WORK: A POETICS OF ENDURANCE WITHIN THE VISCOUS SOLO

by

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

METHODOLOGY

VISCOSITY – AN EMERGENT PRACTICE-LED IDEA

SOLO WORK

AUTHORSHIP AND THE VISCOUS SOLO

MULTIPlicity AND THE IN-BETWEEN

TRAINING-PRACTICES AS BASELINES

THE VISCIOUS SOLO AS PERFORMANCE-PRACTICE

LIMITS

WORK AS PLAY

PLAYING WITH ENDURANCE

PLAY ECOLOGY

PLAYFUL RITUALS

WRITING

A POETICS OF ENDURANCE WITHIN THE VISCIOUS SOLO

BIBLIOGRAPHY

APPENDICES

1. Work (DVD)
2. Running Commentary from Inside Work
3. Jemima performance-practice at the Salon Series, Studio 202 (DVD)
WORK: A POETICS OF ENDURANCE WITHIN THE VISCIOUS SOLO
Duncan’s solos...were enactments of agency, the self in the process of engagement with the external world...When Duncan proclaimed that she had “never once danced a solo,” she was, I think, referring not just to herself as the collective Chorus but also to the interaction, or “duet,” so to speak, of her body on/by/with its surrounding space, which she rendered not just visible but palpable. At root, Duncan's dances...exemplified the striving and struggling of human Will. (Daly 1995: 6)
INTRODUCTION

Fundamental to my understanding of my solo dance practice and performance is the term “hybrid”. For me “hybrid” is a way to articulate a practice, performance and self that is not one, not singular or discrete in its aesthetic, physicality or philosophy. This hybrid is a mesh of intertwining strands of practices, experience, memory, imagination and consciousness, which are constantly weaving and re-weaving tensile, interconnected threads. Rather than viewing hybridity, the hybrid body, as a negative construction brought about through a pastiche of poorly understood practices, I view the hybrid solo as a positive and expansive practice, process and philosophy. Hybridity opens space for the experience and expression of what I have come to know as a “viscous” solo (discussed throughout this exegesis) and provides me with a means to be adaptive in professional arts practice, and therefore to operate in an open, pragmatic fashion. Hybridity involves a fluid dynamic relationship across art forms and the ability to collaborate widely.

Hybridity, multiplicity and fluidity function texturally and tactilley at different levels throughout my practice and performance. I am choreographer, performer, dancer, actor and acrobat. I am interested in the collaborative and artistic potential of contemporary dance, improvisation, aerial arts and physical theatre, and in placing all in a constant state of flux and friction, so that they operate at once as possibilities that jostle up against each other.

A discussion of hybridity must consider the nature and context of dance training during the 1980s and continuing into the present. Over this time, it has become common for dancers to train in multiple techniques, with varying theories of the body and aesthetics. Louppe, Davida and Foster recognize the 1980s as ‘a break in the tradition of dance in which the creation of a corporeal condition had been constantly linked to the aesthetic and philosophical orientations of the great creators (creators of choreographies but also ‘of bodies’).’ (Louppe 1996: 64)

The term, “The body for hire” was coined by Susan Leigh Foster to refer to dancers who are largely involved in project-based dance work with independent choreographers and encouraged to train in multiple techniques. In so doing they are cultivating

a new kind of body, competent at many styles. The new multitalented body resulting from this training melds together features from all the techniques...It does not display its skills as a collage of discrete styles but, rather, homogenizes all styles and vocabularies beneath a sleek, impenetrable surface. Uncommitted to any specific aesthetic vision, it is a body for hire: it trains in order to make a living at dancing. (Foster 1992: 493 - 494)

The term “hired body” usually refers to dancers engaged in short-term or project-based work for independent choreographers. However, the bodies, practices, processes and aesthetics of independent choreographers hired by dance, circus, theatre and physical theatre companies, or as commissioned
choreographers by working to a brief, could be understood in similar terms. My own training has been influenced by this approach. I was encouraged to undertake a “theatrical” training which was designed to teach young dancers the techniques of ballet, jazz, tap and various styles labeled broadly as “contemporary”. While I have a history in training designed to produce a multitalented hybrid body, I do not see myself as a “body for hire” in the creation of my own solo dance practice and performance. I use experimentation with multiple techniques and forms to create a body to meet my choreographic and aesthetic ends, and also to extend the possibilities available to me. It could, however, be suggested that my “choreographer” is “hiring” my “dancer”, “performer” and “acrobat” to fulfill its choreographic vision, and further, that the training-practices I am maintaining are also able to be viewed from the perspective of a “body for hire” – which Foster argues is ‘training to make a living at dancing’ (Foster 1992: 494).

Louppe states that

In today’s dance, both the demands made by choreography and the structure of dancers’ training inscribe hybridization in the destiny of the body. As a result, it is virtually impossible to develop recognizable zones of corporeal experience, to construct the subject through a given corporeal practice. (Louppe 1996: 64)

Louppe’s view is that hybridization works against the development of a distinctive corporeality. Despite this fundamental tension, my project has been to find within the hybrid practices in which I have trained strategies for repurposing the cultural, artistic and corporeal bases of these practices to create for myself a recognizable corporeal experience and subjectivity. Unlike the great modernists, who were interested in refining cohesive and distinctive dance practices based in their own bodies, I seek to find cohesion through integrating diverse, and even contradictory, practices within my own body. I question whether, if hybridization is already inscribed in the destiny of my body, and the bodies of my generation of dancers, through our training environments and immersion in a project-based dance industry, it is necessarily problematic. My project has been to seek the possibilities within hybridity, rather than assume hybridity to be the enemy of distinctiveness.

The concept of hybridity can be understood in terms of creative process as well as in relation to the formation of specific dancing bodies. Creative development projects, which engage in improvisation or task-based processes, place a specific and explicit emphasis upon the interaction between individuals. As individuals make choices of action based on both their own histories and the interactions

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1 “Contemporary” dance within the commercial and suburban dance school context holds many meanings. It refers to a gamut of ideas including neo-classical, lyrical jazz and lyrical contemporary.

2 The breadth of dance training I would ascribe to my early training is such that each evening would be spent moving from ballet class to jazz to tap to “contemporary” and sometimes back to ballet. This form of training touched upon each technique without ever developing an understanding.
with others taking place in the room, the result is not necessarily disengagement through fragmentation of a sense of self, but can in fact be a stronger sense of individual subjectivity and the corporeal experience therein. Although I am in a position of making solo work on myself, the interaction with myself in the studio is very similar to an interaction between choreographer and dancer or performer. In either case by engaging dancer or performer in a process where their subjectivity is valued, they are already in a process of constructing their ‘corporeal experience’ and agency. This process asks dancers to contribute their own ideas, memories and experiences/histories in such a way that their very being is implicated in the work. It is not about explicitly realizing the choreographer’s work or “body of work” but a weaving of all parties’ bodies and works together in a performance text.

My early dance training across ballet, jazz, tap, character and contemporary dance and my physical aptitude for many sports are of significance in the way I have formed my understanding of hybridity. My experience of working and training in many different techniques is such that I have clear understanding of the ways in which each, as a separate practice or technique, potentially creates specific kinds of movement and specific bodies. Susan Leigh Foster describes this process of becoming a dancer:

Dancers pull, tuck, extend, lift, soften, and lengthen areas of the body throughout the duration of the technique class. They learn the curves or angles that body parts can form, and to place these in a particular shape at a given time...Over months and years of study, the training process repeatedly reconfigures the body. It identifies and names aspects or parts that were previously unrecognized, and it restructures the whole in terms of dynamic actions that relate the various parts. (Foster 1992: 483 - 484)

Foster considers this process for the dancing body, studying a singular technique to mark ‘the body so deeply that a dancer could not adequately perform another technique’, and in turn that ‘each aesthetic project was conceived as mutually exclusive of, if not hostile, to the others.’ (Foster 1992: 493)³ Hybridization also produces bodies, however they are not bodies confined to a singular, specific body, philosophy or technique. It could be argued that these bodies have greater agency in contemporary settings because they are open and freely adaptive. Openness and adaptability are made possible through a deep process of practice within which the philosophy, technique and biomechanical and kinematic principles of the body involved are extensively and intensively engaged. Often the hybrid does have specific penchants for certain movements, performance aesthetics and contexts, and specific skill sets that they hone out of their own

³ In stark contrast to this Isadora Duncan sought to ‘discover movements so suited to the human form that they would be rendered virtually transparent on the body.’ (Daly 1995: 34) Her reaction against technique follows two corollaries described by Daly. ‘First, since individual human bodies vary greatly within the general form, therefore every person will move differently...she imagined a multiplicity of forms of dance, based on each dancer’s own form and vision...Second, since the form of the body changes over the course of a person’s lifetime, movements will change accordingly.’ (Daly 1995: 34)
desire to perform. These specific characteristics, brought together through an individual process, are precisely a contemporary project in the terms Louppe describes when she discusses the necessity for each dancer to 'begin again' and forge their own corporeal/aesthetic path. Louppe states that,

In contemporary dance there is only one true dance: the dance of each individual...Contemporary techniques, no matter how scientific, no matter how long it takes to acquire them, are before anything else the instruments of a knowledge leading the dancer to this singularity. (Louppe 2010: 23)

However, in this case, the formation of a specific dancing body is dependent upon interaction between forms and practices.

The aim of this research project has been to define my own sense of hybridity in action. Inherent in this process is an engagement with my dancing history, and a consideration of the degree of stability (or otherwise) that might be possible or desirable in my own formation of a corporeal and choreographic voice.

Image 1: Straddle hang on the tissu. Releasing upside-down and allowing weight and energy to drain out of my torso over an extended time.

In 2006 I received a grant from the Australia Council for the Arts that afforded me the opportunity to continue the work I had been exploring on my own with established artists Legs on the Wall and Jodie Farrugia, and to undertake private tuition with Helene Embling in tissu at the National Institute of Circus Arts. What began to concern me, working with these practices and practitioners, is the amount of work I would need to do to be able to perform tissu and acrobatics as professional discrete skills, practices and techniques themselves. Discrete and definitive terms, practices and techniques of the body and movement seemed to move me towards both mastery and immobility. My desire was for a perpetual
crisscrossing of forms, movement, dance, circus, improvisation, gesture and functional movement without separation.

I was reluctant to pursue the techniques in their own forms because the accent of the movement, and the performance context or style was not where my attention was or is. The performance context of circus acrobatics and aerials sits more within the idea of spectacle, the sideshow, of virtuosic feats or perhaps exhibition of human oddities or difference. Movements often have an accent that may take the form of an explosive or force-based accent or a pause, before, during or following a “trick” or skill. This can be functional: it can support a preparation, an extended suspended flight, or ensure a safe landing, a stuck landing upon completion. However, the accent also signifies for the audience either to prepare for something spectacular or for applause. The accent takes

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4 My own experience as a muscular female in dance growing up, where the meeting of bodily and aesthetic ideals is inscribed in the training, practice and technique — especially in the ballet had a negative slant. Throughout history however circus opposes these ideals and celebrates difference in bodies. Jando says:

At a time when female sexuality and physical culture were often repressed by the prevailing religious and conservative mores, the circus did something that no other performing art was able to achieve: it welcomed women for who they were, gave them career opportunities, let them exhibit their bodies and physical strength in public, and managed to do all this without losing one inch of its - and their - respectability. The circus gave women freedom rarely found elsewhere and unwittingly provided a model for female emancipation. Further more, as a by-product of the circus’ intensely physical culture, sexuality of both genders was brought into the open in an otherwise sexually repressive climate. (Jando 2007: 201)

What is of significance is the value placed in the possibilities of the body as it happens to be for each individual and the individual project to experiment with one’s own body potentialities. Elizabeth Streb reflects my own feelings with relation to difference in movement of individual bodies. Where dance classes are concerned;

Movement is an oral history, passed from one practitioner to another. What can that body do? And what marks are left behind on it after completion? What particular type of scarification? Is it merely a memory, or as a body moves with each move, does it create a more complete and physical marking of itself, internally if not externally? Is the history of moving embedded within each body? Does each body carry the content of its past actions? Is this, then, the true meaning of movement?

I can do what I do with my body because of its particular assets, shapes, muscles, proportions, and other parts of my nature. The fact is, no one has the particular body I have. That is the premise of modern dance: the enormity of difference and the actions that different bodies invent. I do not just mean invent. Certain bodies and psyches are more willing than others to go to extreme places. Physicality is a conduit for the giving and receiving of harm, as well as pleasure. (Streb 2010: 47)

5 “Stuck” refers to the absolute certainty of landing. To “stick it” essentially means to ground the feet into the floor, pressing the soles firmly into the floor claiming for yourself a self-congratulatory arrival following the successful completion of the trick. It’s a stoppage, a finish, from here the flow of motion ceases. One might refer to the term “stick it” as used in gymnastics training for the clearly defined finish where the feet are pressed firmly into the ground, the body then straightens and for women’s gymnastics the classic back arch. This is the “duck” (this duck back became another playful experiment in my performance) back, bottom sticking out, a hyper extension of the lumbar spine and the pressing of the chest forwards (proud as a peacock), chin cocked high and the arms in a strong v-line up towards the ceiling, hands punctuating with a spikey flourish.
away the smooth dynamic I was seeking and created a hierarchy for movement, via the assertion of authority or importance of the accent. This seemed to me to steer the dance more towards spectacle or virtuosity.

