often we start with a venue but once we got the idea and go, 'Oh, it's *Mr Big*, it's about development. We then go and look for an appropriate venue, and the venue sparks quite a lot of special visual concepts in the show. And that is something that Tim takes on fully because he wants to start with what it is going to look like. Being a visual artist I suppose is.....

JD So do you actually have images in your head of what you think might look good for example, or work at that stage? Or do you think it comes later?

DM I would go more into looking at actual movement stuff about whether it can fulfill the concept. So for example with *Mr Big*, once we start it and we've fleshed out with the youth, more about what the content of it was, it came down to this idea of these people that come to Darwin and say, 'Oh that's a real Darwin person!' And they can see that, you know. 'That's a hippie and they always come through here', or 'there's a strong military presence' or 'there's a strong Asian presence'. So we isolate that down into characters. As soon as that's done then I start going, 'Look, that has a particular energy about it now. The military..... that will work in with that group of boys.'

So then when we audition. We've got those things in mind. They're not auditioning for set roles, but they're auditioning...I'm looking to see if they can move in ways that we've already explored with the young people. So I start to think about that much more and saying, 'Well, it would be great if that was forty people flooding through the space here!' or, 'It would be fantastic just to have those six people there in the space with the light down there'...or something. But those really are just trigger points.

Tim and I then try and set aside when we're working on, prior to a show..... so this year we've set aside, like, a day every week where we just go into the studio and we talk about the developmental stuff to do with the work. And we go, 'Oh well let's bring our youth animateur in. Let's bring our leaders into this one. Let's bring the dance animateur in. Let's bring a costume person into this one.' And so we talk those ideas through a lot before we actually get into the studio, because we haven't choreographed anything yet at that point. [laughs]

JD So do you have a sense, possibly at that stage, of a dynamic within the work? For example, 'it's going to start really quietly and then we'll hold that moment for say ten minutes and then it will build into something else.' Is it that kind of.... ?

DM It can be.

JD Right.

DM And in *Mr Big* with the youth show it's much more like that than some other shows. For example, with *Mr Big* we're going to start it as Darwin as an old town out West. So we've got an outback cowgirl walking through it. We know that that dynamic is very, very lyrical, very hot, very dry, very dusty and we've started working some of those ideas with the kids.

Then you know that because of the storyline that a young woman, (it sounds a bit odd because it's not really as narrative as this) comes up from down south and arrives into this hick town, (because everyone thinks it's a hick town from outside). So she's come in with this energy that's very snappy and harsh - we see that all the time around us with all the tourists that come and go - she says, 'Where's the coffee shops? Where's this? Where's that?'

So it's very dynamic. It's all about time - as people come to Darwin and go. But we work with a natural rhythm so we know that there is a section that we'll back fill. So the dynamic now changes. We know that she then calls in the builders and the military to set the town up properly, so it becomes much more of a regimented feel. We've got a guest choreographer coming in who is strongly into break dancing. So we know that section once we've set the town up. Then we say, 'Look it would be great to have..... we haven't got the feel for the end but we've got the concept.' So the young people who have had set characters become stylized, contemporised and highly fashionised within that style. We build up this sense of movement from that. So we're not sure where that will go but we know that there is confusion at that point where young people become sexually entrenched, in a very high fashion sense, in the city.

JD Okay. So you've made youth dance works before. How will *Mr Big* differ from what's come before, given what you've learnt from the projects?

DM *Mr Big* has much stronger narrative lines than we've used in the past because we get one go at a project and you might not get really get a big project with the young people for another two years. We have to be very strategic in what we're trying to get out of the project. We need to because we use the youth projects to develop people with some dance understanding skills, relevant to being in Darwin (not being relevant to somewhere else). So

in the past, the first one was trying to get people just interested in doing full-length work and being dancers, or feeling that they could be a dancer. So that was *Ignite*.

The next one, *Fast*, was about just working hard because they just want to flog themselves to death, dance and dance and sweat a lot. Then, once they've found that they can dance and they can dance hard, there's a natural progression where they start to come to us with their ideas saying 'I want to do this.', and, 'I want to do that.' And so that is where the feeling of the narrative comes from.

Also from our audience there is a real difficulty in contemporary dance in Darwin because there's no background of it around. So the audience, (if you try and do something else that is too left of field) they just don't get it and consequently say the common thing of, 'Oh look, it would be great if you have a narrator!' [chuckles] And so, um, there's another piece I'm doing later that's fully narrated. [laughs]

But in this way the kids...(well, I'm calling them kids but you know they're fifteen to twenty-five, are really young adults but I still call them my kids. They always will be!). [laughs] They are the ones wanting to feel they have got a say as to what is going on. You can't just say 'What do you want to say?' and then do it, because they don't have the oral skills at that point. But we build them up to a point where they say, 'This is what I say about myself as a dancer in Darwin.' So, yeah, this piece has a much stronger narrative to it.

We've also chosen to work with more character-based work with them. And that's predominantly because they don't come from dance training, and so those theatre skills work much better to say, well...even if the audience doesn't get that at the end, it is for them to have a sense that they are a particular character. They can draw on that and then already they see it. They came here to Horsham and they're going out and they're saying, 'Oh there is so and so like archetype character in the streets.' So it just gives them a relationship that just dancing doesn't do, because you don't walk around town in Darwin and go, 'Oh, there's a dancer.'

JD Yeah. [laughter]

DM 'Oh look! She's a dancer.'

JD [laughter] So...you probably answered this but I'm going to ask it anyway. **How do you go about suggesting your visual imagery to the youth leaders and do you discuss a framework with them? It sounds like you've already done that with this work.**

DM As I said, it's more narrative and character based. There's an immediate realistic sense of imagery that comes to mind, and so you can discuss that with them. The last work that we did was on a rooftop car park that had three levels. It was a multi-level car park and it was a brand new building and had never...it wasn't open yet. So we had this spotlessly new car park and a big building (which is the tallest building in Darwin) suddenly built. We took the youth there and said, 'This is the newest thing in Darwin. You're the hottest thing in Darwin. Let's connect the two.' So for them the visual of the work became their response to that, but also Tim's job in the company, in part, is to make sure that the visual and the movement are integrated. So he is always pushing that. He is always pushing a design on it and going well for this one, I'm going to bring...we're bringing for *Mr Big*, a young woman that was in one of our first huge shows who is now doing fashion design in Melbourne. So we're bringing her back to design the show.

JD That's fantastic.

DM So it's linked in....and it is an Alumni thing of bringing her back. But Tim would be driving that.

JD You mention a lot that Tim is a visual artist.

DM Yep

JD Now does he maintain a practice where he works in other mediums or do you consider that his three dimensional work with Tracks is his main visual medium?

DM Yes, he doesn't practice. He's a landscape gardener in his own garden in that sense. His visual comes out in everything that he does. But the strength of Tim's visual is that he looks at it as a three dimensional thing in time. He just loves things moving in and around space. He doesn't like any static. He has been working in dance now for like twenty years and that is his main medium. But his training was in painting and photography but he doesn't do that.

JD Then how do you....what do you call yourself then in the company?

DM Umm....David. [laughter]

It's something that shifts depending on what project we're doing. Sometimes, I'm sort of grappling with what we actually do, so we call ourselves co-artistic directors and for most shows we work together to artistically direct, in a way that I think a theatre director would do it more. Where someone has got a text and you've got actors whose job is to put into action. So we're much more likely now to employ people to make sure the action is put into place and we direct that on the outside. So, not so much as a choreographer would in a traditional sense. We hardly ever have a choreographer in a traditional sense in the company.

JD Yep. So then are there any particular artists or directors or company models that Tracks is influenced by? I know you are doing stuff that is unique but is there someone out there in the big, wide world whose work you admire, or the way they operate?

DM Tim will answer and he is very different but I don't really look outside to individuals or forms or structures. But there are movements or concepts that I'm drawn to. So working with the Lajamanu women and the Seniors I find both fascinating and it enlarges me. I feel as an artist that's the direction where I get challenged. So those sorts of things I find very strongly within the Territory when I work. I'm more interested in....I like the way that a lot of Indian, Sri Lankan, that sort South East Asian style (where the dance is just so full on in everything) where you keep going until you are older is beautiful. The whole thing with the Commonwealth Games, the closing ceremony....when all the Indians kind of suddenly went, 'I can do that!' So I get excited by that sort of thing.

JD Yeah.

DM Watching.....This sounds a bit odd because I don't go to the football, but the way where the football match and the players have set rules. Everyone knows what is going on and everyone is involved. That is much more of an influence to me than going to a dance company. And the longer I'm in Darwin, the harder I find that because I come down to see dance happening. On occasions, when I get out and I get further and further away from it, I lack connection to it unless it's got soul (soul dancing!). So I'd say this Youth Dance Festival for example, where we've seen a whole range of different dance from young people....there was a group from Wales, *Nubrico*,¹⁰² which was fantastic because the young people threw

¹⁰² Nubrico are the youth branch of Rubicon, a community dance development organisation based in Cardiff, Wales.

themselves into the movement. They were highly stylised, highly technical and that was great. The gang from *Steps* in WA.....I loved the concepts in their head, but I don't follow those. Billie (Cook),¹⁰³ from *Restless*,¹⁰⁴ the dance company, I just absolutely adored for the way she comes from a place of heart and soul and lets that unfold. This would be much more like I'd be about.

Originally, in the early days, Tim and I would talk a lot about companies like *Phillippe Genty*.¹⁰⁵ We discussed the way of the visual and the movement and the fabric and those sorts of things happening but without trying to replicate it or anything.

JD I mean the company is obviously thought of very highly as a model for community cultural development and you're an expert at negotiating these cultural pathways with the Tracks performers. But I'm interested in how you operate as an artist amongst all of the management stuff and are you free to develop and experiment with your own ideas about theatre and movement in your role? I mean, possibly with the...

DM Certainly, when one is running a company there is an amount of.....especially in the way Tim and I run it...it's not like a choreographer is running the company. Certainly in running the company there is an amount of your own practice you have to let go of. And that is also matched with, for me, (because I started as a performer and I loved performing) within a Western construct there is a very limited amount of performing you can do. I'm now forty seven and that is clearly out of that realm. I have to really work hard to explore what I want within that. So last year I did a work that was about being in the middle, between forty and fifty, and not crisis stuff. I found Trevor Patrick from Melbourne who we've worked with over the years (I used to work with Trevor occasionally before I even went to Darwin) and two dancers in Darwin who were of that age, and I was able to explore that.

JD In a workshop or within a performance?

DM Within a full performance, yeah.¹⁰⁶

It's hard to, but I explore that by putting tasks and structures on them and then sitting back and looking at it. I don't go in and say to move this or move that. I do a little bit but, like, it is more about saying, 'Here is the overall thing I'm looking at.'

I did another work, *Rivers of the Underground*, ages ago.¹⁰⁷ It was soon after my father died and I was really...when I talk about it, it sounds like I'm talking about dying. But what I was really interested in was this man, my dad, and when I went to his funeral I thought, 'He looks like he knows where he is going.' And yet all my friends in Darwin, whether they are Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist or whatever, they all probably think they know where we are going.

So for me, the idea I started to explore is, how does what we think happens after you die, affect how you live? So I created a beautiful work about a young man who's Hindu and gets shot. It doesn't really matter. He just dies young and then goes into the underground. Then I

¹⁰³ Billie Cook, Artistic Director of *Restless* Dance Company in 2006.

¹⁰⁴ *Restless* are a South Australian dance company who collaborate with young (predominantly intellectually disabled) people.

¹⁰⁵ A French company, largely known for merging visual and physical theatre with dance and puppetry creating performances with a strong element of spectacle.

¹⁰⁶ *Rust*, 2004. Browns Mart Theatre, Darwin

¹⁰⁷ *Rivers of the Underground*, 2000. Fort Hill Wharf, Darwin.

structured it all on a Greek underground story and we brought in Torres Strait Islanders, Filipinos and Indians and just began looking at all these different things. And it became a really celebratory piece that was about how different ways people live and co-exist.