I understand acrobatic movement to emphasize the accent. For example, in executing a cartwheel there is an accent on the hop (signaling a preparation of something requiring some force), a reaching of the arms side-ways to the floor, a transference of weight from one hand to the next as the legs also pass through the wheel plane overhead (or through the air, the body inverted suspended on the hands), as lowering your legs one at time (the reverse order to which they entered in the air) your hands one at time leave the floor returning your feet to the earth (there is another smaller accent on the arrival, signaling completion). The accent as I understand it is functional, but at the same time is a "tell" (a statement that something is about to happen or has finished, get ready to applaud). My own experience of forming an accent in movement is to place an attack or to attack the movement. This attack is usually not sustained with the same intensity throughout the movement, but is rather found often at the beginning or the end of the movement. With the removal of the accent or attack altogether, or a re-positioning, the intent of the movement changes and subverts the "tell". I was seeking to smooth over the accent, eliminate it, so that my movement maintained a smooth viscous quality. Paradoxically my training of acrobatic skills has strengthened my body, so I have greater control and rely less on the accent to generate movement.

Attempting to find a balance between the acrobatic and the gesture, it became clear to me that an ‘accent’ or ‘attack’ from within the acrobatic trick places it in a hierarchized position, and alludes to a greater energy investment, in this way creating spectacle of virtuosity. The removal of the accent or attack might be understood in a similar vein as Yvonne Rainer’s NO manifesto, in which Rainer states “No” to ‘spectacle’ and ‘virtuosity’ and all things that constituted dance. Rainer also notes that,

Much of western dancing we are familiar with can be characterized by a particular distribution of energy: maximal output or “attack” at the beginning of a phrase, recovery at the end, with energy often arrested somewhere in the middle. (Rainer 1974: 65)
The arrest in the apex of movement as brought about through an attack, an explosive expenditure, freezes the moment of spectacle in the perception of the viewer. Attack also creates anticipation of something spectacular. I was attempting to fluidly pass through movement without a climax.

Image 3: Suspend flight at the apex slows descent to land through the top of foot first then outer leg through the knee.

Additional to the accent is the way in which the traditional circus act is constructed; namely by “lining-up” one’s skills or tricks in a row. The emphasis is first placed upon creating the illusion that your tricks are building in difficulty or risk, the last seeming to be the most difficult or risky. The aesthetic, philosophical or thematic context is secondary or inconsequential. This is not to be read as a definitive depiction of circus act construction, but to be understood in counterpoint to values in contemporary dance.

Rather than become an acrobat, I decided to continue to treat training in the skills I had gained from these experiences in acrobatics and tissu as support for my own interests and experimentation. This led to the performance work Peggy-Sue in 2007. This was a solo work that sat in-between circus, contemporary dance and physical theatre. The in-between was uncomfortable to perform and felt like I was uncertain and trying something on in the process of performance;

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6 The practice of lining your tricks up was discussed by circus performer, Rockie Stone, at the Symposium for New Circus Research held at La Trobe University, December 5th 2011.

7 Peggy-Sue was developed with assistance from Dancehouse and performed in their curated season ‘We Like Short Shorts’. 
constant shifting of gears that holds onto everything, not letting go of anything. It felt like everything and nothing at once.

I began working on numerous collaborative and commissioned projects that also crossed technical and disciplinary boundaries. Duets with Kathryn O’Keeffe explored acrobatic dance and the relationship between circus arts and contemporary dance. A circus commission gave me the space to consider how tumbling can work choreographically to create meaning beyond spectacle. Physical theatre commissions again gave me the opportunity to explore the acrobatic in relation to dance and further the use of text, breath and voice in performance. The development of an improvisation practice greatly opened the potentialities available to me and expanded the range of my body’s expression and articulation. Commissioned dance works for the Arts Centre’s education programs took on a breakdance sensibility in a contemporary dance context and Melbourne Dance Company asked me to revisit ballet, jazz and so-called “contemporary” to create highly specific works to a brief. All of these experiences informed my current desire to investigate hybridity in both the physical and artistic sense. The ability to work in multiple contexts is something, which seems to me to be necessary to be continually in work as an artist and is also challenging and interesting to me as a performer and creator.

As a soloist I have actively worked against a fixed and singular signification. By continually setting my attention ricocheting between what is both internal and external I am able to actively feed off information and “act” with intent from within or at the interstices of numerous physicalities, stimuli, selves, environment, sound, equipment and other, in such a way that I cannot be fixed or rendered as an object and possessed as “X”. The hybrid, as I conceive it, subverts and/or works against such a singularity and allows me, to continuously experience myself in plural terms. I am a female solo hybrid, and in the act of hybrid soloing I am not bound to any singular technique, aesthetic or choreographic desire not my own.

“I am not a dancer”, as Duncan herself said, and in Foster’s ideal of what a dancer is or might be, I am not a dancer. But just as I am not a dancer, I am not an acrobat, aerialist, gymnast or actor. On a level of skill acquisition for technique, I do possess certain degrees of proficiency, but to be “one” in Foster’s understanding is in a sense to “master” the body, fix its construction of self and render it immovable in other forms. The capacity to move through, across and between practices on the other hand, may bring about an unstable sense of self and that may not necessarily be a bad thing.

I am also interested in humanness in performance and not persona or spectacle. For me, “human” is not persona, character or spectacle. It is the engagement of the performer in “work”. By this I mean an attention to the work at hand, be that,

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8 Kathryn O’Keeffe (then Newnham) and I met through a mutual friend in 2006. We began training together in acrobatics (tumbling and acrobalance) and tissu and started experimenting with how we might inform our contemporary dance technique and choreography with these circus techniques. Under the company name Inverted Dance Theatre we presented several works in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney throughout 2007.
running, a forwards roll or wiping one’s hand down one’s face. Humans perform all of these actions and they have specific relationships to ‘time, space and body.’ (Streb 2010: 21) Without having to create meaning or add expression to movement, or come from a narrative or drive a narrative through adding expression to movement external or additional to the movement itself; the movement performed by humans with attention paid to the doing is richly meaningful. I think the single performance of one’s actions (as this is always an individual project) with an audience present is an act of generosity, and in my case also displays vulnerability.

![Image 4: Jumping with the "TV" sandbag.](image)

If the solo is hybrid, multiple and fluid what are the limits of the solo? The soloist? And, are either ever really solo or one? These questions have become a central focus of my studio research. My questioning of limits has been taken up in experiments with duration and this has thrown up further questions as to what a poetics of endurance might reveal about the humaness of performance. While I think that I am hybrid, multiple and fluid, through testing the limits of solo performance over extended duration I am interested to see if this remains, or if the human in the performance is stripped to a singularity. My interest in physical limits of the soloist began as a challenge and a tactical inquiry as to how to perform what I see as athletic and physically demanding movement over a longer duration. Where many dynamic solos exist within a broader ensemble work and last not more than a few minutes of “spectacle”, I wanted to challenge my physical performance and expose the work my body is undertaking.

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9 Streb deems ‘time, space, and body’ to be the most basic elements of a “real move”. She believes that ‘a real move has the power and depth to create a movement archetype. These archetypes are made up of motion first, rhythm second, and image third. They exist powerfully as narrative or aural archetypes do, but they currently go unnoticed. (I believe that these archetypes or memories are stored at a cellular level – chemically, muscularly, and maybe even in the marrow of our bones and in the endings of our nerves.)’ (Streb 2010: 21)
METHODOLOGY

As an artist I have placed my practice and performance at the centre of my research. In my project I am choreographer, performer, dancer, actor, acrobat and more. Collaboration occurs between these roles and across art forms and physicalities. Throughout this project, I have employed “training-practices” and “performance-practice” as experimental processes within which to understand what I have come to call the “viscous solo”, which I have worked to create in the context of a poetics of endurance. It is through practice that I have brought my ideas and concerns into focus, and through practice and ultimately the creation of a solo performance work, that I have addressed them.

In an attempt to understand more about a live performance work that might unravel, weave and re-weave across dance, circus arts, improvisation, theatre and physical theatre, I have identified three key components to my creative practice. The three components are “training-practice”, “performance-practice”, and “performance”. Training-practice refers to the practice of the techniques, such as acrobatic tumbling, corde lisse and tissu, improvisation, contemporary dance, ballet and running. Performance-practice is a process in which I play with all potentialities for action at once – gesture, acrobatics, dance and aerials. Performance may be choreographed or improvised action, with an audience present. This latter experience creates an additional in-between, between audience and myself, and their responses throughout performance are another source of feedback and stimuli with which to play in the moment of performance. Considering these three processes as separate activities was key to my developing a hybrid practice. Each individual training-practice in its own right developed both strength and depth of understanding fundamental to the ability to “re-wire” pathways – that is, to adapt existing practices within a new, hybrid practice. Without considering training-practice as separate from choreographic decision making, and also from performance, I could not have developed the ability to thoroughly re-purpose these practices within my work. Performance-practice enabled a process of reconsidering how I could jump from one mode of practice to another fluidly, and avoid the clichés (or simply conventions) of how specific movements begin and end in different practices. For example, performance-practice enabled me to play with how to avoid accent (the ‘tell’ and the “TADA”). It also enabled me to subvert the urge to blend transitions, and develop new ways of moving between movements and practices. Performance provided me with the opportunity to experiment and experience “live” feedback from an audience, and to additionally call upon the relationship between myself and the audience as another thread with which to play with in performance. Audience reaction or perhaps in-action are further variables and negotiable strands that move in and out as possibilities to play-off in performance. It is with these additional threads in performance that my “viscous” solo all comes together.

My experimental processes functioned throughout my research in a non-hierarchical paradigm. The use of play, playing or playfulness as a governing principle for experimental processes reigned throughout. There was no separation or distinction between aims and processes. I interwove aims and
processes throughout my studio based research and writing practice. There was no container for my methodologies. Everything happened simultaneously, and in an iterative fashion in that each articulation informed the next, but not necessarily in an identifiably linear way. Where solo work started as a methodology to explore hybridity, it also became a subject of investigation, as have “training-practices”, “performance-practice” and “performance”.

It is by my jumping in and doing, through practice and performance, that issues within my solo practice and performance came to light. By describing my research as practice-led I am strategically looking ‘to initiate and then pursue research through practice’. (Haseman 2006: 1) Drawing on training-practices, performance-practice and performance (the performed outcome of my research) as practice, I am placing my research into what Haseman suggests as a new and third paradigm for research, performative research. Within a performative research context I am placing my solo dance training and performance practices into an experiential mode where the emphasis is on experimenting with, exploring, examining and articulating the limits of the solo hybrid.

I describe the experiential mode of practice-led research as an “experiential tact”. The “experiential tact” has multiple significances in my conception. The tact can be read as a tactic, tactical, to be tactile, in contact or tactful. In this way I feel it is strategic within my discussion of multiple bodies and the hybrid body. It can assist in the play or interplay within an experiment of multiple techniques, bodies and states of consciousness by alluding to exchanges taking place at the interstice (the interstices between physicalities and this I more specifically relate to a sense of muscular or nerve exchanges) or across the surface of the skin. I suggest that the experiential tact creates opportunity for reflection.

As a practitioner, the process of reflecting in and on action or practice in part begins with an assumption that my body knows more than I can articulate on the page at this moment and that through active reflection within, through and post practice that this knowledge can be illuminated. This type of knowing is tacit. Polanyi (1969) refers to tacit knowledge, which is deeply embedded knowledge not normally available to conscious awareness. According to Polanyi, tacit knowledge can be understood on its own, and explicit knowledge must first be understood tacitly and then applied. In this way all knowledge is tacit. By reflecting within, on and through training-practice, performance-practice and performance, I assume that issues, ideas and insight are inherent within my dance and that tacit knowledge can enter into awareness through continual practice over duration. The process of reflection in my dance practice occurs within the act of doing; prior to doing in the planning of experiments (improvisations, often) and tasks or forward planning of movement (choreographed, pre-planned dance or tricks) or areas to test; and also post-practice, in the beginnings of articulating ideas, issues and insights as experienced within practice. The reflective process actively oscillates.

In this project as a soloist working within, through and across dance, circus, improvisation, theatre, and physical theatre, I have questioned and investigated the collaborative and artistic potential between these forms. I have undertaken
an experiment in which all forms jostle up against each other to produce what feels like a viscous fluidity at the interstices in motion. My studio practice throughout this project was further fuelled by an interest in the physical limits of the body. By this I mean that I have been exploring and testing my body's physical capacity to perform solo over extended durations, to perform multiple physicalities or techniques and fluidly move between them. I have also explored the question of whether I can perform multiple roles in both practice and performance including but not limited to: choreographer, performer, dancer, woman, acrobat, athlete and actor.

This document examines the insights and ideas that have informed and been produced by this research including hybridity in relation to “baselines”; multiplicity; my personal movement history, training-practices, performance-practice in terms of what Roland Barthes terms Text; physicality and endurance as tested through an idea of limits which opens out positively to experiments of possibilities for action; and solo work in relation to muscularity, accents of movement, performance and humanness. These are the products and register of what I have come to know as my viscous solo.