It is a bit odd but to me when I talk about it as a piece, it really was cohesive in my head. So I was able to explore without...I really don't think I choreographed a single move in that piece you know, but I said that I wanted this feeling. So I know that has to be young boys doing full-on break dancing but under pools of light. I need that bit to be proper cultural dancing that is out of my realm. So I'd like a Bharatanatiam dancer there. I need that to be about an indigenous feeling to do with the afterlife and crossing rivers and things. So I get those sorts of chances to explore. Sometimes it feels, (because you can be in a three year plan that you've thought about what the project will look like at the end of that time) by the time you actually get to it, that I don't want to do this anymore.[Laughter] I'm really over it because that is what you lose in running a company I think. You lose the ability to react artistically at what is there. But you gain something else!

JD Just getting back to *Mr Big*.... Can you describe the audition process?

DM Yes. [laughter] The audition for *Mr Big* went in several layers. The first thing we did was to find a young Filipino man that had danced with us for the last four to five years. He has been in not just the youth shows but also in some of the other performances we do - some of the larger performances.

JD Is that Erwin?

DM That's Erwin Fenis,¹⁰⁸ he's employed as a youth dance animateur. So we said, 'Okay, job number one, you come in. Job number two, try and get men interested.' He teaches some classes around and we offer the studio. But for him to get as many men interested to come to the audition we also try and get...the hard one is to try and make sure the schools and indigenous kids know that it is coming up. And we've got a reputation now so that part sort of works.

The next phase was to bring Erwin into what the show was about that they were auditioning for. So he had some understanding and we did a level of auditioning where we looked for the youth leaders. So we put out there that you had to be available and you had to be a leader and you had to...there is a whole lot of criteria which I can send to you. So they had to submit an application. We put it up like a job. They had to give us a resume and they had to write a letter saying why they wanted to be in that. And so from there we auditioned and we chose six leaders.

JD Are they all males or...?

DM No two males and four females. We wanted to go [equal] gender split, but I think, still, currently for us, getting men is...I think...well, it's certainly higher than what I'm seeing here in Horsham, where you have got one boy and twenty six girls. So then we auditioned the youth dance leaders, we chose them and we started training them up into being able to take auditions. Sections of this task, including the administration of it and running it all, right from them coming in the door, to going out, was not easy. We put the word out through the paper and newsletters, our 2,000 mail-out...we put the word out there in a whole range of different ways. We've got radio interviews. We've got an article in the paper about it. And then we had for this one, about 150 young people to audition (which is less than we usually get).

JD Do you audition them at the studio?

¹⁰⁸ Erwin Fenis, employed as part-time youth dance animateur from 2003.

DM We did that this time. Our studio is very small. It's only sort of six by nine metres or something. It's an old classroom with a sprung wooden floor. So what we then did was we auditioned them in one hour blocks of about fifteen people in the room. The first thing we were looking for was whether we could call them back. So the first audition we're simply looking at their technique and whether they are willing to go into new places and whether they have multiple styles of moving.

The other thing that happened before the audition is that we sent two people, Nick Power¹⁰⁹ and Erwin, down to Lajamanu community to run workshops for a week, because we work with that school. We brought a bus load of school kids up to audition because the school supports young men (particularly in that school) to come up here. So we ran that first call back, the first audition, (which is really the second audition for our youth leaders) which included the Lajamanu kids auditioning. So we ran about eight different sessions and one was just an all male one. And then we got the young people to do...we all sat down as the judges. We got Erwin to sit as a judge as well and we brought in guest dancers that work in Darwin as judges too. We also brought in someone that runs a dance school, an indigenous person, and one another who didn't turn up. We brought in someone who runs a dance company in a smaller way, Erwin, as a youth person, and Nick was looking as well.

So from there we chose a selection. We didn't have a set number that we needed. It just seemed about thirty and we just went through and went, 'Yes, yes, yes, no, no, no, yes, no....' In the end we covered the basic numbers and to us it was very clear who we wanted to call back. So we called back fifty people and we then in that next audition process we took them through six different styles of dance which are going to be used, which were character based as well and we were looking for people that could pick up all of that.

They were told beforehand, what we were looking for at the end of the first audition. Then we said to those selected for audition two, 'This is why we've asked you back. You are only going to get one more go at this so, you know. You also have to be able to perform and sell it and this is the standard that we're looking for. We're not interested in therapy. We're not interested in just helping you along to what you really want to be for this project because this is our festival work.¹¹⁰ So it is a major....we're not saying it's a kids show or anything. It's a major work for Tracks. It's the one festival piece we get. It's what we put all of our resources into. It's our major one for the year. A major audience-building event which has major outputs for marketing and.....'

JD Yes. So now just looking economically at it, do the performers get paid for it at all?

DM Um.....not in the youth show. Erwin gets paid as the animateur. If we do any extra work around it, they get paid for that and quite often they're asked to perform. Once we've got the youth leaders, they, particularly, will get paid. But the core, no. The core six leaders will get extra if it comes up. The others are getting nothing. But I mean, equally, they're used to being in dance schools where they pay for everything. So here they don't pay for anything and they're looked after. They get guest choreographers, they get training, they get classes, they get promotion and at the end they get a beautifully produced DVD of the show that they don't have to pay for. So they get those sorts of things. We try and put our money into those resources rather than paying for the youth.

¹⁰⁹ Nick Power, guest choreographer for *Mr Big*.

¹¹⁰ *Mr Big* was part of the 2006 Darwin Festival.

JD Then obviously you have a budget which I'll get later on from you (and a budget breakdown and where lighting, customs and sound costs fit into that). So who's doing the sound for this work?

DM Um..... now this is an issue in Darwin. Our sound engineer person, Elka Kerkhofs,¹¹¹ left this year to go to Victoria to do an animation course. So in Darwin you've got very few people to choose from. The skill base pool is quite small. So we are currently looking for someone. There's a guy who is a great engineer. We just have to find the music because he's not a composer. Probably being a youth show, we'll end up using a lot of pre-recorded music and then engineering the soundtrack so that the extra stuff is a layer over the top of it. But also, because it's for the young people, we want to make sure that it's music that they're into and that they will respond to. It's very hard to find someone to compose that, especially in Darwin. Because of the limited resources, we choose to put those resources into dance first and then the other forms come along. For the youth they're much more interested in the look, so in this one we're employing a costume designer. Quite often Tim does that sort of thing, (the costume design) because he knows what the overall look is and he then gets someone to make it.

JD So where are you rehearsing the work? Is it going to be in the studio and when do you enter the site?

DM Right, we've got two rehearsal venues. One is our own study, [studio] which is attached to our office and, as I said before, it's quite small with a low roof and fans in the ceiling. So there're limited things you can do there. So we work with our youth leaders in that space. There is another space. We've got a partnership with the Darwin Entertainment Centre that has a large mirrored sprung wooden floor with ballet bar. This rehearsal studio, which is the same size as the stage, has the space so we can fit the full cast in it. So we are alternating two venues for that. As soon as we possibly can get into our venue, we try to get one rehearsal a week there but we have to wait for the weather to stop raining. I mean currently, there is a cyclone about to hit Darwin so that might push it a week or two later. This particular site has some safety issues because it is an old, derelict car yard-garage-place and so we have to make sure we've cleared that up. It's had, sort of, some usage for a long time and so we have to fix that up before we get them in there. But we try and get one rehearsal a week for a ten week rehearsal period, roughly. And then there is a week before the show where they are in that venue. We'll also, if we need to do specific work, (say in one show we had people abseiling down a wall of the building)¹¹² arrange for extra practice sessions. Last year we got our studio and it's the first time we've actually really been able to rehearse in a studio without interruption, (because most of our work is outdoor and very site specific), so we try and get into the site as soon as possible.

JD It must be nice to have that luxury of not having to book and organize a studio?

DM By the time you've lugged everything in, (because of other studio bookings and because there are so few studios in Darwin), you could be in four different venues sometimes in a day. You spend most of your time packing up, putting it in the car and driving, so it is a real luxury for us to be able to have our stuff in the room next door. Also, if I need to run and make a phone call there is support around that we can access, and we're just getting used to that. Before that you do everything on the run. It is, sort of, almost a pauper mentality....that we are trying to....that people often put community dancing into, and it is very hard to drag out of that. But we very much want to professionalize the look for our participants so that they feel that they are part of the company, that they are also, key members of the community

¹¹¹ Elke Kerkhofs is a multi-media artist who worked on several *Tracks* productions prior to 2006.

¹¹² *Angels of Gravity*, (2005) Darwin Entertainment Centre.

as well, and valid in that way, but that they are also part of something that has got resources to make use of.

JD Yeah. Okay, I think that is almost all...I just feel like I need to ask two more questions. They are out of order really but....it doesn't matter. How do you distinguish between workshops and rehearsals?

DM Now that's very easy.

JD What happens within each one?

DM We very rarely run workshops. Within the company we have a weekly workshop with the Grey Panthers which is for women over sixty and that is very simply skill development. Those women pay five dollars to come along and dance for an hour and a half and have morning tea afterwards. They're constantly in demand to perform so those workshops often have a rehearsal component to them which is keeping single dances in the repertoire. However, we're about to go into a show in May with them, and so what we do is a workshop for an hour and a half, have morning tea, and then we do a rehearsal for an hour and a half. They don't really see the difference as they just want to dance and move.

With our young people, Erwin teaches workshops for us and we pay him to go out and do that, so it might be through correctional services, or going out to schools, or to get something together for a quick gig in the shopping centre. So the difference for us usually is that if it is a workshop, people pay to do it and if it is a rehearsal they don't and that is one of our main differentiating factors. We try to make sure that workshops aren't about just choreographing work for a performance. But most of our work is performance-based. So most of our work is rehearsal.

JD Okay. Now this is going to be a hard one. [laughs] I would find it hard to answer. Can you describe the thought into action process that you may use with the youth leaders in *Mr Big* to develop the movement material? I suppose it is like what you did yesterday with the CCD group.¹¹³ Do you do something like that with the youth leaders yourself that is obviously a bit more sophisticated than what we did yesterday?

DM Because we've done the pre-work often with them in talking about what...quite often... Julia Quinn¹¹⁴ for example, will go away and take what we've talked about and usually find a stimulus to begin the choreography. So she might say, 'Okay, I want you to create.... you're the cowgirl. I want a thing that is about real action of working on the farm stock.' or whatever 'Erwin, you're the military one..... I want you to think of it being in these particular ways.' And she'll set a problem for them to solve. Tim and I sit there and watch what they are doing (as well as giving feedback), but initially just trying to let Julia handle the shaping of the material until it's at a point where we can kick in. So then we finish and we can talk with the young people about taking it further or describing other directions to take it. We can see where there are issues.

JD Do you talk about it visually what you've seen? Say with the cowgirl, if you didn't like some particular thing....or you didn't feel that that was very strong. Would you intervene at that stage or...?

DM Yes. [laughs] Yeah, um..... You didn't see the other night when the kids actually got up and did like a five minute piece that we put together with their characters. It's just to give

¹¹³ McMicken had presented a paper the previous day for the Community Cultural Development Organisation. In the presentation he asked the participants to participate in some simple physical actions.

¹¹⁴ Julia Quinn, Part-time Dance Animateur at *Tracks*.

them something to be thinking about and in each of them there is something different to work on. So the Indonesian boy who's playing the builder, (who is an amazing break dancer and has some great street hip hop as well)...everything was sort of too...too abstract in the end. We said 'Look, I know what you're doing but other people won't, so you have to put something concrete in there. So I don't care if it is only these four counts in the middle but I want you to show us building something.' Or to the girl that was the hippie, (I was calling her hippie/alternative/backing model) [laughs] I said that she needs to particularly work on a performance quality that is not about being embarrassed to be alternative. And so we had to set much more with her. Although she is creative in movement we have to go through that movement by movement and look at the whole scene to come out. We said to her that the focus was really important where her head was held and so we do that through dialogue with them backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards.