Viscosity occurs through a process of weaving and re-weaving multiple strands. The woven nature of my practice-led research has informed the structure of this document. Rather than placing my writing into a traditionally structured exegesis with clearly defined chapters I have woven my exegesis together with signposts to mark out ideas. The woven structure disrupts what might otherwise be a linear document consisting of introduction, methodology, processes, findings and conclusion. I have deliberately not grouped my exegesis into such a framework. By doing so, I feel that the written work is a text for you the reader also to weave. Here, as in the performance of WORK, viscosity occurs at the interstices, at the interstices of the knitted signposts. The elucidation occurs between multiple ideas within the fissures, and through their intertwining with one another.

The signposts within this document function similarly to baselines in my physical practice. They may be separated out, grouped or woven as I have done throughout this document and as baselines do to produce the viscous solo. My writing unabashedly dives into the centre of my discussion, hybridity, and then continues to unfurl in multiple directions as I whip backwards and forwards through historical and present practice. Like the viscous solo attempting to perform all baselines at once, I seek here to write everything at once. Just as my studio practice consisted of many strands, it functioned within and alongside my written and reading practices. There is a seamless paradox at play both within this, my written exegesis, and my studio practices and performance WORK, between the necessity to separate out individual ideas, practices and processes and to perpetually interlace the amassing threads, tensionally grappling with them and stretching their possibilities. I seek to maintain throughout a sense of jockeying for position and my sense of urgency to convey the experience and learning with succinct immediacy.
VISCOSITY – AN EMERGENT PRACTICE-LED IDEA

Through a studio process of training-practice and performance-practice, I came to understand the viscosity of the movement I was creating to occur through the combination of suspension-tension-release. Suspension-tension-release can be understood and read as woven or bound but not linearly so. What is important is that there is a friction between them, which I think is an attachment to tension and a playing with tension. By that, I mean that I can suspend my body in space in a way that creates an ideal opportunity to release my weight into the space, accelerating and propelling with the force the suspension generates. But the tension, like the tension in the body during inversion, is such for my musculature that it can be let go, be released incrementally to create movement that feels somewhat like moving through a vat of honey. It differs from other ways of moving that may be completely released, or a firing and release that is out of control. I think there is in this viscosity an element of in and out of control, which is, paradoxically, simultaneously smooth and dynamic. Dynamic, in this context, is defined by the controlled release of energy without accent, rather than simply by the speed of the release.

To begin unraveling the multiple strands producing the viscous texture within my musculature in motion, it is necessary to weave together several historical accounts of my experience as a dancer because the origins of a complex embodied concept like viscosity has deep roots. I would therefore like here to offer a chronological account of discoveries made in my practice from 2004, as an undergraduate student, up until now. It is important to note that it is only in reflection that I have been able to articulate these discoveries in this way and only through on-going studio practice that they have come to surface. Thus, viscosity is both an existing embodied concept and a nascent articulation made possible through the physical process of this thesis.

Theatrical dance training and the participation in numerous sports have greatly inscribed my body and informed my practice in such a way to remain open, adventurous and playful in what might now be described as a pursuit of the viscous solo. More formally, that viscosity emerged during my tertiary dance training in a subject ‘Dance Video’ at Deakin University, although the term viscosity is something I have only come to use through the process of this project.

Experimenting with ropes as a way in which to engage film students in a movement context for ‘Dance Video’ while in my third year at Deakin, the premise was to work collaboratively to create a short dance film. With this in mind, and the knowledge that they themselves were quite a physical, athletic group, sitting on the train and passing the Rock Climbing centre an idea was born. At the Rock Climbing centre we were limited in our shot selection and framing, however further experimentation on my part lead to a way of translating some of our rock climbing movement in harnesses into floor work in the dance studio. No longer suspended by ropes we simulated the climbing with bellies off the floor, crawling low, with limbs extended. It was quite a muscular feat to maintain a tension in the body, to achieve the lizard-like crawl. A lizard-
like crawl is the result of taking the vertical climbing pattern and placing it into a horizontal and grounded perspective. I also took further some of the suspended spinning we experienced in the harness while rock climbing. Working with rolling, twisting and spiraling my body from the centre as if still within a harness on the rope, I was able to find ways to extend the movement found in the harness and still be able to invert myself – it was at this time that the “shoulder-stand”

10 was born and the “spinning-date”

11 replicated. While collectively we rock climbed, the translation of the vertical to the horizontal and grounded action was a solo project and the start of more experiments to come. It is in this initial experiment that I also locate an early iteration of “deferment”, the deferment of flight and never the full release of muscular tension.

!Image 5: A relaxed shoulder stand.

Equipment pieces such as in the work of Trisha Brown and Elizabeth Streb, ‘made extensive use of self-imposed restraints and impositions, the better to bypass the intervention of the ‘mental’ in order to discover the corporeal source of the poetic gesture.’ (Louppe 1996 b: 7) The projects of Brown and Streb are diverse, however both approach the practice of working with equipment through asking questions. Both emphasize “human” action and not ethereal flight or otherworldly-ness. They share an investigation into the human body in relation to gravity, space, physics, flight and body propulsion. My translation of rock climbing on the wall to floor-based movement follows this line of investigation. I wanted to understand how aerial experience could inform floor-based physicality through a detailed understanding of suspension.

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10 see Image 5. Shoulder-stand has become a signature within my work.

11 A spinning-date, borrowing the term from Roy and HG’s commentary of the gymnastics, refers to the flaring or splitting of ones’ legs in a ‘V’ as one essentially rolls around the shoulders and then to the forearms as they are tucked under the chest whilst on the floor. This movement is also known as “leg flares” and is a predominately male skill involving much strength particularly in the upper body. While having its roots in gymnastics it is often performed within breakdance contexts.
Companies such as Legs on the Wall, Meryl Tankard’s work for the Australian Ballet and Australian Dance Theatre, and Zaccho Dance Theatre, among others, have also presented work experimenting with the connection between dance and aerial arts. In most cases the aerial arts performed in these works are more likely to be performed within a harness attached to a rope or on a track or pulley system and are not aerial arts within a circus understanding of tissu, trapeze, corde lisse, straps or other contemporary inventions. What these artists offer is a jumping off point for aerial arts in dance or physical theatre contexts. The use of aerial equipment in these works provides the visual effect of flight or locates dance within certain landscapes, architectures or screen contexts. While they require physical knowledge of aerial practices like suspension, these works do not deconstruct suspension or investigate its implication outside the potential metaphoric meaning and not to inform and affect dance practice, dancers’ bodies and movement on the floor. This is a separation and distinction between dance and aerials and something I have worked within the viscous solo to overturn.

12 It should be noted that these companies place emphasis more so in aesthetic terms and not as Brown or Streb in the weighted realities of the body in motion and its corporeal gestures. The beauty of the body at work is not foremost. There remains a desire for flight but perhaps without a sense to the realities of human beings and gravity.

13 This might be seen in a similar vein to ballerina’s en pointe. Where in ballet the effect or illusion of being en pointe is supposed to make dancers appear lighter and potentially airborne. In both the ballet and in uses of harnesses what we see is not “real” flight or indeed airborne action. To achieve flight, the body on its own must leave the ground and displace its vertical relationship to the ground and gravity. In so doing the bodily relationship of one’s head, pelvis and feet must shift from a vertical to horizontal relationship. If flight and ethereal beauty of a suspended body is the desire the use of harnesses does go part way there. This seems to miss out on the muscular effort, strength and work it takes to suspend the body and the inherent gracefulness and vulnerability of smooth muscular action and the reliance on your body action. However flight can be found in acrobatics in the headspring, even if only for a fraction of a second!
During my studio research for this project, I worked with the corde lisse and 2 hessian ropes together in an experiment to see how I might translate floor or ground-based dance into a suspended reality. In part, what I was hoping to achieve was a sense of being airborne over an extended duration. I was also looking to change my bodily relationship from vertical to the horizontal for longer, however this proved to be more of a wrestling match and struggle than anything. The tension in my body during these experiments was extreme and the effect of gravity and a single and fixed vertical axis of the three rope strands was particularly limiting physically. I also worked on how I might work the transition from rolling on the floor, and at other floor-based levels, and jumping or leaping perspectives onto and off the rope. I also attempted on the rope to swing out away from its vertical stable axis and release my hold before returning to the rope.

Following my earlier Rock Climbing experiments, I sensed a separation between dance and the ropes in the next performance work I made. In a collaboration with other dancers, we either worked with the ropes creating beautiful images, climbed, found ways to suspend our bodies and contort within the rope; or we created dance movement that had little or nothing in relation to the ropes. This was until I created a phrase that took ideas of suspension and spiraling around central axis points. By so doing I created a tension in the body and also discovered a powerful sense of falling. The falling was not a release of weight as such but a smoothness that unraveled with a spiraling dynamic that referenced the work we were doing with the ropes. Diversity developed in our movement as we interweaved all that we knew from the ropes: small hand gestures, muscular twitches from clinging over extended periods. The suspension into a spiraling, supported fall to the ground with the rope informed much of the work as we also sought, unsupported, to spiral around axis points before unleashing the tension in a particular pathway.

The experience of developing work from experiments with the rope and an understanding of spiral, suspension and release led me into my next solo experiment in which I sought in many respects to undo the verticality and stability of my early dance trainings. This was my Honours research project *dancing in monotones: the smooth dynamic*. At this time I was more interested in improvisation, as I felt the ropes opened a new space for me as one which played with dynamic and the shifting of my body’s weight in relation to gravity and the rope. The rope in many respects was not dissimilar to a partner in a Contact Improvisation duet, where ‘Contact Improvisation (CI) is, at its root, a duet form based on the dialogue of weight, balance, reflex, and impulse between two moving bodies that are in physical contact.’ (Smith 2008: xi)

Early experiments within the practice or form of Contact Improvisation are very similar to the early work I was doing with ropes. The relationship between myself and the rope took on the specific focus in improvisation to follow the point of touch as it moves, the improvisation with the rope was asking me to be both strong (capable of supporting and falling) and vulnerable (taking on the direction of the rope or being moved by it), requires a vulnerability and a humility
to accept external stimuli). It is a ‘play of moving and being moved, specific movements are unpredictable but they occur within a knowable field - of gravity, centrifugal force, support and dependency.’ (Paxton 1988: 38)

Image 7: Opening out after spinning with the mat on my back it remains in contact with my back through the mutual force generated throughout the spin.

Image 8: Playing with the corde lisse in WORK – following its swing and finding a mutual suspension.

The rope could re-direct my movement and ask me to be open to the possibility of something other, to be alert and receptive, strong yet vulnerable. These paradoxical states created an opportunity to first begin to understand something of the “in-between”, multiplicity, hybridity and sense of not being “one”. It is within the interstices of physical practices and the states of being or expression that are resultant from the movement that the viscosity of my movement is located. The viscosity is produced through a tension that occurs as all potentials
for action and expression rub up against each other in the moment of performance.

I became curious about the transition from floor to jumping or from floor to suspending on the rope. There is a lot of space to fill in between and it cannot be dead space, inactive, an afterthought of "oh, now I want to be on the rope": there is a transition that needs to occur and to occur within the consciousness and awareness of the performer rather than being ignored, glossed-over or snooked through. I am not necessarily interested in this being a pre-planned activity, it can be of-the-moment but in being of-the-moment one must be conscious of the moment one is in. If one is to put this into an active description it is the difference between looking over your right shoulder without taking in the landscape and blindly arriving to see what is over your right shoulder, and engaging with the landscape or terrain as you turn your head to look over your right shoulder, your gaze active through the entirety of the action as opposed to just arriving at the final destination.

What is significant in considering transitions, or even more acutely the moment-to-moment very finely, is the in-between as a space for potentiality. This potentiality builds aliveness where the intermediary spaces could be dead space. Intention there, and activeness within the in-between, generates friction and tension between potentialities as they vie for the position of action. This is viscosity. The potentiality that is viscous might be understood in relation to developmental motor patterns that generate "baselines". Transitions of movement are movement patterns, and dance practices often set in place habitual transitions from one movement to the next, or a pause between movements. However focus or consciousness at and of the in-between provides what Cohen suggests is 'the key' for describing movement patterns: the in-between is 'where movement is initiated from' and awareness here allows you to track or recognize 'how it sequences through the body. Another key is one's attention, and another key is one's intent.' (Bainbridge Cohen, Nelson and Stark Smith 1984: 100) From my perspective attention and intention are paramount when negotiating the jockeying forms, physicalities, expressions and selves that are the potentialities in the in-between that enable me to create what I experience as the viscous solo. Remaining conscious of attention and intention gives me freedom of choice and specifically, the freedom to construct in the moment of performance what might be considered a diversion or an unexpected choice, from the movement baselines vying for position.

Through working with the ropes or tissu and a more acrobatic or athletic way of dancing, as informed by tumbling, I was able to shape and inform my own dance. The discoveries made throughout this journey greatly inform what I understand as viscosity of my movement today. This viscosity is embedded in the musculature of my body. The viscous quality draws on my body memory from all previous trainings and practices, in both dance and sports. Within the viscosity there remains a tension or friction as a product and register of the interweaving of all the experiences and possibilities for expression, motion or action.

In another solo white (2009) I created a sparseness, developed a gestural
language and sought to create space for all of these possibilities to remain in frame as a potential within the perceptual field. But at the same time I wanted a work that didn’t rest on “tricks”, a barrage of physical feats or virtuosic movements spilling forth, or spectacle (even though they were present in a way) as its mode of communication with an audience. There needed to be a delicacy in the work. I sought this delicacy to remove any hierarchy, accent or spectacle within the athletic or acrobatic floorwork, to find a balance between the subtlety of gesture and the dynamic of larger movement into and out of the floor. There was also a process of questioning the reason for each movement. I really wanted to be vulnerable, exposed, questioning and responsive in the moment of performance, even though the work was choreographed. I was also interested in the nature of gesture and its relationship to the acrobatic or athletic floorwork in my dance. There was a great tension between these two. They seemed so disparate; disparate in thought process, in stimuli, in the kind of motor control of the body and the specificity of the movement. Not that the acrobatic or athletic floorwork is imprecise, quite the contrary, but gesture is much more delicate and capable of subtler, more nuanced variation.

Viscosity entails loading or increasing bodily tension through spiral folding then generating an explosive power. While there is explosive unleashing of force there remains an element of tension and tensility within my musculature. This allows for smoothness, easefulness of movement that eliminates the attack and accent of the movement rendering it less dynamic, difficult, explosive, exhausting or risky from an external viewpoint. This in part stems from the exploration and experimentation done with ropes earlier and I also would suggest could hark back to the balletic ideas of not showing the effort behind the movement. This reflects Fraleigh’s description of Martha Graham’s aesthetic:

Strength and grace were not opposed in her technique or choreography – effort, work, and muscle became apparent. Woman achieved grace through strength not through hiding it as in the ballet. The ideal for Graham’s dance was not ethereal and otherworldly. Yet, there was a superhuman, heroic directness and precision in the movement. The intent of her work was decidedly – and demandingly – human, even though her dancers were divine athletes. They may have presented love as a “diversion of angels,” but it was their capability as human beings that interested Graham. (Fraleigh 1987: xxiv – xxv)

In viscosity there is a constancy of movement but that constancy of the release of the spiral or suspension and its potential dynamic explosive force is deferred by the perpetual and incremental release of my body. It is controlled in a way not dissimilar to breath, if one is to inhale to full capacity and slowly or incrementally release the breath over duration. It may or may not be equal in terms of the bursts or releases of the breath or movement but that is unimportant. This duration, rhythm and incremental idea I think has a longer history for me than the ropes – it connects back to early swimming lessons, being dumped by a wave in the surf and tumbling underwater back to shore, to long distance running and rock climbing.
This idea of viscosity can be traced within my body memory of the ropes and links further back to the whirl-pools made in Grandma’s pool as a child that you either had the choice after swirling the water to such a degree that you could no longer run to either float within its wake or reverse your run and battle against the force. The battle is similar to the vat of honey or other sticky substance. This also I think is a very elastic or rubber-band type of torsion or tension, and the amount of tensility I enjoy playing with. This playful tensile fluidity also connects to the smooth dynamic.

Viscosity is poetic. The memory of viscosity in motion is not tied to “one”, nor contained in a singular experience or memory. It transforms over duration, over time.

SOLO WORK

From viewing dance and physical performance over many years I have noticed the deployment of solo “acts” or short divertissements within a larger work, performance, ballet or circus. The solos that I have witnessed as an audience member at the ballet, within contemporary dance works and circus, are brief “acts” displaying a singular discipline or specific skill set of movements, technique. Often the function of a solo appears to be the performance of virtuosic feats in a spectacular show-stopping fashion or functioning as a brief climax within the whole. The solos performed present a dynamic and charismatic persona that actively diverts and alters the often more subdued whole. Its function is to dazzle, entertain and re-energize with its deployment of exceptionally virtuosic technical mastery matched by the charismatic intensity of the performer. In the first instance, solos were or are often choreographed to highlight or showcase the soloist’s particular pendants shaped or framed within the choreographer’s aesthetic interest and the theme of the work.

If one is to look at the construction of a solo for a circus “act” the process belies the individual human performing the “act”. The process by which a traditional circus act or perhaps Olympic gymnastics is made is, as already noted, a laying out of tricks in a row. It is a listing of your bank of tricks or skills and then a shuffling into a sequence where there will appear to be an ascending degree of difficulty. The final trick in the act will seemingly be the most difficult. There is no connection between tricks. Each trick essentially exists as a single unit within a larger whole. It might be likened to a single pearl. Each pearl has its own beauty and is not reliant upon weaving with other pearls. It exists autonomously without need or want of anything other. Its finish is defined. This differs greatly from the Text and my viscous solo.  

The 19th Century ballet dancer, pedagogue, theoretician and choreographer, Carlo Blasis, wrote in The Code of Terpsichore that;

enchainments in dancing are very numerous. Every good dancer has his peculiar mode of combining his periods, steps, etc. Form,

\[14\] See below.
therefore, a style of your own, as originality is the chief means to procure yourself distinction. By copying others you may, perhaps, sometimes excel; but the absence of novelty will, unquestionably, deprive you of attraction. (Blasis 1828: 53)

The display of prowess and mastery of technique is insufficient in and of itself. Where short solos also offer up the charisma of the performer to the audience, what they do not do, as an evening length solo might, is offer something of the humanness of the performer, something of his or her singularity that does not necessarily rely on technical display for its dissemination. By contrast the potential generosity of the individual soloist in an evening length work can offer something other than charismatic mastery in their exchange with an audience. While this might be read as a more deeply personal expression of the performer’s selfhood, equally it could be argued that this impression of selfhood might simply be the effect of being created and performed by the same individual. Whatever the case, this extended solo format does create space for experimentation of an individual idiom.

An evening length solo work does not tend to display the same degree of dynamism as shorter solos. And, if it does, it certainly does not do so over an extended time frame. In the evening length solo work we might witness short bursts of dynamism with periods of rest. In a dance theatre or physical theatre context it may also be interjected with pedestrian movement and text delivered often from a standing posture rather than within a constant surging of dynamic action.15 I am interested in the physical potential of myself as a performer in a solo that does perpetually surge with dynamic action.

My own solo practice and performance is in counterpoint to both the idea of a singular technique or discipline and to the often short duration of the dynamic solo performance. Working with the idea of hybridity, my experiments with limits, duration and endurance were a means through which I hoped to challenge spectacle, performance persona and hybridity. The solo hybrid, for me, is a way of seeking to negate conventionalization of movement and performance, and the extended duration places my body into a struggle with endurance and the possible breaking down of any performative charisma or persona. Hybridity, duration and endurance in my solo could be said to show the human working and at play rather than the performer presenting their accomplishments. While physical accomplishments and technical mastery may be apparent they are not without human effort and struggle.

I created my solo hybrid through a conscious act of experimentation in which I engaged an excess of trainings to strip performance back to human work and struggle. When every millisecond is chosen from an array of competing physical and artistic paradigms, and even re-chosen in the middle of what would normally be constituted as a single movement action, I understand my solo as “viscous” in that it functions as a poetics of endurance. Furthermore, an excess of

15 Examples might include Molissa Fenley, Jennifer Monson, Elizabeth Streb and Louise Le Cavalier.
physical practice over duration challenges my endurance, both physically and psychically, and strips my body of any excess baggage, so to speak. Holding onto everything at once in terms of physicalities and practices, feeling the frictions between “styles”, became an extreme physical experience. Working intensively this way over a period of months, my normally muscular physicality was transformed. It was as though I literally let go of excess body mass. I became almost exclusively focused on muscular effort, and my body composition seemed to reflect this change by transforming into muscle. My body fat dropped to 3%. This was not an effect I particularly desired or anticipated, but it became a real effect of the work, producing in me a “muscular” body in both literal and metaphoric senses, that seemed to both enable and emphasize viscosity.

The solo project in dance has a history of being the platform within which choreographers could test the very ideas of what the body in motion might be, their own ethos of the body and their relationship to the world through their bodies. In relation to Duncan, Jowitt writes

Duncan herself left something to choreographers of the next generation: the idea that the body itself, and not just the choreographic scenario, ought to reflect the creator’s private response to the world, and could be altered to do so. (Jowitt 1988: 102)

Training-practices within my solo practice have altered my body in ways that directly reflect philosophical ideas and experiences of body, work, communication and engagement within the world.

Implicit within my undertaking a solo study, I am engaging with the historical perspectives of solo dancing or performance and its inextricably bound ideas of a subjectivity in dance, of the subjectivity of the soloist as implicated in the act of creating and performing a solo oneself. Louppe suggests that the solo in contemporary dance operates ‘to affirm the presence of a subject in the immediacy and wholeness of both her/his being and movement.’ (Louppe, 2010, p. 206) This might point towards the solo as a site of psychological or emotional expression. However, it is possible that this expression is deferred and is read indirectly through my body at work, hearing its sounds and feeling vibrations generated through work with equipment in relationship to the environment and space – for instance my body slapping on the floor.

In my own practice, this can steer the solo into a realm where the “presence” of the “subject” (soloist) is illuminated in their attention to the intention of action as informed by their choice in the moment of performance. Engagement in the task or work that you’re doing, actually being in a state of work, is to have function and agency as a subject. The choice made from multiple forms of feedback both internal and external to myself could be read as an immediate subjectivity, even though it is mediated through a particular physicality. The particular physicality however in the moment of performance provides a deep connection to and embedded-ness in subjectivity as it is informed by and produced from within the interstice, the in-between, of the training-practices
and movement history. This embedded-ness of a history does not however necessitate an explicit psychological or emotional expression of a personal story, history or truth. As Sondra Fraleigh writes of the German school and Martha Graham:

dance was a means towards self-knowledge – not a disclosure of personality but a construction of it, not self-expression as self-indulgence but a creation of self in expressive action that moves beyond the confines of self...the idea of “becoming” through dancing...human beings create who they are through their actions and choices...the body is created in dance. (Fraleigh 1987: xxii)

Implicated within the creation of the body during live dance performance are the audience or witnesses of the dancing body self. It is also through their engagement and active presence throughout the live performance that the “becoming” of self in dance is not confined to me individually. Nor is it confined to any singular witness or audience member. The live performance contains multiple “becoming-s” which are constructed through both a shared experience, the performance, and through each individual’s personal experiences and histories they have brought with them to the performance.

Emotional and psychological expression in my performance is produced through the intensity of the movement, its viscosity, muscular tension, the use of repetition and duration and not through drawing on a personal experience to emote or evoke a certain state or feeling. I am not working as a method actor would. I am however working with movement in such a way that certain expression as bodily “tensions” is generated within, on, through and outside of my body but this does not necessarily or predictably affect my own internal psychology or emotional landscape in performance even though from an audience perspective it may seem to do so. In this way it could be said to be deferred expression. “Expression” is an effect not a cause.

Image 9: Separating the Velcro mats whilst lying atop of them.
What duration offers is an open-endedness and openness for many threads to be woven together and unravel ceaselessly. It creates space for play with “everything at once” and while for me this may be an experience of being in-between, this in-between and multiplicity is not transparent from the outside. Roland Barthes makes a distinction between the idea of unified “works” and something much more open which he calls texts. He suggests that the unity of a text is made by the “Reader”.

The reader is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost; a text’s unity lies not in its origin but in its destination. (Barthes 1977: 148)

This points to the idea of the solo performer, me, as in a process of questioning in performance. With my body and movement or dance I ask questions of physicality, expression, aesthetic, technique, virtuosity, spectacle, task, function and work. My questions centre around how these create, through the textures of the body, its relationship to space, objects, equipment and audience a reading of the subject. By witnessing the body of the performer at work and in question, I think that something inherently human can be witnessed and a ‘self’ perceived, but that this for the performer is not the intent. My intent is not to express but rather to the task of movement, to performance of physical action. While Barthes points to a “unity” at the text’s destination through the witnessing of the audience, my soloing hybrid as proposed "author" remains unfixed, or in-between.

In both practice and performance I am interested in movement quite explicitly: in how movement is produced in my body and how through repetition and duration (which can become about the endurance of the human or performer), through working on tone and tensility of my musculature, I am able to generate effects that affect my own personal experience and offer a visceral exchange with an audience that may also be affecting for them. This type of expression is very different to that of the method actor in which the actor draws exclusively from their personal experiences and seeks to recreate these in performance. The work of method actors I would think is extremely exhausting and grueling both bodily and also psychically. The work that I am engaged in on the other hand can be physically exhausting but does not impact upon my psyche as such. A producer of a short works season I was involved in would watch my work every night and then ask me from the side of stage how I felt about that performance and I would always smile and make a light hearted remark. She questioned me about how I could perform with such an emotional intensity and integrity in my work and be quite so happy.

Where companies and not soloists perform much strenuous, highly physical dance, I am somewhat of a scientific experiment in a durational sense, where the limits of performance, of my body’s ability to work physically over a long duration are tested with an audience. I want to use this ability to work, to continue to move and function under what might be defined as extreme physical stress to reveal something of the human within the performer, and the dance. The humanness of a performer in direct exchange with an audience, moves
beyond the virtuosic spectacle of the dance, of the acrobatic and opens a visceral and potentially even grotesque experience for the audience and performer alike.