So it's different for each dancer at that level. Once we get into the group work with thirty young people it is much more about what we did years ago. With the chorus, it is about just making them dance and getting them involved and in terms of doing that, to make sure they're connected to the material and they own it and they feel that it is about them. Because we know as soon as you start doing something that it is not about them they just turn off. I'll bet you see that at this festival here when in the choreographic work, as soon as the kids don't want to do it, they won't. So we have to maintain that the thoughts there are always about, how do we sustain the action? How do we sustain their interest in it? How do we keep them pushing it further and further? Often by the time the main chorus comes into the process, the structure of the show is much clearer anyway because we've done that with our leaders. Younger people particularly want to know the end result before they get there. It comes to the question of 'Will I go to this or won't I?' They want to know what it is like. So we are able to give that to them much more. But the actual choreographic work, the actual creating of the movement, comes much more in our company, through problem solving than through setting movements. Much more! And then shaping it. So it's going 'Okay. Well, here are the elements.....you create those elements.'

So as I said before it's much more like a director in a play I think. You are assuming that at some level that the performers, that the actors...(because I come from teaching actors as well, as a background), where their job is to create the action. The director's job is to direct it, not to create it. I get an enormous amount of job satisfaction in seeing what people give me and then manipulating that. Rather than saying to 'Do it like this or do it like that.' Tim is probably more prescriptive in saying, 'I need that to happen right there because it looks better.' But by the time he comes in and does that, the kids are really owning the material itself and it's great for them to get that sense that someone's saying, 'That is fantastic! Let's move it down here, down the ramp and jump over the edge there. And see that happen through the space.' So they're very willing to go with that. But it is always between Tim and me. There's two different ways of creating action going on side by side all the time. Because Tim doesn't come from a choreographic or dance background, he doesn't think that way. He always has to have another step (where someone like myself or another choreographer) does a translation whereas I'm side-stepping that translation quite often.

I'm also aware, especially with young performers, that they need to..... there's a whole lot of performance things that they have to get. They have to have it sitting in their body to feel confident enough to give me. If I'm saying that I'm not getting a performance quality it is usually because I haven't had enough time on the material because the material has been changed and manipulated out of their control. So I'm much more about making sure that line is all the way through the rehearsal process and then that is balanced by Tim making sure it looks good. [Laughs]

JD Yeah, it's an interesting kind of relationship. I mean, you know, I'd have to kind of look at what we've spoken about to be really sure, but it seems to me that in some

ways you're very involved in the generation of the material and Tim, possibly, is more involved in selection.

DM In the generation of movement?

JD Yeah...of the work. You kind of

DM Tim needs to have, like visual artists, something in front of him to look at to respond to say....in rehearsal he'll say, 'Oh that's great but I need to see you focussed on it more.' Then I can go 'Okay, let's create that!' and I'll go back to the dancer and say, 'Now this is what we need.' I'll actually work on the process of how that will happen. So in one sense it is – like if I want that plant out of there and I want to put it up there instead and then I'd be the gardener and do that. So within that structure, I operate that way a lot more in, as you say, the generation of the actual material. Alongside Julia, I will talk with her about dance and stuff and then start talking about the needs of the dancers. We'll talk about time and how we're going to get there in that amount of time. Tim doesn't generally operate in that area unless he is directing a work.

JD Well I suppose now, you know, because he has been actually working in this medium for so long, he must, you know, he must really know things about movement. He watches movement all the time. [laughs]

DM Um, you'd have to talk to Tim about that. He....that would be maybe a friction point in our work where I would say that and he keeps saying, 'I'm not a dancer. I don't work in dance. I need other people to do it.' But I think that's potentially his lack of trust in his own movement ability. When I first, (not when I first met Tim) worked with Tim in Melbourne with my company *Storm in a Tea Cup*¹¹⁵, it was Tim, Deb Batton¹¹⁶ and me who created a work that was the three of us. I had seen Tim's design work with *Dance Works* before that. I worked with Tim and sort of assumed that he would perform. I didn't understand that he wouldn't. And so we created....and it wasn't till afterwards that he said I don't perform. [laughter] And it was a dance work, you know, with Deb Batton now *Legs on the Wall*, and Tim working there and it's.... all up and over tables. We set up a house that was all wardrobes and tables and sound systems and couches and pianos that we're dancing all over. And then I did another work in Darwin with Tim and Sarah Calver, called *Six Feet Over or Under* which again was....

JD Was that the second work you worked on together or was this much later?

DM It was the second one I made Tim dance in [laughter] or what I call dancing. So he actually has had that sort of thing but he doesn't...I don't think he fully trusts that, because when he stands there and he sees a choreographer do much more, the language obviously of dance is at a much higher level. But Tim knows where he wants it to get, so he knows that 'I'll get that person to do it and that one to do that.' That will be more or less how I work. I much more work on having a concept and going into it with a group of dancers and work that on the floor. Tim works much more in the structuring. I think I said this the other day. In creating nests, he likes to create them to put things in. Someone that's very pretty, I'll do that, or I need someone that understands blue. I'll bring blue in. You know....so he works that way.

¹¹⁵ *Storm in a Teacup* was an independent dance company, set up by David McMicken and Tracie Mitchell in the late 1980s. Based in Melbourne the company made a number of works before disbanding.

¹¹⁶ Debra Batton, Artistic Co-ordinator (2001-2009) and performer with physical theatre group, *Legs on the Wall*, based in Sydney, Australia.

He says he works big picture, which isn't necessarily true, but in his way of saying that he looks at the big picture, I sort of say, 'Well, I have to work on, (if I'm working with him) the full engineering.....the structuring underneath that. I've got a musical background, I've got a theatre background, I've got a literature background, I've got a dance background as a performer and as a choreographer, and so I've got a lot to draw on. Tim's starting to realise (in a different way than me).... and understand the technical side of things you know, like the lighting and the engineering of things. And that's just through repetition of doing it over and over again. But the more he knows about that, the better that will be.

But there is also those....those rubbing points or whatever is about what makes Tracks different. And he is here at the Australian Youth Dance Festival as Associate Director of the final dance product and working with a whole bunch of dancers and choreographers saying, 'I'm the only...you know....there's not many artistic directors of a dance company that don't come from a dance background.' [laughs] It's fairly unique.

JD I think he is the only one.

DM Yeah.

JD So you met at *Storm in a Tea Cup*?

DM Yeah.

JD Was that the first work that you worked on, the one with Deb Batton?

DM Yeah - with Tim?

JD Yeah

DM Yeah

JD And then you just realized that there was a connection artistically?

DM It goes back earlier to a degree, Tim was working in Wangaratta. I knew his work up there through Margaret Brickhill as the community arts worker in Wangaratta who we made the Royal Order of the Ausdance Garter [laughs] at one point. Tim worked with....Margaret set up a project where a good friend of mine, Beth Shelton, went up there and worked as a community dance person and that's where he got interested in dance. I then was working at St Martin's Youth Art Centre with youth dance and theatrical dance stuff. And Tim wanted to go and see everything in the dance world. I was working then (when I left that and *Storm in a Tea Cup*), I was working in the Ausdance Studio in Melbourne which was the old YMCA behind the Art Centre. Tim was working with Beth and Dance Works (which was downstairs) so we constantly saw and knew of each other and what we were doing. So it was not until....Tim actually had glandular fever and he was living in Darwin by then but had come home to see his mother. Deb Batton worked with him up in Darwin. I had a small amount of money left over from a project and Deb said, 'Let's spend it.' I said, 'Yes.' Then she said 'All right. Let's work with this man.' And she brought Tim into that process and it was a very small project that...just at that point.... that was clear. I really enjoyed that way of working that wasn't at a high technical dance level. It was at a much deeper, physical and emotional level. Deb with her physical....Tim with his..... really internalising of...and timing how that comes out and me just wanting to dance, really. I want to work with people. I don't want to sit in a studio by myself. I find it a bit tedious, boring and I don't want to just say, 'This is my idea. Push it off.' I find that really..... that dictatorial way of working...is....just....offensive to my heart. [laughter] I don't like it in any field.

I like to have that sense though, that I can build into being a leader and bring people along with me. But to understand that it's a shared journey. We're going on that together. And I

thought that for a very long time and then working with Tim was a way of expanding that because he clearly called himself a community artist at that point. I didn't really have those connections into community art but that's what and where I had worked so it was like opening up in my head and I was saying to myself, 'Oh well you do actually..... might work in with groups of people and communities.' And I've worked in a whole range of different areas in Melbourne from refugee groups in North Richmond and out to the western suburbs.

I was looking for something that connected that with my dance life as I still wanted to perform as well. So it just by chance then Tim and Deb went back to Darwin (because they were working on a project together), and I came up for a visit while they were there. It ended up with news of a piece we'd done together as a performance in Darwin. And then I got a little job up there. Once I had gone to Darwin, I just knew that's where I had to be and I just knew that, um..... as in any sort of relationship you might have artistic or otherwise there are pressures and that there's going to be ups and downs. But despite that I really responded well to working with Tim.

JD Okay. I'm going to leave there. You must be exhausted.

DM No.

JD Thanks David, that's fantastic. I got great info, heaps of it and we'll leave it there.

DM All right.

TAPE ENDS

Appendix 6: Third Interview - David McMicken

Interview between David McMicken, Artistic Director of Tracks Dance and Josie Daw.

Held on 4 August 2006 at Tracks' Studios, Darwin.

JD David, you have mentioned the themes in your work as being age, death and male identity, particularly your own personal identity as a gay male. Can you talk about how these things have developed over *Rivers of the Underground*, *Rust* and *Angels of Gravity*? I suppose I'm interested in finding out the first time you made the decision to make work about some of these ideas.

DM I would have to go back to before I came up to Darwin in terms of the first major work. It is only in retrospect where I look and I say, 'Well there are some themes that go through.' I think that, as for myself as an artist creating work like any artist, you're creating it about the world as you perceive it and what it means, so those are certain aspects of my world. (Particularly working in dance, which is particularly strongly biased towards the feminine.) Working within a field of dance, which I came to because I really liked the physicality of it, I found that as a man all I'd been able to do before, was sporting activities I guess..... like playing soccer and those sorts of things as a kid and swimming and feeling the enjoyment of the body working at some sort of peak level.

I found that dance gave me a way that let my brain interact with that physicality. The unfortunate part of that for me was that most avenues into dance tended to be through female teachers and through a feminised way of moving the body. Although not so much in the initial training with Shirley [McKechnie], but contemporary stuff allowed me, for the first time, to see movement as a non feminine thing. But out of that, every time I was performing anything that was about relationships, it was about a world that wasn't my world which you still have to do as a performer. It is not something, I think that, say, heterosexual performers think about, because they're just doing it. Unless, if you ask them to start playing gay characters, they'll start to probably think it was a bit much. But the assumption is, on the other side, that you just do it.

So it was later, when I was able to create my own work and find an avenue to present that through things like the MidSumma Festival¹¹⁷ in Melbourne, (which was the gay and lesbian festival), where I was able to produce works that were much more about my world. I went, 'Oh I this feels, as an artist, much truer to create work.' And I worked on a piece in Melbourne with Tim Newth and Debra Batton which was *Journey of the Heart*, where I was able to explore, on a larger scale, a piece that wasn't based in a gay and lesbian festival. I was able to put that work out into the world as a new company. I became interested in making sure that that was a permanent part of my practice without forcing it or pushing it, just as a permanent part, because that was something that was a very important. Not that I'd say that it is my entire identity, but it is certainly a part that everyone notices. The impression that you want to make is to be sure that it is still hot and strong there.

So I was developing slightly hidden moments of this, I guess, in running a company or working at Brown's Mart through the community dance program. I had to make a clear definition at that point, of the difference between that work and the later work, that is about developing male dancers. That development hasn't got anything to do with sexuality at all as it's a gender issue rather than sexuality issue.

¹¹⁷ A gay and lesbian art and cultural festival held annually in Melbourne.

So I was developing the occasional works which I've called in retrospect *The Love Trilogy: Bodies of Light, Walk on Water* and *Love Versus Gravity* which were about a part of my world where friends with HIV were dying, oppression was around, and laws were changing. There was a political side without protesting, just putting things out there. I felt that I had, as a company director, a position where I could occasionally present those issues as I would issues about indigenous things or multicultural work. (They just start to sound a bit like the year of the oppressed ... [laughs]...although not really.) It's just that those are things that get me passionate when I start to see a little bit of injustice. I was once told by an ex-partner that I had a heightened sense of justice (or injustice as it might be) and I get upset by silly things. I know there's a hook for me in my work where I go, 'Oh this needs to be presented.'