Image 10: “Duck walking” – walking whilst maintaining a squat position of the legs. I was interested in the physical demands of walking in this manner but more importantly the shift of my pelvis. For me the duck was a derivation of the gymnastic pose with the accentuated arch of the lumbar spine. For me this was anti-spectacle, however the power of the movement I think may have de-bunked my theory of non-virtuosic duck walking.

Endurance might be read as spectacle - a spectacular display of endurance. The spectacle of endurance can be witnessed or experienced in various ways. We see in Stelarc for instance the endurance of pain, inflicting pain upon the body of the performer as means to speak about the enduring will of the human in pain. And in circus, the spectacle is found in the performance of “tricks” that perhaps suspend the belief of what is physically possible for the human body. If endurance emphasizes the spectacular in my work, it is not in the vein of Stelarc, performance art or circus. It is not light, brief, spritely in nature, shocking, entertaining or acted out on the body, but rather, deferred and manifested in work and struggle.\(^{16}\)

Through the solo project I seek to elicit an understanding of my own principles, philosophy, aesthetic and practice. It has been my belief since entering into professional practice, that this is key and vital in the sharing of one's physicality, choreography and practice with others, be they students or colleagues in the

\(^{16}\)Deferment in my performance I feel offers an opportunity to move away from spectacle and also potentially from a direct visceral exchange with an audience. By this I am referring to the assessment of the calculated risk associated with climbing the tissu – crash mat underneath and the assumption of rated/tested equipment that has been rigged by a professional. It is also perhaps in the still vertical plane with fixed axis that a deferment of flight might be read and the tearing of the mats that something of the muscular viscosity might be said to be deferred.
form of dancers or other professional practitioners across multiple art forms and contexts. It is only through solo practice and performance that I am able to focus on this and elicit the understandings I am searching for. They are within my body and require a direct focus. The history of the solo as a site within which to test and illuminate one’s own principles, philosophies, aesthetics and practice can be traced specifically back to Louppe’s idea of,

The ‘grande modernite’… a creative framework where the choreographer, dancer, thinker invents not only a performance aesthetic but a body, a practice, a theory, a movement language. (Louppe 2010: 18)

The solo offers me the opportunity to test and experiment in a very focused way my perception of the collaborative and artistic potential between dance, gesture and acrobatics. It enables me the freedom to cross and cut between multiple practices and set up improvisations to experiment with ideas of pre-planned movement and movement of the moment. It has enabled me to bring my attention into the ways in which gestures occur or are created and how they might inform and sit side by side with the acrobatic, and in turn how the preparation of the acrobatic movement and its inherent accent may be eliminated to find some of the delicacy of the gestural movement within.

The solo may be weighted towards the emotional expression of the soloist or towards a less personal intellectual viewpoint. Again I would place my own practice and performance in-between these two poles. While I do place emphasis on expression and the integrity of the expression, I place it in such a way as to attend to internal and external feedback, and within my body’s imagination in the moment of performance. In doing so, I am not specifically drawing upon my personal history or experience as the primary or sole means for expression. Additionally, I am in a constant state of addressing the collaboration between physical practices, physicalities, and filtering their feedback to find action or expression in gesture, acrobatics or dance, and through which I am seeking to maintain a viscosity of the movement and a balance between the “trick” and the delicate gestural language. I understand myself to be in a constant process of transformation throughout this project, practice and performance. I remain unfixed.

In the performance of WORK I am engaged in a process and practice quite literally of “work”. For me “work” has a very functional and tactile nature. I play with the mats and experiment with how I might lift or carry them, for instance, but rather than this be an “act” of their weight or mass I perform with them and attend in the moment to their weight, relationship to gravity and their size in relation to myself. While there is a familiarity with the task at hand, the performance of the task is very clearly the reality of a human negotiating the “work” at hand. It is a performance in that it has been done before but it is not an “act” or expressive beyond the engagement I have with the object and the function of my movement to enable the action. The effort I use to maneuver the big red mat, point to point, is not embellished, replicated or attempting to be or hide something else. It just is.
I am not a singular body, but many bodies. Implicated by training-practices, lived experiences and states of being in the world my understandings of myself in performance-practice and performance are multiple. Can a multiple body be understood as “a” hybrid body?

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen discussing embodiment with Nancy Stark Smith suggests that in Body Mind Centering (BMC) ‘Embodiment is, in a way, separating out. It’s feeling the force that is in this body. But in order to embody ourselves, we need to know what is not ourselves. It’s a relationship.’ (Bainbridge Cohen 1981: 63) What is of interest to me in this understanding of embodiment as a “separating out” and a “not me” is how it might relate to my understanding of authorship in the “viscous solo”.

My concerns at the start of my Masters research were focused around ideas of authorship or ownership in the development of my own idiom in dance. The concept of authorship evokes terms such as “I” and “my”, which are problematic in my practice, which emphasizes multiple bodies. As I experience the fluidity, multiplicity and availability within the hybrid body or multiple body images, the “I” is out of place. The “I” imposes limits on ceaselessly multiple hybridity. What might be more appropriate first-person pronouns that do not evoke the singular definition as “I” and “my” do?

“I” and “my”, Barthes suggests are traditionally the territory of the Author-God and serve as purposefully possessive and authoritarian pronouns. Where multiplicity is concerned Barthes proposes the idea of a scriptsor of text. The scriptsor, an alternative,

no longer bears within him passions, humours, feelings, impressions, but rather this immense dictionary from which he draws a writing
that can know no halt: life never does more than imitate the book, and the book itself is only a tissue of signs, an imitation that is lost, infinitely deferred. (Barthes 1977: 147)

In the performance of my viscous solo I am drawing from multiple sources and making of them a dance. I am offering ramblings into the space that I have little attachment to and which while seeming to express and appearing to come from deep within my psyche and emotional landscape, do not express “me” as their affectivity is deferred to the witness or audience. In a sense I am offering multiple physicalities and lines of movement over to the witness/audience at once without making any clear stamp of authority of the action so that each witness/audience member may experience and create for themselves in the moment of performance through their engagement what they will in relation to their physical experience and personal history. If, for example, we take the “flagellation” from the performance WORK as a case in point, what I was experiencing and reflecting was on engagement with the sound of the slap, how loudly and vibratory could I render the slap of my hand on my body? My reasoning for doing so had a connection to the slap of my body on the mats and floor, the binding of myself on tissu and corde lisse, the control of breath, breath withheld and pounding out of excess flesh from body through training-practice and performance-practice. While the latter was not an explicit intent it was a consequence of the work undertaken.

Image 12: The moment I realized I was talking about “the” legs and not “my” legs.

There became a shift in my language as I discussed my work. I started saying things like “the legs” instead of “my legs”. In conversation I caught myself discussing the significance of a particular moment in the performance WORK where the mats are balanced on my head for a period of time and I said in answer to Tom (Lighting Designer and Technician) questioning what was significant here, “the legs”.

29
It is a solo and it is my body, yet it has become not me, not singular and not fixed. I seem to have become part of something other, in a sense another piece of equipment at times, and at other times I am very personal. Just as equipment and the space both have texture and function so too the body has texture and function, and for each these are multiple and in flux. I have allowed the textures, surfaces and equipment to affect my body through both training-practices and performance-practice. Working for six hours per day throughout my studio-based research has stripped my body of excess and affected my internal musculature where now I locate viscosity. And contact with surfaces, in particular the acromats, has opened my skin creating a greater porousness and sensitivity between self and other.

If the “I” is a ‘paper-I’ as Barthes suggests the ‘Author’ to be (Barthes 1977: 161), then the “I” of the hybrid soloist in performance (and in reflection here) may also be understood not as Author but rather as Text. ‘To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing.’ (Barthes 1977: 147) In the case of the hybrid soloist this would entail a similar fate to becoming a dancer in Foster’s terms, to make over the body and fix its subjectivity in terms of the technique or choreographer’s ideal of that dancing body. The hybrid might instead be understood to be ‘borne by a pure gesture of inscription (and not of expression), traces a field without origin – or which, at least, has no other origin than language itself, language which ceaselessly calls into question all origins.’ (Barthes 1977: 146)

The in-between feeling I had early in the project was a product of hybrid practice, which evoked a feeling of multiplicity. The issue for me was not necessarily about being in-between, however uncomfortable this can be at certain times, but rather a question of how this in-between could be sustainable and fulfilling of everything at once, rather than one or another. Cixous writes lyrically of such an in-between:

working (in) the in-between, examining the process of the same and the other without which nothing lives, undoing the work of death, is first of all wanting two and both, one and the other together, not frozen in sequences of struggle and expulsion or other forms of killing, but made infinitely dynamic by a ceaseless exchanging between one and the other different subject, getting acquainted and beginning only from the living border of the other: a many-sided and inexhaustible course with thousands of meetings and transformations of the same in the other and in the in-between... (Cixous 1991: 142)

In speaking about the in-between feeling I had being a product and register of multiplicity, I have continued to question the shift to describing my work as hybrid. For me the use of the term “hybrid” is a means to articulate a practice, performance and self that is not one, not singular or discrete in its aesthetic, physicality or philosophy. This hybrid is a mesh of multiplicities intertwining. Physically there is a tension produced through this multiplicity and hybridity, which I call viscosity, like dancing within a vat of honey. While not explicitly
creating dance about “X” or specific movements and gestures to express or convey “Y” the tension found at the interstices and the performance of the viscosity does for audience and performer alike traverse a multitudinous terrain from which multiple meanings might be experienced and others unearthed.

In the multiplicity of writing, everything is to be disentangled, nothing deciphered; the structure can be followed, ‘run’ (like the thread of a stocking) at every point and at every level, but there is nothing beneath: the space of writing is to be ranged over, not pierced; writing ceaselessly posits meaning ceaselessly to evaporate it, carrying out a systematic exemption of meaning. (Barthes 1977: 147)

The viscous solo cannot be pierced, it functions only by a holding on to and consistently ranging over, through and on multiple baselines, multiple strands. In a sense to use a circus analogy it is the classic example of juggling many balls – the balls have to remain up in the air but they can interact, one draw focus then another, a constant shifting and jostling, an urgency to remain in the air. This urgency of keeping all balls perpetually in play contributes to viscosity in motion. For viscosity is loaded with tensions at the interstices, produced through the holding onto and vying of multiple techniques, gestures, practices, aesthetics, bodies, roles and imaginings. To let go of any is to lose the viscosity. Conversely the “trick”, with its pre-established pathway through space, dynamic and accent, offers a singular meaning and elicits a singular response for each individual. While having both function and purpose the intention of the viscous solo is to subvert singularity and paradoxically enact a ceaselessly woven and re-woven hybridity.

We know now that a text is not a line of words releasing a single ‘theological’ meaning (the ‘message’ of the Author-God) but a multi-dimensional space with a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash. The text is a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture. (Barthes 1977: 146)

Like the Text the viscosity ‘is only experienced in an activity of production.’ (Barthes 1977: 157) The constant weaving, re-weaving and overlapping of multiple techniques, practices, gestures, bodies, and selves in performance-practice plays with an infinity of variations. Viscosity is actively engaged in both construction and deconstruction so as to never inscribe itself fixedly. Paradoxically it is open and dense. Viscosity is textural in its practice, experience, play and feeling. The smooth dynamic of viscosity as experienced in performance-practice ‘is bound to jouissance, that is to a pleasure without separation.’ (Barthes 1977: 164) In performance-practice, I am working without discrete references to techniques, practices and instead working within the viscose web of hybridity. If the hybrid like ‘the Text poses problems of classification..., this is because it always involves a certain experience of limits’. (Barthes 1977: 157)
A multiplicity of practices and a practice of multiplicity in my research gave a feeling of being in-between. Not one and not the other, somewhere in the middle. Initially the in-between was uncomfortable to perform and felt like I was uncertain and trying something on in the process of performance – a ceaseless shifting of gears. Even though, at first describing this as uncomfortable and never feeling settled, this in-between became a liberating and open platform full of potentiality. As Barthes writes in relation to his idea of text: ‘Interdisciplinarity is not the calm of an easy security’. (Barthes 1977: 155)

In a similar way to the understanding of physicality or practices as discretely named and suggestive of the labeling of an individual for instance undertaking tumbling training as an “acrobat”, Gail Weiss suggests ‘To write about the body or even the body image is a paradoxical project. This is because these expressions themselves seem to posit both the body and the body image as discrete phenomena of investigation.’ (Weiss 1999: 1) I cannot understand, express or be understood as say an acrobat, discretely or definitively, within performance-practice as there are other physicalities, expressions, ways of being in the world and definitions of self always implicated within the understanding or articulation. Weiss states that

Not only are the expressions “the body” and “the body image” problematic insofar as they imply discrete phenomena that are capable of being investigated apart from other aspects of our existence to which they are intrinsically related, but also the use of the definitive article suggests that the body and the body image are themselves neutral phenomena, unaffected by the gender, race, age, and changing abilities of the body... Instead, whenever we are referring to an individual’s body, that body is always responded to in a particularized fashion...these images of the body are not discrete but form a series of overlapping identities whereby one or more aspects of that body appear to be especially salient at any given point in time. Thus, rather than view the body image as a cohesive, coherent phenomenon that operates in a fairly uniform way (Weiss 1999: 1)

My experience is such that the multiplicity of images; dancer, choreographer, performer, acrobat, gymnast, aerialist, actor, improviser, researcher, writer, teacher, woman, sister, twin, daughter are co-present and ‘constructed through a series of corporeal exchanges that take place both within and outside of specific bodies.’ (Weiss 1999: 2)

The view of the body as multiple is one also put forward in dance scholarship. Ann Daly illustrates this in her discussion of Isadora Duncan.

To speak of “the body,” of course, is a verbal deception. There is not one body, but many. And what is especially interesting about Duncan is that she enacted many of them: the dancing body, the natural body, the
expressive body, the female body, and the body politic... What they all share is movement, or, to be more exact, what philosopher Mark Johnson calls the image schemata of “force.” (Daly 1995: 5)

And, Irigaray:

“She” is indefinitely other in herself. This is doubtless why she is said to be whimsical, incomprehensible, agitated, capricious (Irigaray 1985: 28)

TRAINING-PRACTICES AS BASELINES

Through practising multiple physicalities as discrete techniques, practices and philosophies of the body I have been and continue to be able to expand the possibilities available to my body for textures and motion, movement or dance in performance. I have found in my experimentation that these form “baselines” from which I gain support, insight and access to further expand my practice and performance, to create an openness, a preparedness, an awareness that can extend away from attending to alignment, shape or technique and instead to place trust in the body’s intelligence to be in the moment of performance able to choose from the feedback available and make of it in action.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen uses the idea of “baselines” in referring to notions of patterning the body from birth and an understanding of the development of perceptual-motor integration through human developmental stages. Cohen suggests that the first year of human life is crucial to development

This is when the relation of the perceptual process (the way one sees) and the motor process (the way one moves or acts in the world) is established. This is the baseline for how you will be processing activity, either in receiving or expressing, throughout your life. The importance of working with babies during their first year is that I feel it helps set up a broader baseline, offering more choices in not only how to see events or problems, but how to act on them; it gives them the most multiplicity of direction. (Bainbridge Cohen, Nelson and Stark Smith 1984: 99)

In my practice, baselines are constituted from training in multiple physicalities, philosophies and techniques of the body. Against or alongside weaving multiple strands in performance-practice and performance, a separating out of practices or techniques has been an equally important part of my research. I have been able to establish a number of specific training-practices and these have opened up greater potentiality in my performance-practice and performance by developing discrete skills. The separating out and focusing in on a particular skill and/or trick brings consciousness to the movement pathway and its particular relationship to posture and muscle tonus. The consciousness is important as it then gives you the opportunity to make choices about the action and its effect and affect in the moment of performance or in the crafting of choreography. It is important for instance that one understands the motor control, economy and
physics of a plié in ballet for instance so as to be able to jump. The greater the
attention paid, the more potential for a higher balance or other variation.

I built the baseline foundations for my form of viscous solo from the practices of;
acrobatic tumbling, improvisation, contemporary dance phrase material, ropes
and running. These training-practices maintain my body’s capacity to perform
certain tasks, tricks, and movements and also to learn new ones. Implicit within
my understanding of “training” as a process of bodily maintenance are the brain,
nerves, senses, mind and imagination as important to the training and
development of the performer, dancer and choreographer. For the most part my
training-practices took place between four and six days per week, for a total
duration of two to six hours. Bonnie Cohen stresses the creative “awakening”
potential of learning bodily patterns:

It seems that people are usually awakened by the patterns, and I
think it has a lot to do with the awakening and aligning of the
perceptions to the movement. They’re usually surprised that some of
the patterns are difficult and, in getting them, they feel their minds
open. (Bainbridge Cohen, Nelson and Stark Smith 1984: 102-3)

Training-practice and performance-practice have taken up a large part of my
research process. Their function is vital to performance and to the future
practice and performance that I envisage creating. They are not to be viewed as
by-products and waste but as unconditional vital elements to performance and
practice. It is in the same vein that Steve Paxton describes the practice of
“standing still” as a disciplined practice foundational for the practice Contact
Improvisation.

Standing still is not actually “still.” Balancing on two legs
demonstrates to the dancer’s body that one moves with gravity,
always. Observing the constant adjustments the body makes to keep
from falling calms the whole being. It is a meditation. It is watching
the reflexes at work, knowing they are subtle and dependable – not
just emergency measures.

Standing became one of our disciplines, keeping the mind
attentive to the body’s present moment. This simple practice was
preparation for the complex interactions that would arise with a
partner. As were the throwing and catching practices that called for
instant response, introducing ourselves to adrenalinized states.
(Paxton 1988: 39)

While not practising Contact Improvisation explicitly as a soloist, I regard the
principles of the development of Contact Improvisation as a practice and
performance-practice as relevant to my hybrid solo practice and performance. In
considering the relevance of Contact Improvisations emergence to my own solo
hybridity I am referring to the ways in which Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith,
Lisa Nelson and others collaboratively first began physical experiments and
developed the practice of Contact Improvisation in the early seventies. I am
particularly drawn to the multiple reference points of CI, which takes as
“baselines” the practices of martial arts, sports and social dancing. (Novack 1990)

I have found that acrobatic tumbling, beginning with forward rolls, as a warm-up greatly supports later experimentation, improvisation and choreographic possibilities. It provides a knowledge and confidence, skills and preparedness to be able to challenge the range of movement possible, suspensions on greater angles, inversions of the body, rotations of the body around its centre in multiple planes and the knowledge that your body knows what to do, is strong and capable to correct imbalance or to fall without injuring oneself. Emerging from my studio practice is the sense that the contact between my body and the floor or mat also sensitizes the surface of my skin to be more open, porous, as an organ of perception. The skin viewed as an organ of perception also has implications for the experiential “tact”. The tactile nature of perceiving with the whole body, a body covered in a sensitized epidermis, is such that perception is 360 degrees at once. A sense of constant friction might mean that the skin is yet another interstice, in-between.

Image 13: Strength, power, grace and kinaesthetic awareness aids in the ability to know where you are in space and to land through different bodily surfaces – in this case the outer surface of my leg.

Tumbling on mats provides another in-between and friction that creates a space for a reading or understanding of self and other. The development of the haptic system through tumbling and also a constancy of working low to the floor, maintaining the ability to place all bodily surfaces in contact with the floor at any moment, as part of my ongoing training-practice I feel has heightened my perception of where I am in space and in relationship to other bodies or objects. This work has created a flexibility, adaptability, openness and relaxed acceptance of where I am and my body’s abilities to negotiate imbalance or ride it out utilizing a heightened proprioceptive system. A notable difference between Contact Improvisation and my hybrid viscous solo however is Contact
Improvisation’s release of excess muscular tension. This release of muscular tension is not a possibility (at this stage) for my viscous solo.

There are similarities here to touch used as a re-patterning or teaching of patterns of movement in Body Mind Centering practice. Cohen describes,

combining my touching, or lightly manipulating them, with verbal directions. Eventually what came out was the significance of the initiation of the movement – that the key to a pattern is where it’s initiated from and how it sequences through the body. Another key being attention and another intention. For example, it’s very important when you do a movement that your attention (which is what is stimulating you) and your intent (which is what you want to do in relation to that stimulation) align up with the movement that you’re doing. It’s a key. (Bainbridge Cohen, Nelson and Stark Smith 1984: 105)

Aerial practice provided another “baseline”. It seems to bring about an awareness of deferment. The deferment of flight is particularly apparent. I am secured on a constant vertical axis that while I can change the relationship of my body to the vertical centre at the rig point there is never a true sense or experience of flight as airborne action traveling through space. The image however of a body suspending itself on a tissu or rope does proffer one of flight. The other interesting experience is that of the weighted realities for the performer and the illusion of lightness. The tensility of my musculature during much of the aerial work is great. I do seek throughout practice to find moments where I can in a sense drain my body of its tension and find a sense of lifelessness while suspended. In part this is a subversion of the final arrival of the trick, and a way to defer the accent of the finish as opposed to adding to the climatic end a big gesture of completion, a TADA!

Running provides another “baseline”. Running is a form of structured improvisation. By this I mean that going running is an improvisational act, and the structure I am imposing on this improvisation is the activity of running but other than this I seek to allow my attention to direct me on my run for a certain duration, often one hour. During this running improvisation I can attend to my

Image 14: Straddle climb on corde lisse.
noticing. This noticing may be how my feet are impacting with the ground, speed, motion of arms, the pathway of my legs through space, the interaction between upper and lower body, the spine, directionality, place, imagination, the list is endless but there is also a choice about what noticing is during the run and this can change throughout the run. It is often a cross between noticing and in a sense going further, following this to an end point or just noticing without any attachment to the noticing, an endless ricocheting.

While training-practices do “identify” and “name”, the other side of my studio practice, performance-practice and performance offer the opportunity to ‘construct body as a site of exploration’. My performance-practice attempts to experiment with the hybridity, fluidity and availability of multiple techniques, trainings and physicalities; multiple interactions between the roles of performer, dancer and choreographer; multiple modes of expression and locomotion; attention to multiple sources of feedback both internal and external to my self; states of pre-planned movement and also of the present-moment. At the interstices, the in-betweens, the viscosity is created through the friction or tension associated with the feedback and the choice of action. It is the interweaving of the diverse threads available to me within the action of the solo that leads to my current sense of hybridity.

THE VISCOUS SOLO AS PERFORMANCE-PRACTICE

After developing a deeper understanding about hybridity and its potential from separating out baselines into individual training-practices, I began to re-enter performance-practice. Performance-practice is the practice of “everything at once”. I was conducting performance-practice research into solo hybrid practice that was at times extreme. I challenged the habits of my body, endurance, multiplicity of techniques practices and aesthetics all at once. Where a lot of contemporary dance of the present seems to be more conceptual, driven by thought and philosophy and not by the physical body, I stick out like a protruding scapular. I train; I work physically for long periods of time, for the most part on my own and in silence. I am interested in what this body might be

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17 Performance-practice takes its cue from Deborah Hay. Hay’s approach ‘constructs body as a site of exploration to which the dancer must remain vigilantly attentive. Body does not succumb to the dancer’s agency – striving, failing, mustering its sources to try again. Instead it playfully engages, willing to undertake new projects and reveal new configurations of itself with unlimited resourcefulness.’ (Foster 2000: xiv)

18 Like the idea of a body in question as experienced in a workshop with Ros Warby, Performance Practice, in which I participated at Dancehouse. This workshop was based on Warby’s experience working with Deborah Hay. The workshop brought about many questions, particularly questions concerning the acrobatic dance, gesture and functional movement (perhaps of the more pedestrian nature) interactions in performance. (Warby 2010) The practice creates a space for experimentation with all your potentialities at once. It places value in the ‘body as a generative source of ideas’ (Foster 2000: xv) and in so doing opens all bodies to a playful dialogue in which choices and decisions can be made. What is created or choreographed through the choices made in the moment of performance-practice I believe has a connection to the dancer’s subjectivity and in saying that to a subjectivity in flux.

19 This should be understood as a generalization. There are obviously exceptions however it does seem that the trend towards philosophical inquiry is particularly burgeoning and concerns about physical training, fitness, bodily challenges and new approaches to movement less so.
capable of and treat it as a science experiment in practice and performance. For
the most part this was my studio practice and research following training-
practices. I was however fortunate to have peers and mentors witness my
practice at several intervals throughout the project and to perform in curated
programs.20

![Image 15: Protruding scapulars.]

There was intensity in the duration, silence and solitude when practicing for six
hours five times per week alone in the studio. However the more time I spent
working in this way, the more alive with possibility I found it. To listen to my
body, my breath and the rhythms of my muscles, bones and heart beat seems at
this late moment of writing to really locate myself within the amassing choices
available for action. The listening experience taught me about resilience in the
moment of performance, to acknowledge where I am at any moment but not to
hold on to too tightly. Resilience and in turn “bliss” were found in the fissures
between practices and the noticing of where I was which created the opportunity
to revel in my choice for action and surprisingly shift where I was to a place
perhaps unexpected. It grounded me and paradoxically allowed me to fly with
potentiality. Practising “everything at once” in performance-practice over
extended duration enabled me to extend myself in multiple planes at once.
Performance-practice over duration, developed a deeper noticing of possibilities
both within and outside of myself, fuelled my curiosity of what might be possible,
my ability to respond and challenge myself physically, psychically, mentally and
performatively.

20 An example of performance-practice from a curated season can be seen in Appendix 3, Jemima
as performed in the Salon Series at Studio 202.
LIMITS

In 1982 Julie Moss competed in her first Ironman without ever completing the total distance before.