I came up here [Darwin] and I'm presented with a world that says Aboriginal people are like this, but my experience says it is like something else. Or, that multiculturalism down South¹¹⁸ means this, and when I came up here it means something else. Or being a man in a big city means this, and being a man out bush means something else. So I saw these contrasts very strongly when I came to the Territory, which allowed me a lot of leeway to explore some of those ideas that I don't really feel I could do in a larger city.

So through the *Love Trilogy* I was exploring both some of the sexuality issues within the context of the wider (gay) community as well as stuff up here as well. So I had a fairly good idea of what I was doing. Then it moved into *Rivers of the Underground* where the sexuality itself had nothing to do with the work (even though the three works that led into it were based on that), but I thought, 'This isn't the avenue to push or present a sexuality issue.' It moved into something else. It had moved into the second scene there that you've mentioned. [McMicken is referring to my initial question, which mentions death as a prevailing theme in his work].

JD I noticed in the program notes there is actually no mention of the word virus or AIDS or anything like that, and yet when I watched the work myself on DVD it read strongly to me as a work about AIDS.

DM It became..... AIDS to me..... that thing of HIV and AIDS, as a gay male (and I'm currently negative in my status so I'm not pushing it from the point of view of being a positive person)...but as a gay male... one of the issues about HIV (and then leading into the AIDS related deaths and illnesses), is that predominately it is young people dying in this country and young gay men at that point. I became interested in the ideas of how society can be incredibly negative against a subsection simply because of its sexuality, and the situation of young people dying early when they shouldn't be. I related that to some of the earlier works like soldiers at war dying, and the women that I worked with (the older women and also the Aboriginal women out bush), had this really interesting understanding of people dying at the wrong time (or what we might call the wrong time). So that theme became a stronger focus in *Rivers of the Underground* for me, but it didn't quite come to that through the journey and so that information is held within the development of the work.

JD Well there is that particular moment where there're women raging, beating sacks or cloth or whatever they are, and I saw that as just this outpouring of anger. So what do you think might be the different ways that the Lajamanu women and the Grey Panthers see death?

DM Well the older women see it from two different places. The senior women see it as something that they generally had to come with terms with as they approach it. You know,

¹¹⁸ Referring to the Southern States of Australia

after a certain age every day you live is a kind of a blessing, let's say. So on one hand, they have a different approach to mine but also with a lot of those older women (who were children when they were brought up during the war) - I see them very much like my mother. That's the same group you know, she's seventy something and most of the Grey Panthers are in that bracket. They had been strongly affected by the [absence of] fathers or uncles of that age group. Whereas now we've got old relatives and they didn't have them when they grew up.

So they have had to deal with the violence of that and how hard in many cases. This was exemplified right before I was doing *Rivers*, but what led into that show, is that my father died and he was only seventy. My grandmother, she had three kids and she had to put two of them in the ground, you know. You think it is just wrong. It's wrong once. It's wrong twice but absolutely at the same time it's... like us doing *The Land*, *The Cross* and *The Lotus*, and dealing with this Buddhist meditation, concepts about things decaying and dying and just being what they are so at the same time you go, 'Well, that's what it is.'

The issue isn't whether it is right or wrong for me. The issue in the show, which I hope is what I was leading to in *Rivers of the Underground* is how do we as humans deal with it...and how do we...part of how we deal with it is our belief about what happens after we die. And it becomes...particularly when one is working in a multicultural environment where you've got, you know, Buddhists and Christians and Muslims and atheists and whatever and we're working with them. All of them are absolutely convinced that they are right, but what happens at that point of dying is very different for each and every one of those people. So that became to me...well...that must inform how you live your life. And if you are going to live it in a truly multicultural or multi belief system you have to either stop saying that one of them is right and the rest are wrong and start saying, 'That is what you believe, so that's what is going to happen to you.'

I used the Greek afterlife, sort of Hades kingdom,¹¹⁹ as a model because it had methods for dealing with death and these were things that people were taught in life. Because, from my Western background (that's my theatre background) that notion of saying you pay a price to die, (you know, you have to pay the ferrymen to cross the river to touch the water.) It kills you if you are not dead. You know it's toxic and that you are...there's rivers of wailing which is what we used for those women thrashing around and we said just scream and yell at times. There's rivers of oblivion where you drink from that river and you can't remember your life. That is how you deal with the afterlife and you reach a point of having to let go. There're rivers of flame that burn out, terrible things that are stopping you moving forward. And so I used those ideas of the five rivers. I strongly read them as if someone died when they shouldn't. I see this out bush in an Aboriginal sense too. As soon as someone sees this business, it goes on and they all come and they fight and they scream. They yell and they bash each other and then they sit down and they talk to each other. It's kind of like absolution and then there's a point where you move on but finish. You know, that's the end. You move on from here.

So I've had to deal with less since I came up here but certainly when I left Melbourne in the very beginning of the nineties, I was dealing with quite a few friends that were dying. And back then with the AIDS you didn't have, you only heard about it right at the end, you know...so and so, they've got AIDS and they were never HIV positive. They were... 'Oh, they've got AIDS and they're dead!' So coming up here I had time and space where...and also as the virus progressed in the world and people lived longer, I had time to sort a lot of

¹¹⁹ In Greek mythology, Hades ruled the underworld while his brothers Zeus and Poseidon ruled the land and the sea, respectively. The five rivers in the kingdom of Hades are Acheron (sorrow), Cocytus (lament), Phlegethon (fire), Lethe (oblivion) and Styx (hate).

ideas and distil them into a more universal issue, which stops being about my sexuality and starts becoming...that becomes just a piece of information at that point.

But when...questions about works like *Rust* and *Angels of Gravity*...where I could come back to some other themes...because... which goes...you ask about aging... I think about aging for physical people, athletes - people that work with the body think about aging in a different way, because there is usually an age point or retirement that is much earlier than most people would choose. So that, being an issue to think about for me (now that as I'm forty seven) I was looking around and going, 'Who do I have as a role model for the aging dancer?' And I had, you know...Shirley [McKechnie] would still do a little bit of movement when I was at college, Helen Herbertson¹²⁰ really is the one that...and Nannette Hassall... I remember her talking about being forty and saying how it's the end of the world really. And Helen was talking about having to re-evaluate her entire way of being as an artist once she hit forty (that was great for me!)

My first professional job was a duet with Helen Herbertson and so I've always followed that sort of thing and I've loved working with Trevor Patrick over time. So I knew when I got to do *Rust* that I was thinking less about the actual dying part of it and more about the big gap between youth and death as well as this huge gap in the middle which most of the world lives in but it contains very little art work. And as soon as you approach the idea of aging, people start talking about it and the crisis, you know..... this midlife crisis or how indulgent we are. One of the reviews of *Angels* you know, said it was totally self indulgent - 'flopping around on stage worrying about getting old or something. Who do they think they are?' That was just one. So I was really interested...I layer that with my sexuality that as a gay male there is an incredible amount of pressure to be youthful. So the gay male dancer, you know...like you're dead at twenty two or something!...it's all a bit of...and I refuse to go that way or accept that. We complain about what the media puts out...and yet your own specific needs...our media puts out more than ever this thing about the buff body. I mean, I'm not in there any more, yet those issues start to come up.

So by the time I got to do *Rust* I was able to go back with the development work...not a full length...it wasn't a full, produced work but a development piece, I was able to look very specifically at myself again because I was performing it. I don't do a lot of that anymore and I was able to rework it with some people that I... like, Elka [Kerkhofs], as a multimedia artist who I'd worked with on one and two of the *Love Trilogy* pieces. I've worked with Garry Lang right back in *Bodies of Light* when he and I did a duet together. We went back and revisited that. I was able to go back and revisit material. I created a solo in 1992 when I first came up here and to revisit that and say, 'Okay, how do I feel about ten years later, with the same material and how does it fit in my body now? How does it fit in with my self identity? How does it fit in with the idea of aging? How does it fit as a performance piece?' You know, when I was thirty (it seems relatively young now!) it was quite, you know, a physical piece....what is it like years later? So I was able to explore that through *Rust* and then take that into *Angels*. But again, *Angels* became a....can't think of the word....underneath the gender stuff a little bit (although working with Trevor in his solo material I was able to allow scenes to come through that way)....and I've wandered off the question.

JD Oh no, that's fine.

DM The older women have helped me deal with that, the Lajamanu....the older indigenous women. There's like a whole generation almost missing in Indigenous culture in this country and they got the old people dying, but most of those old people are putting people in the

¹²⁰ Helen Herbertson, former artistic Director of *Dance Works* is one of the few mature dance artists in Australia who have continued to choreograph and perform dance.

ground too early. Their children are the ones that are committing suicide and drinking themselves to death, and whatever, and, in Lajamanu.....in Warlpiri culture, when someone dies and they're in mourning, the women hit their heads with bits of wood. Most of the old women have a big scar down the middle of their head which is quite confronting. They cut themselves too, so there is a lot of blood and things like that. I remember a discussion down there when they talked about needing to change their traditional ways because the women were getting brain damage from too many funerals. You might only have a few deaths in your life normally, but they were starting to do it a lot more. So I realised that there was a commonality between the grave, hampered by the war experiences, indigenous women and the indigenous social province going on, and, then my world as a gay male. So I've connected all of those together. By the time I got to *Angels of Gravity* I was able to pull all those scenes to one. So it's a bit of a roundabout.

JD Yeah, but I think that's what I found with talking to Tim. It's very hard to actually stay on it, (a set pathway) once you get going talking about your work because there are so many different connecting moments.

DM And it is very much..... it's what I like about creating works in companies is that I'm just not thinking, 'Here's the work, finished. Put it to bed. Let's go to the next one.' Because on every work, we keep coming to this thing that's about the relationships, not just with people but it's the relationships between ideas that are really important. And it's a bit like just putting things side by side at times saying, 'What does red look like next to green? Okay, I've tried that. Let's try it next to something else and see if it tells me something different or whether it might have a different connection to it.' And a lot of these scenes, sort of, raise their heads in different ways. Certainly for me, that thing of aging is strongly related to myself as a performer. And so that isn't an issue for Tim, within his practice as a visual artist, as it doesn't really matter. It's not going to stop just because he gets older. But for me, through the period of being up here, I've had to very seriously look at, kind of, peaking as a performer and then moving further and further away from that. So it does come through. The work is a fairly long.

JD Okay, so we've established some of that. Can you talk about some of the ways in which you negotiate your sexual identity with some of the groups you've worked with? I'm interested particularly in the Lajamanu community as well as some of the Christian groups you work with, for example, the Torres Strait Islander Group in *Rivers of the Underground*.

DM I don't know. It's not something I consciously think about when I'm doing what I call the mainstream work. When I'm working with large groups like that, unless it's the theme of the show, then it doesn't come up. It's not something I necessarily have to negotiate. When I'm in Lajamanu, I've never...it's not something that I would even bother with. Because when I'm there, I need to work on something completely different.

There's certain Warlpiri people who would know, (they're just too perceptive, you know) even if I they had someone saying they're gay (which they don't because it's a concept in itself) it's not that they don't have that behaviour in their cultures, it's just a concept that one would be exclusively.....doesn't make sense because the entire culture is passed on through relationships. And so you would challenge their concept (which they find hard to understand) that it is not that I live with a man, but why don't I have children.

So it's not something I've really negotiated in Lajamanu itself or with those women. It's certainly nothing I hide though. It's not, like, when they come up here and visit me in my house or I say, 'This is my partner, Daniel.' or whatever....I don't like....a lot of indigenous, (although some indigenous people are the most homophobic people I've come across) as well

sojust as a self preservation I tend to not to... but I'm not the type of person who goes pushing it away.

With the Christian groups it varies. There was a very strong Christian group that we worked with up here called Unity which was a gay and lesbian Christian group and they were attached to one of the churches. The minister, who is not gay himself but who is strong and supporting, helped the Uniting Church go through a lot of upheaval in the mid nineties and sexuality issues were very big then. We used that group in *Walking on Water* as a performance group and we used them and some of those people in *The Land, the Cross and The Lotus*, so a lot of those sorts of groups work within that idea of it being an issue within the church to deal with. But they had very good support from people like Beth Shelton talking about that from a strong church point of view.