It began as a lark, ‘an opportunity to go to Hawaii.’ Julie made it through the swim and during the bike leg ‘sits up smiling, waving to the crowd.’ Early in the run she takes the lead. About 400 meters left and still leading, she’s running and then slowing down, really slowing down. Julie collapses but struggles up to a walk. Julie falls again and looks like she’s dying. She is passed by a competitor and thinks ‘I quit’. She is exhausted and no longer in control of her body, she has pooped herself quite literally. But then ‘there’s a voice within that says “Get up. Get up. Just keep moving forward.”’ Julie crawls the last 3 metres completing the race. (Moss 2010)

Julie says that the ‘I quit’ was just her ‘ego trying to self-sabotage,’ but her real self was ‘that voice that said; “just keep moving forward.”’ ‘There is no limit.’ (Moss 2010)

What does Julie Moss have to do with dance research? Perhaps a playful and experiential contract with limitless possibility? Haruki Murakami writes

Most of what I know about writing I've learned through running every day. These are practical, physical lessons. How much can I push myself? How much rest is appropriate—and how much is too much? How far can I take something and still keep it decent and consistent? When does it become narrow-minded and inflexible? How much should I be aware of the world outside, and how much should I focus on my inner world? To what extent should I be confident in my abilities, and when should I start doubting myself? (Murakami 2008: 81-82)

I don’t know that there are limits anymore. Obviously you feel tired/exhausted at times but this is actually challengeable too, you can work further than the alarm bells of the brain. The central governor theory (Noakes 2007) proposes that self-preservation will save you from the brink of exhaustion, but its point of rescue or point of sending the warning signals is very conservative – perhaps when you might have 60% left in the tank. So you can go further than you think you can. The body protects itself far before it needs to. This reminds me of the way that I’d say that dancers, generally, are “precious”. You don’t want to work too hard – no bruises, burns, overly muscled bodies – all that!

Looking to dance, and specifically, to the work of Elizabeth Streb, I find like-minded artists. While not explicitly stating “limits” within her work of extreme physical action, Streb does describe her work as a choice to ‘up the ante regarding extreme movement’ because ‘without danger and fear, movement is merely a decoration separate and apart from truth.’ (Streb 2010: 48) Where I would suggest a testing of limits and potentiality, Streb poses similar questions in terms of possibility, and a much more spectacularized focus with circus and
rock star bravado. There’s a definite distinction between a balls-out adrenalized ante up-ing and my own ante up-ing from within myself. There is a clearer sense in Streb’s approach of throwing yourself out into space.

When my dancers walk into an action room, they agree to get hurt, to embrace danger. It is where the wild moments roam, but not without an inscriber – the body. Without the body, there is no actualization of real movement. I have always sought to measure just how much physicality the most exposed body could absorb: Is there a meter or scale to measure this type of intensity? Is there a method to ascertain the degree of magnitude? How much can the body take without dying? It could be similar to an IQ test. But it would measure a body’s actual individual capacity, not only the body’s potential average capacity. (Streb 2010: 48)

Streb describes her dancers as ‘true crusaders...modern-day gladiators’. (Streb 2010: 41) Like marathon runners and Ironmen they are seeking their own “holy grail” (for Streb, the “real move”) – for,

A STREB action specialist in training to do a real move also needs a constitutionally impervious physical body. There can be no inherent weakness in structure, joints, ligaments, tendons, muscles, mind, or heart...If you want to fly and crash, then everything must be tuned to perfect pitch. The “inside” part of the approach to real movement is even trickier. A real mover’s spatial, physical, and temporal curiosity has to be insatiable. The dancers of STREB are action engineers or movement methodologists. Their number one question has to be how, not why. They can never say no. (Streb 2010: 40)

The idea of dancers as “crusaders” and “gladiators” reminds me of my Primary School days when Gladiators a TV program of the time inspired our play on the playground. We balanced on equipment and negotiated each other’s bodies with sheer physicality hoping to topple one another off their feet. Boys and girls were alike in our play. I relished beating the boys. In grade 6 my ambition noted in the graduation book was to become a Gladiator, by first competing as a challenger. Smiling now, I see a very early connection between physicality as it is related to challenge, sports, determination, work and dance.

Where Ironmen, marathon runners and myself, I would suggest, hold onto and work within an internalized fashion with questions of physical capacity, intensity and extremes (as pertaining to our individual pursuits), Streb’s action rooms place the body in question in relation to environment directly. The questions being asked in both instances reflect beliefs in human will and the capacity to adventure into the unknown. Placing the body and psyche under tests of extreme endurance, what are the limits of both the physical body and the psyche of each individual? How much can we undergo, endure? When we witness someone struggle, overcome, undergo and perhaps battle against, do we also experience this?
WORK AS PLAY

The idea of learning through play in sports and social interactions or environments, gives rise to my understanding of learning through an interplay within my perceptual field. Within the perceptual field not only are different types of physicality, bodies, gestures, images and states all rubbing up against each other producing a friction or tension that creates a viscosity in motion. But, play may also be understood as an interplay of selves within the perceptual field.

Play is a paradoxical practice. From the outside it may appear frivolous to spend so much time in a studio playing. But the act of spending time in my body, is quite serious and rigorous. It is not out of indulgence but necessity. Play in an open-ended fashion creates space and time to sit within a ritualized practice and ask questions, pose challenges or re-imagine what might be physically possible for my viscous solo from directly within my practice and in the act of playing. The open-endedness and ongoing practice is vital to my preparedness for risk taking, posing further questions and challenges and potentiality and availability of action in space.

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21 Play is the paradox between the mastery of skills, technique or tricks and the pleasure of movement. The pleasure in working physically and quizzically with regards to just what might be possible. It’s the ability to imagine, to take the reality of movement and make of it as it is or perhaps as other. To an extent it’s the childlike ability to experiment fearlessly and without judgment. To stretch or operate outside of the borders, lines or rules.
PLAYING WITH ENDURANCE

Without initially putting forward “endurance” as an important aspect of investigation it became significant as time passed. My studio practice from the outset was over extended duration and this set up ideas as to endurance in practice and performance. Endurance is not only physical but also mental and psychical.

In play there is an element of risk. Play took me in the ceaseless pursuit of limits of the body, the solo; my ability to work for extended duration and to perform multiple physicalities and roles fluidly, without separation is a risk. It placed calculated stress upon my body and also psyche. It asked me to endlessly challenge myself. This in and of itself was an arduous and risky endeavor, drawing me deep within my own thoughts, which at times were not so rose-y. From a physical perspective, dancing or working my body intensively in physical tasks and movement, six hours a day five times a week, there were also risks associated with overwork of muscles, lack of rest and recovery time leading potentially to fatigue and injury through the physical stress placed upon my body. These are all risks associated with the way in which I was experimenting with my solo hybrid in practice and performance that were played out over duration. The solo hybrid in my conception might be described as a play of excesses where duration and endurance operate as a means to find out more about my solo hybridity.

Practising for six hours duration at times was grueling. But more grueling than practice with time in-between smaller bursts of activity for food, water and small period/s of "rest" was my experiment of six hours continually up-ing the ante of physicality. It was a battle of will in the studio on my own. I had trained for about a year in practice six hours, five days a week, this would be the ultimate test. How long and how hard can you push a solo dancing body? Six hours was fine. I was feeling good, tired but on my way to work and to meet 'Y....'. Sitting on the tram reading Delueze and Guttari I started to feel dizzy. As a child I couldn’t travel in car or other whilst reading without feeling sick so maybe this was just a bit of motion sickness rearing again? Then I got very hot and the dizziness became extremely intense. I felt cocooned in this strange warped and trance-like state. People in the city were moving by as they do, and I was moving but felt as though I had this impenetrable bubble surrounding me. I felt awful. I was frightened and called my brother to ask what I should do. He said go home and rest. On my way back out of the city this feeling reached it’s peak - I was sick just metres from making it into the confines of our driveway. The next few hours were incredibly lethargic and, following water and sleep, recovery came. Perhaps this is a limit? But it is not a death or a true stoppage, it’s an extreme without borders. The work continues.

The risks of my solo practice are only partially explored in the performance of WORK. If I was to take to the extreme described above (something that time permitting I long to do) in a 40 – 50 minute performance of continually extreme physicality, a dense viscous weave of multiple practices, ideas and selves and irregular and unexpected changes in movement or thought patterns, I might
come somewhat closer to the display of physical daredevilry that can be found in the circus. This type of daredevilry and extreme seems to create the opportunity for visceral exchange between audience and performer in such a direct way.

Before Evel Knievel or reality television shows began offering dangerous and spectacular stunts, the circus offered daredevilry on a scale never seen before. Above all, the circus offered a vision of the daredevil that was up close and personal. It was a direct, live experience and deeply human – emulated today in contemporary action films, television, and the world of cartoon superheroes, yet only in two dimensions. In the circus there was no possible staging or trickery, and one couldn’t help but empathize with the daredevils. Theirs (and, therefore, our) triumphant victory over “daring the devil” during performances was cause for celebration. To be sure, circus performers play with extremes: precarious balance, dizzying heights, extraordinary displays of strength and agility, and lurking, if not always apparent, danger. In essence, the circus is about overcoming our limitations, doing the seemingly impossible – from a simple somersault to a seven-person pyramid on a high wire. But daredevils, who are generally the final punctuation of the circus performance, present the audience with the ultimate thrill: watching someone truly overcome a life-threatening challenge. (Jando 2007: 601)

PLAY ECOLOGY

Play operates most effectively as tactfulness in performance-practice and was also in operation throughout the performance of WORK. From the development of WORK I set out not imposing a structure upon what I thought might be the performance of my research. For a long period of time I grappled with and quite seriously felt nervously sick about how training-practices and performance-practice might become performance. I was really troubled by the idea that the training-practice, in particular something such as tumbling, might be a part of performance where, in my ideal of performance and aesthetically what pleases me to create, mats, equipment, would exist under tarquette or quite possibly be eliminated altogether, movement adapted and extrapolated from the training-practice but not clearly recognizable as such. How to in a sense leave aesthetic ideals behind and embrace the ecology of the equipment present within the research in performance?

One of my supervisor’s suggestions of the ecology of the mats reared a somewhat cheeky response on my part. While aware of equipment as having value and qualities of their own this was not an area of philosophical or performative thought or experience in which I was particularly comfortable. With experience seeing performance that “tried” to acknowledge and make explicit the worth or value of the things within the performance, I felt that such a foregrounding of equipment can come across as “tween”. How could I possibly have these pieces visible within my performance and not be overwhelmed by their presence, ignorant of or twee-ly making explicit their value as equipment within the
environment of the performance? It was through play that I processed these questions. I turned the big red mat on its thin edge and rotated it in a diamond; point to point. The sound of the mat as it passed over its point in contact with the floor was loud and farty. This became part of the performance score. With its sheer mass, quite literally half my weight and more than double my size, it became a strange duet partner. On my back it swallowed me. But persisting using my legs with all the power they had garnered from tumbling and running, I span in circles, gaining speed and momentum stopping without causing injury to my knees proved a challenge until beginning to raise the torso and falling a top the mat, THWACK! A sound so loud within my solo world of the studio it initially frightened me. Not only was it an exceptional noise it was unexpected and offered me a sense that making such a noise in performance, particularly dance performance, was part of the process of stripping the virtuosity of the dance away and realizing the reality of the work, equipment, movement and human condition within this work. Silent dancer – NO.

By playing (however much it felt like a cheeky act and perhaps inappropriate for “serious research”) I let go of inhibitions. I took pleasure and actually switched to the side of preferring not to drown the sound of myself dancing out with music to hearing my body dancing, working. It is very exposing to hear your naked breath, at times a grunt, gasp, slap on the floor or squeaky floorboard exploitation.

PLAYFUL RITUALS

Rituallly, I would begin with running to generate heat within my muscles. Often this would unfurl into working through my body, swinging limbs, rolling through my joints, circling spiraling throughout my architecture, moving into and out of the floor, playing with suspension and then momentum increasing in speed as focusing on bringing myself into a heightened state of awareness internally and externally through sensitizing my skin placing all surfaces of my body in direct contact with the floor repeatedly. Eventually, out of economy, this became tumbling as the practice through which this might occur and more specifically about the sound of the mats and my body in contact. Different tumbling sequences and movement producing of varying soundscapes building out of the contact of body and mat, movement and breath. Through practice over time the exact series of tumbling runs and running loops became clear and I then had a new place in which to experiment with improvisation and that was in relation to suspension, accents of movement and the bodily sounds in relation to environment. I was able to find a sense of play continually throughout a new structure only arrived at through repetitive play. Structure need not impose a fixity or rigidness with rules or markers. As with the execution of movement there is space to blur the edges and play at the interstices.

Play operates on multiple levels. It is conceptual and practical, a tactic, performative, textural and open ended. Play operates conceptually in ideas. It is in the construction of a structured improvisation, the investigation of what a mat is, how it might be used in another way, its sound, texture, mass – the ways in
which the mats were both supportive and obstacles to be overcome in *WORK* illustrates something of this. An initial resistance to crashing on the red mat almost out of superstition that if I were to just “splat” on the mat I would be setting up a relationship in which my body in an over familiarity with the mat would be conditioned to believe it was okay to let go of the tissu and plummet down onto the mat. Falling was *not* an option. If the red mat held value like a sacred cow, as something that shall not be fell upon, it was then logical that this sacred object became supported and elevated from the floor. It was also then that it became a burden. Play prevents things from being only one thing.