The Christian side of our work, if you like, has been, generally speaking, more through Tim's work because that's his direction. He came to that up here as a....like he was going to the Buddhist Temple. He was doing Tai Chi. He was going to church, and was seeing an indigenous person then. So to him it was an exploration as one of his issues that there is to explore. It wasn't really one of mine at all.

The Torres Strait Island women that performed in *Rivers of the Underground* weren't performing because they were a Christian group. They were just given to us on a plate really, as a gift. A woman worked with them. They were a Christian gospel group but we didn't work with that aspect of their material. Although it informed how they performed and what they performed, it wasn't, you know, an issue within the show and also within that show it wasn't a sexuality-based show. There my work gave me the idea of someone leaving and not coming back or crossing to the other side and how they got back.

JD In the statement you wrote after returning from a long residency at Lajamanu, you mentioned that your concept of family had changed. Can you articulate how this changed?

DM Yes, I shall. I had this conversation with my mother a couple of weeks ago. She was here [in Darwin], and I was saying how, in my Western upbringing, the idea of family had a radical overhaul within my own family context. When I was a child, my grandparents and great-grandparents and aunties and uncles all lived in the same area, so as a kid, I could more or less walk to see any of them. And then there was this explosion of families. But instead of feeling like this extended family, we were down to a much smaller family unit. Mum, Dad and the kids and even then, Dad got sent off a lot. So my idea of a family was..... I think this it is a religious or a Christian thing that family is mother, (biological mother) father and children and that that is the most important thing.

When I went to Lajamanu, that just doesn't work because they want to know who your biological family is, or your blood family. But they also....because they operate where everyone has a direct understandable relationship to everyone else which fits into a system. And you have to fit into that system for them to understand who you are. So once I.....and that's different for me. You know, that's like, I go, 'Oh there's that person. They give me a skin name Japaliarri'. Like when you came in and spoke to me the other day and said, 'Oh my husband's Jangala', instantly I go, 'Oh, he's my uncle. Oh you're my auntie. Oh you're my niece as well.' or whatever, instantly I go, 'You're part of the family and you're related to Beth and Ian as well because he is Jampijinpa so she's Nampijinpa.' So you're instantly Erwin who's Jangala. So suddenly my idea of family stops being blood exclusive. I think a huge number of problems arise because issues we're dealing with socially now are about, what is a child, and what is a family unit?...and who's, you know.... They're saying people on one hand have to be with the biological parents to be the most well balanced child. On the

other hand, they're saying the most fucked up people union... so, like, to me this other system said, 'Oh there is another way of looking at the world.'

We toured down to Melbourne in '96, I think, and took the Lajamanu women down too. It was a really interesting moment. We're at Dancehouse and Tim and I were there with all our Darwin friends because we are performing. Our Lajamanu friends, my blood family and Tim's blood family, and all of our Melbourne friends were all in the room at the same time and the Lajamanu women expected me to introduce my family. And suddenly there is my cousin there who I don't particularly like, but suddenly I went, 'Oh he's Jampijinpa. That's the same as Tim. Oh Tim, this is your brother.' And I had to introduce them by relationship not by name and it's complicated. You know, there are sixteen skin names and you've got to, like, work it out. And I remember my mother going, 'That's not my sister. And I said, 'Oh Mum, this is your sister.' And she said, 'That's not my sister.' And I had to explain to her eventually and said, 'It doesn't matter whether you call her your sister or not. She sees you as her sister and she will treat you that way, whether you like it or not, you know. It's not negotiable.' And that's what I really like.

Within that system, the idea of family stops being negotiable. It becomes an absolute given, like it or not. The idea of country is the same - where you belong or where you come from. So the Walpiri system (it's not exclusively Walpiri), the indigenous system to me gives a connection that goes beyond blood and beyond small units. It tells me thatbecause it goes past people too.....you know, like, we can go to a place and I go, 'This place is Jangala. Oh, that rock is my uncle.' And.... I know that sounds a bit odd, but for me.....because it's behaviour that goes with it, you know. You listen to it. So this place.....the story of this place teaches you something that it is for you. It might not be for that person because it's not their uncle, but for you it is. So place starts to become family as well. Yeah...so does that make any sense?

JD Yeah.

DM It seems really complicated on one hand, but on the other hand I found it incredibly freeing and simple because I stopped having to live in what I consideredbecause it was an intellectual concept about what family is. You see they're arguing about it and this just stops all of that argument. It just says no. It's just not important. The important thing is that you are all related, or you're all connected and that there is a whole range of behaviours that therefore.....because that's the other thing this family had changed for me, is that there are set behaviours of cross relationships. In the Western culture, we might have rules that say don't swear, don't tease, don't this, don't that, and that cuts across the board for everyone.

Whereas in Walpiri it might say that you don't swear at your mother, but you're allowed to tell dirty jokes to your grandmother on your father's side, and you tease that one and you don't talk to that one. There's a whole range of.....so as a human being you get to experience behaviour, in a really broad sense, that is enabling rather than restrictive and so that way of being in a family I found interesting too.

I translate that across, you know....Sarah [Calver] working at Ausdance, she's my mother and I still call her Mum and I behave in a respectful way to that. Tim's my cousin and, partly, that living informs our work too. It's a natural. You're asking one day why we still work together, you know. Hell, it's amazing! But it's like this cousin relationship in Walpiri gives us another way of dealing with things, of negotiating work that says 'It's my concept and you're the worker on it, or it's my concept'....like the Walpiri concept of saying owner and manager - and that shifts. So you don't have the Graeme Murphy artistic director model. You have this thing that's about swapping all the time. So that's a family model and that's effective for work as well as how we negotiate that work.

JD Yeah, it's very interesting. I'm going to just jump around a bit because I think we'll get to that next question a little later. Much of the work of Tracks seems to follow a strong representational narrative. Is this the personal preference for you or are you conscious of making the work accessible to an audience?

DM Yes. This is interesting, this question. Being trained in postmodern technique it was interesting to come to the Territory where that just didn't mean anything. People here just thought that that was a load of nonsense and that that sort of material totally lacked any heart or soul and didn't have any meaning that they could carry. It didn't mean you can't do that work, it just meant that there was no appeal to an audience. So to develop audience appeal, it helps if your audience has some way of understanding. We started creating work that was about here, to give it some sort of narrative. There is a large cast in most of our shows and a mix of cultures and skills, so you have to find common ground. Often storytelling is common ground because you can ask from the building of this place, 'What's your experience of it? What's yours? And what's yours?'

And in the same way that it's both multiplicities of experiences that create some sense of truth that informs the structure of the work. I know when I loved dancing myself and creating work that there's this... and it's purely my training, my early training that I formed...that's where the journey stuff that Shirley (McKechnie) would teach from Bodenweiser.¹²¹ The psychology of it...I love that, that there is this inner eye you're putting out there.

I don't like that in a life that just has figures and lists. I find that sometimes it's interesting to look at if I'm reading a ledger, but I don't find it that interesting any more to look at, because I don't think it goes anywhere. It doesn't take me anywhere. It might if I'm looking at a single work. So when I'm partly.....we're very aware that the line between our audience and our performers is a little more blurred. You might be interested in producing work that I then have to explain that to an audience so they can understand it.

So they then come to the work and I'm more interested in creating a work that an audience comes to and goes....they recognise themselves in it. They recognise that they are surprised at how interesting their own life might be. They become surprised at the extraordinary nature of the world that they particularly live in. In the same way, if you're going to watch a lion in the bush or whatever and you say, 'Oh this is amazing!' You know this actually happens here. So with *Rivers of the Underground* all of those people in that show (except for one that I brought up) lived in Darwin and were dancing about their lives. The wailing came from the Sri Lankan woman you know like mourning stuff that they do. The Torres Strait Islanders were doing traditional work and the break dance girls and boys in that are doing their style stuff. The Greek influence up here is very strong.

So it's not that I'm dumming it down so an audience can understand it. I feel that I'm actually presenting....I'm pushing them into understanding themselves further. And in hindsight, as a practising artist, I'm doing that because the world I want to live in has people that can artistically articulate their lives. If I can help them do that better, then I'm better. I'm happier, you know, like developing an aesthetic eye or something. If I don't want to live in a cultural vacuum, I need to not just produce cultural material (that doesn't mean anything to me) I need them to understand it and feel that they are part of that culture rather than art. So I think that's why it does it. But not all the work is like that, you know. In *Angels of Gravity* I think, although it has some sort of representational narrative through it, it is also quite happy to have really abstract....because that's part of the world as well, it's just not the entire world. The

¹²¹ Bodenweiser Ballet (1939 - 1959) was the first modern dance company in Australia. The company was founded by Gertrud Bodenweiser in Vienna in the 1920s, and it formed in Australia after an Australian tour. The influence was from the strong expressionist dance movement in Europe.

larger works though, the ones that are videoed and put on DVD and our big festival works tend to be audience centred. We're always.....I think we actually take the audience fully into consideration when then creating a work. How they enter into the work and what it is we expect them to get out of it are taken into account. How they can negotiate that with us afterwards or through it is important. Also, because a lot of our works are outdoors, people see you in rehearsal during it. They see the show coming up. They have got a connection to it that's not..... we don't work in a black box. Let's put a magic show on for a bit. So the audience becomes an absolutely essential part of the work because that's, we are doing. It's not just accessible to them.

I'm getting into trouble because everyone will say that they are doing it for the audience but I think we really are. We are doing our work for the audience, whereas I think in a lot of Western arts practice the work is done for the choreographer. It doesn't matter what the audience want. They hope the audience like it and they come along but really they will say that their absolute right is to produce whatever they want to do regardless of an audience. I think that's not in our philosophy at all.

JD When you've described your work to me you've often surrounded it with questions. For example in *Rust* how do we view the body as it progresses? Do you find you return to these questions throughout the choreographic process and do new questions arise that force you to explore them?

DM Yes. I do, yes. I like to, in my own work (and I think is predominantly because I have strong theatre training) find the question. The initial questions provide me with the impulse for the work and the stimulus for it. So I spend a lot of time (before I get to create a work) in this questioning mode. I write things down which go into folders and they go on the computer. Later I come back and look and I go, 'That means nothing, but this still rings true.' I talk those ideas out with Tim a lot. We'll just walk down to have lunch and then I'm thinking about the ideas. You can see what's got legs and what hasn't, or what feels like it connects. We're always looking for questions that have a wider appeal than just one person. So if I'm saying, 'Is there any connection between me as an aging performer, for example, and *Rust*? Is there any connection between that and anyone else in the world?' And I'll go, 'Well yes. There is. There's lots of shows. There's lots of synchronicity in the world. There's stuff on television. There are magazines. All of these things that are obsessed with the look of the body, therefore I can create work that can connect to a lot more people.' So often, the questioning as I come to that in the choreography stays fairly.....I keep going back to it, and once I've got what that is, I come back to it and go, 'Well this is a really interesting exploration but has it got anything to do with what I'm here for.' So it helps keep me on track.

New things arise in the choreographic process for me quite often in that...say in conflict (but it's not the absolute word)..... in debate with Tim, quite often because I might be really going on something, he'll say, 'I just don't understand what you're talking about. I don't get it.' And I'll go, 'Well okay it's....I have to decide whether to keep pursuing that question or to allow a different question. Sometimes it's just rephrasing physically, rephrasing what is going on in order to get the meaning across.

JD So are you talking about maybe a section that you've made, something physical that he would look at and not get, or are you talking about discussing ideas with him that he might ...?

DM It's in the discussion time. When it gets into creating work, Tim will really basically go on a visual. He goes, 'Oh I don't like what that looks like!'.....or whatever, which I don't care about in the end. Let's just say I'm working in a visual form. I take a lot that randomly becomes an aesthetic choice. I'm not interested in, you know..... some people like blue and

some people don't. So when someone says it has to be blue it doesn't mean anything to me. And that's a little bit later on when we've created work where it gets to with Tim, but in the initial stuff there has to be a hook. Because we're running a company and not just creating work, we have to be able to market the work. We have to, so we're thinking about that. We have to make sure an audience comes to the work. So if everyone looked at it and said, 'Oh that's nonsense! I'm not going!' It's a waste of time us creating the work.

But on the other hand sometimes you have to go, 'Well this is an important issue, I think, in the world and it's worth looking at.' So you know, when I was doing *Angels* and I'm looking at aging - the role of the body and how it progresses and whatever, I had Trevor Patrick up here and so you cram.....we spent a lot of time every night at dinner talking about it. So with him sitting there and talking, he and I might come down to really refine time. Working with someone like Trevor is partly why we choose who we work with. I could work with Trevor because as a gay male in a similar age bracket to me, there's a commonality, so we can explore that idea.

I work with Sarah [Calver] in that because she'd worked in Lajamanu so much and knows that connection. I work with Michelle [Dott] also because she lived in Lajamanu but had never done traditional contact with the women. She was always teaching in a school. So I worked with them for different reasons and they give me different answers to the same question.

It seems to me when I was doing..... I was involved in some sorry business down in Lajamanu which is ceremonious stuff that goes on after a death. One of the things they did was, (after fighting and screaming or whatever) all the men sat in a big circle and they went around and let every single person tell their story about what happened. And no-one was saying that a story is right or that it's wrong. What they were saying is that for the same question, what happened when someone died? There may be fifty different answers and that's where truth lay.

So I think that's what I could do in my work. I ask the question and then I try and see how everyone else answers it and then shape that into a piece that has, for me, an internal logic that I think would work. For Tim, when he comes in and has a visual logic, he thinks all things will then take on a visual journey and that also then has a satisfaction for the dancers. They feel like they have added to own the question I've just asked. So I think that's how I use the questions, I think. I mean that query..... It doesn't have to be a set question.

JD I just want to ask this question because I find it an intriguing sort of concept and I'd like you to talk about it. I'm interested in the choice of Trevor Patrick as the lead for *Fierce, The Story of Olive Pink*.¹²² Can you recall some of the conversations that led to that decision being made?

DM If I can...it's a relatively layered thing. We had done a show and its exploration of the show called *Shades of Pink* where six artists from different artistic backgrounds researched this woman, Olive Pink, and put on a show. We all masked ourselves and dressed as her to show this woman has many, many facets. When we used Trevor as Olive Pink or asked him to be in the show, he wasn't the only Miss Pink in the show. We had an Indigenous Miss Pink, a full blood, black artist, we had a female Miss Pink, and then we had the male Miss Pink. So within that show we were always looking at different facets of her. And she originally, sort of, split off from herself, coming and going. There was often the Trevor Pink (who we would call Trevor Pink) or Nicky Pink and we used masks a lot. So we wanted

¹²² *Fierce, the Story of Olive Pink*, (2001). Brown's Mart, Darwin. A narrative dance story tracing the life of anthropologist and Aboriginal activist, Olive Pink, (1884-1975).

to.....Oh, I've gone all over the place! It wasn't ever just saying, 'Oh we're going to use a man in the role, full stop.' It was always part of a balance. We had black. We had white. We had male. We had female. Plus...we originally had a whole stack of other women, all with masks as well.

One of the things when people talk about Miss Pink, Olive Pink, was that she was a mannish looking woman, which you see when you look at photos of her image. She was in the era, plus in the field (where she was into anthropology), which was predominantly male based, especially in the Territory. Working with Aboriginal people, there was a concept that she couldn't do it. There was a lot of stuff brought up at the time trying to denigrate what she was on about. She dressed in Edwardian gowns. Even though it was a female outfit with long flowing dresses, it was very severe and she wasn't feminine, not soft feminine. She was in Alice Springs. A lot of the time she was in the desert, you know, so when she's dressed up in her field gear, she's often riding camels and stuff. So she was very much a female within a male at that time in male arena. So we were interested in reversing that as well. (That is, putting a male into a female arena).

And then above and beyond that, with the ideas we had of her moving, we thought Trevor was the most exquisite mover. I have worked with Trevor but not in recent times. I worked with him, earlier, in Melbourne and seeing his work and some of his development, I knew that he was moving more and more into text based performance. So I thought, 'Well, I'll give him a holiday. I'll get him to come up.' We also knew that it would be working with the Aboriginals in Lajamanu and there's a certain head space you need to deal with that. And we felt that Trevor would deal with that very well.

So we'd like to look at things that click and then when we do bring someone and say, 'We've got this idea. Would you be interested?' And when they say yes then you know it's the right thing.

So with Olive Pink, she was called a lesbian, she was called a communist. They said she'd never finish her degree (which she did). They said she's not qualified. And I thought intellectually he [Trevor] could cope with what she was about. And it helped to have someone that had never been in the Territory. So that thing of her coming in as a Western outsider into this foreign world, it was perfect. It was absolutely perfect.

JD Okay, let's just move on to *Mr Big*. We don't need to talk for a long time about this because you'll be exhausted.

DM No I won't.

JD *Mr Big* has a strong male focus which I know was one of your intentions when you first decided to do the work, to be able to involve young men. Are you pleased with the result of the males in *Mr Big* and what do you think might be their next stage of development?

DM I think this goes right back to the first thing we were talking about where I spoke of my introduction into dance. I was very conscious of what I call the feminisation or the movement vocabulary to *Mr Big*. If we want to create work connected to that place, you have to find the way for the men to be involved in the males featured in the show, (or for anyone to be involved in that). And dance anywhere in this country has real difficulty with that. So we had a long term plan and attempted to try and get men involved in dance which has been both successful and unsuccessful. The success is that we've had quite a lot of family members going into tertiary colleges. However they leave, and so we lose the skills that they build up, which also means we lose the role models and we lose the passing down of information. We have been very conscious of different shows and of putting males into our work particularly

street-style hip hop. We know young girls will train and train and train and love it. So with *Mr Big* yet again, there was a conscious move to say, 'Well we need that element in the show.' We brought Nick Power in and auditioned the boys. They were told early on that we had a male who they love to watch dance. So we put those things in place and ran workshops to try to get them in. Unfortunately, some of our males have dropped out of the show but we've still got some left. They're just young men and they don't understand.

Most of the girls have done dance training from a much younger age and they've been going to two classes a week. They understand that it takes that time to get there, whereas the boys get very frustrated and don't do a lot of variety of movement. But, you just have to keep sticking at it. We look at a line through our programming where we say, 'Where are the young people? Wherever they're going, we're going there, there and there.' We can get the girls (there is no trouble getting girls at all) so we don't have to focus on that. We just have to advertise in town. With the boys, we actually have to put an effort into it. So the next line for me that we're working with (in the last year), is multicultural.....often you can get them, but even then you look at the cultural groups and there's thirty women and two men. So some groups.....the Greek group is from the male family. So we're trying to get them involved in that, but our next big thing for young men will be the Arafura Games¹²³ and there's a whole section in that. That will be just full on dancing, energy and cultural stuff. We had Mark and we did 'Four Wheel Drive for PNG' and that way of dancing which I would look at and say (even though there are very clear gender roles within it), 'There's a strong physicality there.' That clarity is saying this is boys' dance and this is girls' dance. It is important that practice teams say that this is dance. Therefore the men just shouldn't be saying, 'Don't go because the truth is, this is female dance mostly.' In truth, when you look at how the body moves and how it feels and what it makes you feel like, most men would say, 'I don't like how I feel when I do that, so I'm not doing it.'

That was another big shift with me coming to the Territory. I had been brought up in Melbourne in Western training with some sense of where we're supposed to be. To me at that time, a lot of that had said that we're all the same. And at the same time there was this really strong women's movement (which I support in concept) that it could be seen as questionable or it couldn't be. Anything that was masculine was regarded as negative and if it was feminine it was positive. You come here and just say, 'Well there are three things. There's the masculine and the feminine and there's also, sometimes, where it comes together. So we try and..... that's just the culture we live in up here. Now if that was the difference I noticed when I came up here and when I go back down to Melbourne, I will probably get caught up in discussions about it. When you talk to people there, they are discussing what Nick is saying about the men's big events that are going on. Standing around, there's me within education, saying we actually need to focus on men as well, not just let them keep going. We have to focus on and train them properly in a way that is positive and developmental because they're a little bit different.

JD **What are your feelings about the representation of the young women in *Mr Big*?**

DM I think we started well. I think our core is dance leader girls are quite strong. I think the chorus girls towards the end of the show get viewed using a style that is a sort of hip hop. Young people seem to like to watch this and most of them seem to like to do it. I don't personally, but I like the energy of it. I just don't like the bump and grindness of it, but, I like how Nick uses the women for this section.

I think the women..... it is interesting for them to be doing what I call male choreography. I guess you know where Nick is just going to do this. There's just so much stuff comes from

¹²³ An Asia Pacific Sporting Games held biennially in Darwin.

the other side. I want to see the show. Because we started the finale of it which is what Julia and I call the Bad Jazz. (The hip hop stuff and there's two songs in a row of it), it keeps appearing to me as if that's the whole show but I know it's not. Once we get to Saturday and run the whole thing...I think that the women could be more....I really don't know. There is a balance.

There is a real balance between saying that women are allowed to be sexy or they're not and saying they can or can't be. When I look at where most of those young girls are at, they clearly are growing, most of them are over sixteen, they are all at a consensual age within the law and they're all exploring that part of themselves. Mostly they get told, I think, that they're not allowed to explore that in public, or that it is bad. I think that we have to come around to a point of balance that says what is bad and what isn't. See the same thing happens if the boys do what they do, stylistically..... so I think that is worth putting out there in the public forum when we are using public performance with audiences. They then have the option of talking to us about it and debating it, whereas I don't think a film clip does that. You're so divorced from it.

JD Yeah, you said at the Youth Dance Festival in Horsham that you felt a larger part of youth dance was about display. Can you elaborate on that statement?

DM Absolutely Josie! [laughs] It's this thing that I was saying about the roles, the physical roles you have as you age or not and there's a point in youth that is purely about an energetic display of self. And we know this culturally, in any culture. If you look at who their gods and goddesses are, they're not old hags usually. They are usually young, vibrant, sexually active, beautiful, and absolutely controlling the world. That is what young people do and, you know, as an older person I can laugh at it and look back and go, 'Oh you've got so much to learn.' But at the point they're in, that energy drives change, and it drives a vision that is about going for something. It's not about over-planning and I love that. I hate it too because I wish I could still do it. But I love that and it's taken me..... it really was during *Rivers* where, because a lot of things at that time in my life, (it's just an age thing perhaps), were a lot more settled and I said, 'That's the job of young people. That's their job. That's their nature and you have to try and harness that. You can't make them be old people because they're not.'

And they want..... they're fighting with this thing where all that we say to them, if we change their look into something that is about being sexually desirable or not, and I think, 'That's that.' When we did *Fast*, I had complaints from some people that we over sexualised some of the performers. I looked at it and I went, 'Gee! This is a hard thing isn't it? Three of those women have got babies. Most of them are over sixteen and are sexually active anyway, and that's their life and the world they live in. Are we meant to pretend that it's not?' They love it. They put themselves out there, but because we give them these mixed messages, because we give our youth these messages of saying be strong and powerful and independent but not sexy. Be everything except what your body is craving to be. How can they learn how to handle that? So, yeah, I think that these sorts of things give them a chance to explore with their body. They're working their bodies. You know, physically they feel something and they're buzzing from excitement from working so hard physically that one has to, within that, accept that part of that is an expression of sexual display. Certainly, if we let them do what they wanted to do it would be much more than what we are doing. We put it into a context first.

JD Okay, final question. In *Mr Big* there is a sequence of Greek dancing by the builders, where four dancers, (well there's more than four now actually. I saw it the other day) were performing. They included a Greek girl, a Lajamanu boy and several Filipino youths. How did you choose these characters for these roles and do you deliberately make decisions that exclude individual cultural identity?

The roles were roughly chosen through auditions. Through the auditions we looked at the second movement phases from each of the different characters. Then Tim just does things, random things, and just says, 'You're a builder.' or whatever. It is partly as random as that. In this case, in *Mr Big* there was a scene where we realised that Bob the Builder hadn't been introduced properly, (builders up here are predominately Greek). We also realised that two of the cast, and then the Lajamanu boys and the other boy, Jason, who had been sick... had less to do in the show. We thought we'd create a scene. Originally the scene was simply building and it was the Greek girl who said, 'I think we should do some Greek dancing, because all the builders are Greek.' They're not all Greek, but up here you can talk about things being Greek built. You look at those big Greek companies and the girl herself runs a building company. So it was her suggestion to do the Greek dancing. When she said that, we said, 'Yeah, okay.' The kids that grow up here, even though they often have a strong cultural identity, they also have a strong sense of mixing those identities together. So the idea of representing...it is not to represent the Greek culture or to not represent the other cultures. Some shows though, (because this show is about youth) will be very much about those cultures being representative of themselves and me looking at what those fusions are.

In *Fast* we used a lot more cultural material where we asked them where they get their movement vocabulary from that lives in their body. What cultures and things are there? It's a bit like when I first came here and worked with a Filipino. Before I knew it, I'm all dressed up in Filipino clothes and doing a head hunter dance with some Filipino women! On one hand I'm thinking, 'This is really weird that I'm a Filipino.' And then on the other hand it's like, she's the boss. She's telling me what to do.

It's the same when we did *4WD, Sweat, Dust and Romance* where we had Aboriginal choreographers. We had dancers who we'd brought up from down south who had real trouble doing cultural dance, Aboriginal dance, and saying, 'No. I'm not allowed to.' No one's ever told them they can or can't. They got that in their head, and yet they get up and do the PNG dance because that was maybe seen as, I don't know, folk dancing. They're allowed to do folk dancing but not Aboriginal dance. I think that if we were in Lajamanu they would get up and do the dance. They just demand that you do. There's not this sense that I am in their culture. So I don't know all the answers to those questions that come up by putting them out there. You know, like she's the Greek girl and she wants to do it. I said, 'Okay, let's try it.'

JD **Okay, I'll leave it there. Thanks David.**

DM It's a pleasure.

Appendix 7: First Interview - Tim Newth

Interview between Tim Newth, Artistic Director of *Tracks Dance* and Josie Daw.

Held on 3 August 2006 at Tracks' Studios, Darwin.

JD Tim you were trained as a visual artist, what prompted the interest in performance and can you describe your first encounters with dance?

TN It was interesting thinking about that because my visual art training was three years of my life. I thought about my interest in performance, and how when I was in fine arts I did a lesson in drama and that was the highest mark I got for any of my subjects. Then I went back, (I remember to secondary school in an English class where the teacher decided to do a bit of drama), and I remember she said to a group of us, 'make a car.' That was like a lightening bolt to me that we could actually make a car with our bodies. I clearly remember that moment from when I was maybe fourteen.

At primary school, (I went to an extremely small primary school of 23 students), and I remember this woman came in, (who was brought in because we only had one teacher for my whole entire primary school experience). This woman came in and did a play with us, and again I remember that as being... I just adored this woman that came in and got us to do these things.

So yeah, I do think of myself as visual, but when you ask that question I think back to my training and there were these really clear moments that were crystal for me, which brought me maybe to where I am now.

I guess a key turning point was when I painted murals in Queensland. I had some friends who were painting some murals in Queensland somewhere and I thought, 'Oh I'd like to go to Queensland. I'll go up there.' I then got invited back to my hometown of Wangaratta to become an artist-in-residence to do some murals, and that's where *Dance Works* went to put an artist in the community. [A rural residency program where the visiting artist was dancer, Beth Shelton]. Their intention was for the artist coming into the community to work with a musician. I happened to be in the office and I said, 'Oh yes!' [About working with Beth]. So that started this whole dance thing that rolled on from there. And, you know, I was thinking about it, until I actually created, (we created), a work together...I was describing myself (even though I was painting murals) as a fabric artist, as that's what I was experimenting with. Sewn fabric shapes that would fill with air when you moved with them.

The first dance work I ever saw was the dance I created with Beth. I'd never actually seen any dance until I'd created that work as a collaborator with a choreographer. Which is interesting because I knew Beth quite well by that time and she took me down (to Melbourne), and *Dance Works* was interested in working with me as a designer.

I saw a dance rehearsal for the first time. I knew the dancers outside of being dancers before I saw this rehearsal. And I remember (I think it was a piece of Sue Healey's) I thought it was really weird. And why I thought it was weird is because I knew these people, but here they were intimately touching each other. I knew Ian as different to Sally but there they were doing this, and I thought, 'Well what does that mean?' Straight away I said to them, 'What does it mean that Ian is touching Sally like that?' It had nothing to do with what they were personally feeling, but I remember they were my first feelings of watching the dance thinking,

‘That’s him touching her but he doesn’t have anything to do with her.’ So it was a strange response. I didn’t understand the relationships that I was seeing. That was my first moment of actually seeing any real dance.

JD Yes, that’s interesting because not coming from the language of it, for you to question a moment like that, I think is a really raw response. I’m interested in, I suppose, how did you reconcile that later on? Did you come to terms with it and say, ‘Well that’s like a fantasy?’

TN Because I knew those people I knew it wasn’t real, but it made me straight away question the meaning of what they were doing from a visual and kinesthetic point of view. It was a piece of Sue Healey’s and I loved how they were moving. She works really beautifully with dancers. You know, she creates work that dancers love to dance, and so I was responding on all those levels, but I also knew these people as people, not as dancers, and so I was also responding to the people doing these things which was dance. I find that interesting in retrospect, because I feel like I work with relationships with dance now, and the relationship is actually the key thing.

JD Between the performers?

TN Yeah, very much so. Even creating the work it’s more the relationship I have with that performer that then creates and goes on into the work. So I feel maybe twenty years later I have reconciled it by the way this company works.

I guess from that, I then went to live in Melbourne and, being a country boy who was initially scared of the big city, by this point I was fine. I remember I went on my own little personal journey as I was working with *Dance Works*, and doing different dance classes, improvisation classes and contact classes.

I remember doing an Alexander workshop with a woman who had come over from New York. I was sitting in the group and she came and did her thing to me. And then she said, ‘Stand up’ And I said, ‘I can’t stand up.’ My body in this new alignment didn’t know how to stand up! So in this process of working with *Dance Works*, primarily as a designer in the beginning, I was doing these classes and I was finding out all that.

I remember doing a workshop with Anne Thompson and discovering I had a pelvis, so I guess I did find in that process I discovered I had a body! Through the work I was doing, it was allowing me to get my own relationship with my body. I wouldn’t say I was becoming a dancer, and I wasn’t becoming a dancer, but I was actually becoming in tune with my body. Before, I was totally unaware of that kind of thing.

I guess that’s one person’s journey, but that feels like where dance or performance entered me, if you like.

JD Yeah, it’s interesting, even with the mural work, that’s a certain type of artwork which is very public. So really, from very early on, you were involved in the public display in some way. And so it is interesting how that has continued in your work with Tracks.

TN Yes, you know, I remember a very early work was when I was artist-in-residence in Wangaratta, there was a youth festival and I remember coming up with this concept which was called *Arm to Arm the Great Shirt and Cuff*. I worked in the schools. We had all this left over fabric from a project and we made these really simple shirts. I got the kids and we painted hundreds of shirts, and they were hung all throughout the festival on this huge, long clothesline. At the end of the festival after the last event, it was lowered down and all the

people got into their shirts which were now joined at the arms. Think of the safety of this! And then they spiralled around a huge shirt which was then let off. It was full of balloons, and they went up into the air. So I was very....I was obviously very interested... I probably wouldn't have made a performance, it was just a way for me to actually create a work and put it out there.

At the same time I was having little exhibitions (which I must admit I found very.... it was like putting things into an empty void.) I would exhibit things and make them look nice and put them up on the wall, but I never felt I got anything back from that. I would get satisfaction in creating the object, but there was never any human feedback or very little, and so it was quite insular. I found that very unsatisfying. I guess that stopped me going off onto that pathway, which at that stage, a lot of my peers were going down.

JD And what made you decide to move permanently to Darwin?

TN My visual art peers were incredibly shocked when a couple of years later they heard what I was doing, because they all thought I'd become a hermit and went to live in a little hut in the bush. The question about why did I permanently live in Darwin.... I remember there was a time when I was trying to make lots of decisions in my life. I went to a workshop and did this little grid, where you asked a question and then you wrote down all your possible options, and you eventually worked out which of your options got the most points. I remember doing that when I was trying to decide about living in Darwin. It was actually Lajamanu that was the key reason I wanted to live in Darwin because it was to be close to Lajamanu. It's different now, but that was a really significant point in 1988, going to Lajamanu.

JD You went through Brown's Mart?¹²⁴

TN Yeah, I guess Brown's Art was the umbrella organisation for what has now become Tracks. I'd had no exposure to Aboriginal people in my life, and I hadn't been around them. To actually go to a community and you're the one who is the different colour and it's really remote and the people... I remember walking around and seeing this old man painting on his verandah. This was a whole different experience of life. I remember once I'd been there, I had to work out a way that I could live there for several years. There was something I felt I needed to get from that experience.

JD What do you think that was?

TN I think it was about being Australian. You know, I've always... it's not a patriotic thing... I'd never had a desire to go and do the Europe thing, or the Asian thing at that stage. I just wanted to be an Australian and in my own travels had been travelling around Australia. I'd never had that Indigenous experience and I really didn't even know it was there to be had. But it made me question who I was and what I was as an Australian. What I was as an artist. What did that mean? Who were these people who had been living in this country for thousands and thousands of years, and who was I in relation to them? There was just this... this huge, pile of totally new questions that I'd never asked or considered before, but I just felt I had to jump into and somehow make some sense out of.

JD And did you go down as a dance person or as a visual arts person, or what was your first project?

¹²⁴ A community art company incorporated in Darwin in 1979.

TN It was a performance project so it was with the Youth Theatre Company. I had designed back pieces for the company and I had a good relationship with them so the performers said, 'Well you may as well be given the piece in these selected roles as well.' So we went off and quite early I linked up with the Patrick family (that happened to be that first old man that I saw painting). It was only a year later. He was a great painter as was his wife, and he had a responsibility, he toured with the dance stuff. So whenever dance was happening he had a responsibility for looking after it. Particularly at this stage when the women travelled, he and his wife were in the group. He would travel with the group to make sure they got it right, he would always be there. He was a fantastic craftsman and woodworker; he took me out bush and taught me how to make boomerangs. He'd sit and he'd paint, but he would travel with the dance group as well. And so, even though this man was a lot older than me and we hardly spoke any..... there was something I saw in him that was... he was skinny like me and tall like me. There was something in him that I saw that was a bit like me. He did all this visual art, but somehow he was totally connected to the dance group that travelled around, so I could just see that there were these parallels between him and I.

JD And the dance group that he was touring with at that time, was that mainly the women....?

TN It was mainly the women because a lot of the women would travel to places like the Burunga Festival, or wherever there was a festival or cultural event, which was quite often. The women would travel and they would dance, where the men would mainly perform when there was an initiation or some ritual that would need to happen in the community. That's when they would go out and dance, but the women would actually dance much more in a public arena. It tended to be, mostly, the women in those days.

JD And just going on with the dancers, it seems to me that the performances that you produce are particularly driven by the dancers you work with at the time. Can you talk me through two works that are similar to you and give me an example of them and talk about how the dancers and their roles work within the performances?

I actually found this one of the hardest questions to answer when I was going through them, because I feel where I began and why the companies are sort of different, but sort of the same, is that once I got past being the designer, other companies started picking me up. Particularly *Tasdance* in Tasmania. I was grateful to be given eight to six dancers to create a work with, and Jenny Kinder who was the Artistic Director of the company, would have all this administration to do (not to put her down, she created a fantastic opportunity for me), but basically I'd be left in the studio to create the work for the dancers and I'd run upstairs and grab her out of the office and go, 'Can you just have a look at this before we end today?' and she'd have a look. It was a fantastic opportunity for me because I worked directly with the dancers in creating the *Dance Works*, as well as designing and spacing. So that feels a bit different to what I do with *Tracks*.

JD We've just had conversations about how you had quite a strong connection to Rukshana and she seemed to be a real key figure in ...

I have got a proper answer to this question which I will talk through but I guess quite often in creating the works and visioning *Tracks*' future works, a lot of the stuff I contribute is to the cast and how that might how we thread together and come up with a set of relationships and a logic to the cast. I remember with *Angels of Gravity* it wasn't originally Trevor [Patrick], Michelle Dott and Sarah [Calver], but there was a point of logic for me where I went...'We could potentially bring in Michele Dott because she's worked in Lajamanu as well, and there is the connection between those people.' So I guess quite often I'm making a connection.....well, it comes back to the fact that I'm actually making relationship connections to cast members that are not essentially dance driven. They are

dancers, but I look for other relationships. I feel like I drive a lot of that within the company. I can go back and talk about the work such as *Snakes, Gods and Deities*. It is sort of tricky. It doesn't.... its all these little elements that just trickle in one by ...

JD You mentioned to me that it was seeded from the Asian Residency.

TN Yeah, I was trying to think back to the project when it was actually envisaged. I'd actually written it up before I did the Asian Residency, but the Asian Residency took it over and formed it so it much, then it became a major drive within it. I wanted to create a piece around fear - I think it was where I was coming from! In Sri Lanka I had this strange relationship with snakes - I saw a snake about every third day when I was there over a three-month period, which was just bizarre. So these snakes kept appearing. I remember first arriving in Colombo to meet Argent from the *Sama Ballet*,¹²⁵ and he said, 'Look I hope this is all right but I've got the band today, and I have to shoot a video with a snake charmer. Is it okay if we go and get the snake charmer first?' So their little van arrives and I'm in it. And later this very exotic guy with bandages around his head gets in the van and he puts this bag in between me and him. I realise the bag is wriggling and of course it is full of snakes. We shoot him playing the flute with the snakes coming out of the basket, which was just fascinating. At the end they're all talking in Singhalese, and before I know it, he has wound the snake around my head and around my shoulders! At this point I was absolutely terrified of snakes, absolutely, but what could I do, you know, I had this huge python around me and they started videoing me!

So the whole thing of snakes became an important element, and I began to visualise what I wanted the [central] pose to be at that stage. I came back here [Darwin] to create the work and Suzanne [Fermanis]¹²⁶ was here for the first couple of weeks in the year, so we were doing a lot of strategic planning. She does, quite often, encourage one to think bigger. 'If you could do whatever you want.... what would you do?' And I think in that moment I went, 'Well, I would really love Lavadus from Sri Lanka to come and work on the piece.' And from that momentum, we started to move.

In Sri Lanka, their drumming is totally integrated into the dance, and Prasantha (who is the drummer who works with them regularly) was an extraordinary drummer. I'd worked with Airi Ingram from Drum Drum, in the four-wheel drive project,¹²⁷ and he is somebody I really like to collaborate with. As soon as I met Prasantha in Sri Lanka, straight away I thought, 'I've got to get Airi to meet this guy.' My gut feeling was I wanted Airi to create the music for *Snakes, Gods and Deities*. And all of a sudden we said, 'Bring the Sri Lankan dancers over.' And later, 'Oh, bring the Sri Lankan drummer over.' And so the music was a really clear part of the development.

JD It's like you were setting up the things that surrounded the work.... did you have key images in your head at that stage, or did that not happen until you were in the studio?

TN I knew what I wanted the posters to look like fairly early on. I knew I wanted to work with Rukshana¹²⁸ because we've had this working relationship with Rukshana and I somehow wanted her to, you know.... I felt I was in her country and I wanted her (somehow)

¹²⁵ *Sama Ballet Company*, based in Sri Lanka.

¹²⁶ Suzanne Fermanis, Development Consultant to *Tracks*.

¹²⁷ *AWD, Sweat, Dust and Romance*. Darwin 1997

¹²⁸ Rukshana Sashankan trained in Indian Classical dance and collaborated with *Tracks* on several productions.

in that the connection. I was throwing around ideas of who would be the dancers, and who would be the *key* dancers in this project, and Rukshana was a really logical one. Julia Gray, who is also a PNG Australian was another, (then it became obvious that I should involve Irony as a PNG drummer) so that connected.

There is a woman called Jolanda George (who is an Indonesian woman living in Darwin) who David had worked a little bit with in *Rivers of the Underground*. Rukshana took the lead (sort of) female role the first time we did it, and Jolanda took it the second time. We were both excited about getting those two to work together. I talked to Rukshana, Airi and Julia a lot about fear, and what did that mean in their culture. What were symbols of fear? What did they fear as people? I started to develop a storyline, if you like, for the show, and at that same time I realised my story wasn't in there. I guess that's where Yoris Wilson (who is the other key dancer) who we'd worked with, who... can do anything really, came in. He was mainly working in theatre, and I started to work with him because he was a really good physical performer. I guess I felt that Yoris could tell my story in the piece. Much of my personal story and then Julia's and Rukshana's stories were woven into the piece.

In Sri Lanka, I was interested in the meaning of dance and what it meant for people to dance. Why did people dance? A lot of the reasons are to do with rituals. I remember a ritual that went on for two nights and three days and sitting there all through the night...they danced all through the night. They actually employ the dancers to come in and perform the dances, and drummers to perform these rituals over several days.

That thing of the dancers having a real purpose within their community and their society had been something...I grew up on a sheep farm where there were shearers who played football, and I was really happy in that life, but where my life had led me had very little to do with that. I guess a lot of my values come from there, but it is a very different life that I lead now. I was always interested in becoming an artist and that my role would be just as important as the shearer, as the plumber, as the doctor, as the teacher. If I was going to be an artist, I wanted to feel like my role was just as vital as any of these other roles that I've just mentioned. And that was what I was seeing in Sri Lanka. I was actually seeing the dancer, the performer, the drummer, actually having a vital role in the community and that was really good. That was a really important thing.

JD Did you connect the ritualistic dance in Sri Lanka with what you have seen in Lajamanu at all?

TN No. It felt very..... it felt quite different. I use the word *felt* because the Lajamanu thing is so connected to the earth. You know, you can't go to one of these things without being covered in dirt. It's forty degrees. You're covered in sweat. The dirt sticks to you. It's really hot. It's taking a long time and you don't understand what is going on. There are flies. You haven't eaten for ages. There's the whole body sensation of being involved in Lajamanu. I remember one of the first dances I actually got involved in I was painted up in margarine (they mixed margarine with charcoal). Then my body was painted black, and they put white circles on it. I don't understand the language, so I didn't really know what was going on.

When I was in Sri Lanka, I was sitting on a nice mat and there was incense burning, people were constantly offering me food and the costumes were silver, shiny, beautiful, exotic. So when I was watching the dance (because the body sensation was *so* different as I watched) I felt the physical sensation of being in Lajamanu. I wasn't actually making those connections between the two things, which is interesting. I've never actually connected them until you made the comment, I've never thought about them being connected or not connected until you asked me that question.

JD Okay, let's talk about defining your sense of visual aesthetic. I'm interested in finding out some of the qualities you're interested in visually and whether you have been able to explore and develop these areas in your work with Tracks? A lot of your work I've seen on DVD has a real sense of balance to it and I'd like your response to that.

TN Essentially I'm really interested in space. I love working with space and yeah, absolutely right, I do have a sense of simplicity that I really like and I do have a sense of order. I do know as an artist I actually need order to begin, although that's not necessarily where it ends up. But I need that sense of space and order before I can see anything else that might end up being somewhere completely chaotic. That's a part of my personality type. Very different to David's where he can work with heaps of people around him saying many different things. I can be there and *operate*, but I actually need to do my creative thinking outside of that in that much more peaceful, still space. Then I can think about it, and bring that information back in to that more chaotic state.

So I think actually that thing of simplicity and order are really key to my aesthetic, and I do feel satisfied within the Tracks thing. I guess I love the big picture, I love the whole picture stuff and that's what I love about running the company in that I have a say in how the kitchen looks, and what the kitchen chairs are, or how the offices are set up and how they look. It drives everybody else crazy. I work out what the letterhead is going to look like, what the covers of the DVDs look like, what the promotional folder looks like...and the key thing is the images that sell the show.

And I love that relationship I have with Mark¹²⁹ in that he is a fantastic photographer and thinker and art director, in his own right, but I know he loves our challenges. I'll have an idea and I *almost* give it over to him, (David will get information about the project as well) but I will tend to give Mark strong visual ideas and say, 'I think that should involve one dancer, and I think it should be this dancer, and I think it should have four arms, and I've got these five pythons.' What's great about Mark is that he will take the idea, but he'll take it somewhere else and I'll say, 'That's not at all what I expected!' But it comes from our conversation. He has actually taken it somewhere new and taken it in the direction that he wants to take it, so it is always exciting. It feels like he has interpreted the idea and added to it. I find that fantastically exciting.

The actual creating of the work is more to do with the feelings of the space. For me space comes before the work and I spend a lot of my time looking for the right space. I drag other people around as well, just exploring sites. For example, in *Snakes, Gods and Deities*, I knew I wanted trees and I was thinking of a clearing that was in the middle of trees. I hunted high and low and I wandered through this golf course and found these two fantastic trees that joined together and created a huge canopy. So the feeling I was looking for was there underneath the trees.

I then think 'What do audiences need to feel as they enter into this performance? How do the audience actually enter?' I guess it's the same as the poster, you know. They see the poster, they see the image and that's the way in. Once we get the show, how they actually come down that corridor, or go up that lift, or walk across that golf course, and then what do they arrive at and what do they feel and do? What is around you at that stage? Are you in two inches of dust and very industrial, or is it very slick and very smooth?

¹²⁹ Mark Marcelis, photographer and designer of posters for *Tracks*' various productions.

I'm really interested in felt experiences and how that can inform an audience. When you're describing that Lajamanu ritual compared to the Sri Lankan ritual, I know those things feel different because of that felt experience.

So there is that thing of the site and that's one aspect of it. Then once we've created the dance work itself, the choreography, it's placing that within the site. There is the site which the whole audience and the performers inhabit, and then there is the bit of the site that we want people to look at the most. How we make that work is a different set of equations because it's not about the audience. It's about the choreography. It's about the dancers and the dance. It's about the capabilities of the dancers. Often the sites are not easy and I might go, 'Well that would look fantastic coming down those steps.' And then I realise it's the Panthers¹³⁰ and they might not be able to see very well in the dark. I enjoy having those ideas and working with the choreography and with the choreographers. I usually have the first interface with the lighting designers and the production people and I just like working it all out.

I love logistics too, and working out how the performers get into the space...what happens if the lighting tower is put over there...and what if that bit of the dance happens right in the distant because that feels really different up close. I get excited about those things and because it is very visual, for me the dance seems often a texture or an energy that I'm placing. It might be a fire energy, or it might be a very slow, passive energy.

JD In the studio you seem to take on the role (not on site but in the actual studio) of an observer a lot of the time. So is the work that you and David make generally cut and pasted towards the end of the show and choreographed in small units so you've got the freedom to move around?

Often but not always. It's very different if I'm directing a piece. If I'm directing a piece I'm in there all the time and that gives me the right to actually direct all the way through the process. If David and Julia are choreographing I know they need to create, I don't have the dance development skills that David and Julia have where they can actually develop dance skills with dancers and quite often we're working with dancers who are not highly trained. So a part of actually creating the choreography is developing a level of dance skill, and I don't have that skill to pass on. I work with them much more in the office where we actually create the concept and we talk about what the dancers do. Then we choose the music and we talk about it, and so we come up with a feeling of what it is going to be like. I get growled at if I butt in (in the process) because I know they have to get that skill level even though I'll sometimes say, 'Oh that's not really what I had in my head'. It doesn't matter at that point. They have to create...they have to get..... it's more important that the energy is right, and usually the energy is right, so the fine detail is not so important. In the end the big picture is. So it's important I don't butt into that. But it is different if I'm creating the work - I will play with the fine details. I don't play with the fine details in this arrangement [*Mr Big*]. But for example if I'm directing a piece I will play with it. Yeah, it's a different substance.

JD Okay, I'm going to leave it there because I think that that is quite enough for today. Thanks Tim.

TN Thanks

¹³⁰ The Grey Panthers are a group of women, predominantly over sixty years old.