![Image 17: Role and function reversal, or big red crash mat as sacred cow.](image)

Within my hybrid solo, play operates in the openings between multiple threads of technique, practice and selves. By attending to the openings, the in-betweens, I create space and open possibilities for play and multiple forms of action, in performance improvisation, I can choose in the moment of performance as I challenge movement pathways, choices, accents of tricks, duration and endurance. ‘Improvisation provides an experience of body in which it initiates, creates, and probes playfully its own physical and semantic potential.’ (Foster 2003: 8) In the openings, it could be said that the attention to what is available for choosing are in fact pre-established actions, gestures, dance “steps”, acrobatic tricks or states of being. But the openness to the tact of play within my own consciousness in relation to the equipment, environment and audience is such that this act of play invites the external world, its textures, to inform my own bodily textures and viscosity.

De Spain illustrates this in his discussion about his own improvisation practice;

> Improvisation, as I understand it, is an attentional practice: the more you attend to movement and memory and sensing and intention, the more you play (improvise) with all of the elements of what we call living - and the more you come to understand that reality itself is
based on the relationship between our attention and the world. You sense that your attention is both selecting and forming your experience in real time, but that what is being selected and formed is not completely of your choosing, because the world is improvising too; and that dance, your interaction with the world, forms you just as you form the world. (De Spain 2003: 37)

The tension and viscosity that I locate at the interstices, the in-betweens, is the attentional tension and negotiation of “everything at once” both internal and external to myself.

Our consciousness is like a body interacting with the exterior world. Because our nerves cannot extend beyond our skin, we only really sense ourselves in contact with a larger world, but separate from it. In the same way, we only “know” what is present within our consciousness, yet by touching it, by dancing with it, we can sense the contours and textures of an infinite world that exists beyond the boundaries of knowledge. (De Spain 2003: 37)

WRITING

From discoveries made within my training-practice and performance-practice, I reflectively wrote as a process by which to begin the articulation and to draw out ideas and issues that could be teased out and experimented with on the page and physically in space. It was through this process that I began to ask more questions and these questions then started to open new terrain and direct my research into others’ practices, dance histories, theories of hybridity, subjectivity and the text.

Writing as a practice was for the most part a dynamic organization of my experiences working as a practitioner-researcher. Through the process of reflection, writing about the experiences, inception of ideas, developments, growth and fulfillment, elicited what might be defined as a poetics. Poetics are not confined to writing but the act of writing assisted me to define and uncover what viscosity is in another articulation. ‘Poetic expression arises when we seek to write from within the feelings, thoughts, hopes and fears associated with being involved in research’. (Burchell 2010: 389)

A POETICS OF ENDURANCE WITHIN THE VISCOUS SOLO

Hybrid practice has broad implications for training in dance and also more generally for human development – physically, consciously, psychically, mentally. Given the very nature of the contemporary world in which we live, richly complex with infinite possibilities, the more hybrid as people/dancers we are the greater potential we have to experience and engage more fully and consciously in the world. The application of expanding one’s baselines, the options available to us in the moment of performance have profound possibilities for social, moral, creative experiences. The access to and availability of multiple possible responses to any given situation gives us the opportunity to
choose our response and in the freedom to choose and from a myriad of responses we do so conscious of the choice being made. Dance training needs to consider the current artistic-social climate. In so doing the hybrid training I have utilized in this project can be a useful model or paradigm. While the hybrid training practice I have utilized in my project reflects a specificity to collaboration between acrobatics and contemporary dance, collaboration between other practices and contemporary dance may define their own hybrid training practices specific to their own art form development.

Future considerations of the viscous solo could also include the significance of breath in the production of viscosity and skin as an interstitial and porous organ of perception. These considerations could productively draw upon exercise sciences and sports, and place in frame wrestling, ironman, bodybuilding, martial arts, and circus arts in a more clearly represented and influential way.

Breath as well as being vital for life, is also a significant contributor in the production of viscosity. An accentuation of tension is created subconsciously in my performance by the inhalation of breath in my transitions between movements or phrases. This difference, the inhalation of breath during transition as opposed to exhalation at the transitive point, suspends my body in a tensely tentative way and in so doing illuminates and heightens the feeling of viscosity and its expression. Investigations into the relationship between breath and dance, or movement performance, are well discussed by artists and philosophers alike. In future projects I would like to address the relationship between tension, viscosity and breath in greater depth.

Opportunities for further development of the performance WORK have been offered and this will entail: perpetuating the overlapping of forms and weaving the performance into a more finely woven whole; returning to a more openly lit performance space as it was in rehearsal and experimenting more clearly and with greater accessibility the idea of a mobile audience and the audience’s ability to freely associate with and experience their own body and its relationship to space, the work, textures, me and others throughout; investigating some of the lesser established ideas and images within the work. Specifically: the platform shoes, flagellation, the functionality of gesture, Frank Sinatra, how tactility might be exchanged, vibrations of sound, breath, body and equipment, the deferment of expression, withholding of breath. The latter, I think, results in transitions occurring on the inhalation as opposed to exhalation; relentlessness of shifting images, thoughts, ideas, movement patterns into unexpected diversions; play with equipment; comments on risk, spectacle, endurance, physicality, musculartiy, strength, struggle, effort and work. This further exploration creates possibilities for reading the viscosity of movement as a poetics of endurance and endurance as a register of human struggle.
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APPENDIX 2

RUNNING COMMENTARY FROM INSIDE WORK

Inside the black box theatre space I begin running before the audience enters. It is almost complete darkness aside from a light that looks as though the door has been left open and light on the big red crash mat below the tissu where audience will hopefully sit. The space is live, active and working from the moment the audience walks through the door, and so am I.

The tuning score has begun. My feet create much of the rhythm of the space, the shuffle of audience as they settle, the sound of my breath and some chatter amongst the audience, the intensity of the space is high and my bursts of sprinting heighten it. The looping nature of the running, cyclically, continuing to expend and generate energy simultaneously through my body and out into the space and the audience’s bodies.

A small settling and I begin my final loop running into a lowly lit spot before, wham! The gymnast snaps into action. Anticipation of response is left wanting as the spot light snaps off again. Not deterred by my lack of a giggle. Call me a gymnast and I will respond in such a manner cheekily committing a faux pas and confirming what might be read from my bodily appearance. I continue with this play, with Tom who has designed the lighting. We play between a sense of mischievousness as the light comes on and snaps off at the sight of spectacle.

A strip of light on the edge of the blue tumbling run of mats indicates a transition. Tentatively I move towards the end of the run. There’s a hesitation. I begin with a series of forward rolls conscious of not getting to close to the light. I am interested in the sound of my body moving along the mats, the squelch of these particular mats and the sound of my breath then the running back to the beginning to the next series of tumbling. New looping cycle has begun and the reality of the physical work being undertaken is perhaps heightened by the loss of clearly visible movement. I feel the lack of light directly on my moving body allows for a more realized experience of the physicality, of my body working and increasing the intensity of its’ work. The absence of my breath at the end of the tumbling sequences before transitioning into running doesn’t feel imposed, like a withholding of breath to not show the effort of my body but perhaps does create a sense of holding one’s breath which is carried through all transitions in WORK.

I return to the place where the spot light had been and in its light I stand and breathe. I am still aside from the breath surging through me and sweat beading on my face, a small trickle down my spine. Music of another kind begins to permeate the air as the breath begins to still. The sound of the strings bleed. I melt into the sound, folding at the knees and lowering myself into a squat. No attempt made at the gymnast or other spectacle I walk like a duck.

Duck walking down the mats I am denying and deferring the expectation of the tumbling run. The loading in my quads is akin to that of the loading as one exits a forward roll or other tumbling movement. Power and tension held within my
musculature fires me into a forward roll and then I whip into headsprings seemingly from nowhere. A final kip up punctuates a violent end to the tumbling loops. Unexpectedly from a dynamic finish I wobble drunkenly on the end of the mats as I track my way down the edge along the Velcro tabs. A lack of balance from a strong and sturdy, driven tumbling. This feels awkward like failing on the balance beam when it’s expected that the dancer is in control of their balance and highly centered in their weight distribution and placement. My vision is impaired by my body blocking the light that would allow me to see where I am placing my feet, hair covering my face and needing brushing aside, and the squelchy mats providing an uncertain less concrete ending for my feet. The transition is not rushed but time is not allowed for equilibrium.

The tying of hair - functional. It is perhaps not performative or what might be expected of a highly skilled, technical performance but the “act” of tying hair within the performance again questions work. What is required in this moment? How does or is my body working and engaging in space, in performance, with objects, equipment and audience? I feel it functions to show both the spectacular and the everyday. It is an action that might be repeated 20 times a day possibly more if the day is filled with high action that disrupts the “do”.

Reaching back behind myself I feel the tension of expectation. Expectation to be, do, subscribe, entertain or succumb to other expectations. I suspend my urgency to fulfill any expectations by extending the reach further away and slowly folding back into myself.

A moment of flight, unexpected perhaps, from out of a deep lunging and back elongation. I arrive back on my feet and swiftly trace my hands up my back. My scapulars protrude. My attention has shifted to the terrain of my back and its expression. Small hand and arm gestures behind me change the landscape of my back as I slowly change my facing.

From back to pelvis, my hips swing and fingers click. I am thinking about my time in jazz class and the hip isolation and how this too relates to the hyper mobility of the lumbar spine to produce the “duck”-back of the gymnast. I take the investigation of the duck into a squatted skipping and then into a walk. My interest is in the power of the pelvis, the sideways shifting action to produce this walk. The strength of my quadriceps to maintain the squatted position for a time is also interests me. My attention to my pelvis spirals up and out of the squat it begins a play with sequencing movement through my body. Movement finding its articulation through a sequence through my pelvis, whether initiating, responding/following or leading my movement the power of my pelvis in motion is my focus.

I arrive in front support from a jump into the floor and remain held here for a time. The sound of my breath and the movement of my torso in this relatively “still” position provides me with an opportunity to show some of the “work” my body has been doing up to date without excessive action to demonstrate. The “work” reverberates through my body with each breath.
My intention on the tissu is as much as possible to defer expectation. I am not interested in re-presenting well established tricks or an “act” on the tissu. I am interested in the upper body strength in juxtaposition to the lower body explored in the duck. I am also interested in the texture of the tissu and its sounds against my skin as it moves and in relation to my muscular tension. I take time in wrapping my body into an inverted straddle hang and as my legs arrive in the straddle position I release my hands and drop to hang upside-down. I hang in a way which feels as though I am draining myself of excess tension despite the tension maintained in my legs. I hang here for what feels like a long time and then try to hang for a slightly longer time.

Undoing Velcro mats produces different sounds for different ways of detachment. The slow crackle and the quick rip and variations in-between all have reference to the ways in which my muscles and the production of viscosity occur throughout this performance.

Further vibrations created through my feet by a speedy running action on the spot, shakes through my entire body and ricochets out through my pelvis. The visible and audible ricochet extends my sense of the way in which viscosity is produced through the jostling of multiple forms and selves in the moment of performance.

Placing my hands upon the edge of the big red mat I take a breath before squeezing lightly the red vinyl and tipping big red on to its point. Passing through my hands as I rotate big red I steady its rotation using my body weight to counterbalance and slow its descent. Turning the corner is a tricky maneuver and the mass of big red in relation to my stature requires a greater counterbalance to keep the mat from toppling. We begin a duet, big red and I, and I cradle big red above the floor balancing it with my hands and feet. No longer breaking my fall, I break its and then slide it slowly back to the floor while rolling underneath. Without grabbing hands I use the CI technique of rolling point of contact to move into big red balancing on my back. I am interested in the connection between us, where one starts and the other ends, in the image of little legs walking with bent knees beneath a big red mat. While spinning I’m conscious of both my own safety in terms of the force generated and my knees ability to counteract the force and slow down, while maintaining the connection with the mat and not allowing it to fall or fly-off haphazardly. Opening out I’m preparing for and attempting to back the loudest THWACK as I fall to lying on top of big red.

Working in and out of control through suspension-tension-release has been in play throughout my studio research and I take the “kip-up” as an opportunity to work between the surety of the action and the maniacal pleasure of the sound my body makes slapping against the mats. The interplay of suspension-tension-release in the “kip-up” is repeated again and again, and I am seeking within it to make the separation shorter and shorter.

Aware that I need to separate the mats I make the decision not to create a transition and instead to undo the mats while lying on them. To do I focus on the
task at hand – separate the mats. Locate Velcro and slide one mat on top of the other. I arch and wriggle to accommodate the task.

Putting on the red platform shoes I am really interested in the juxtaposition of ideas, aesthetics, philosophies and techniques. Red high-heels to me feel like a token in dance theatre and physical theatre works, often signaling some form of uber female sexuality. As I wobble putting them I feel my strong sturdy body capable of many highly physical demanding movement waiver. I feel a sense of irony balancing in platforms while also balancing mats on my head. There is something clunky, clumpy about walking in platforms. They’re certainly not light or offering a sense of lightness, of flight as I walk in them. I defer to tap dancing briefly as they slop about on my feet. The mats on my head reverberate with the bounce of a paradoxically light and fluffy clumpy stomp.

As I make the transition from platforms to kneepads I take the time to scan through my body. There’s the sense of hunger and depletion, and also at this point on Friday a glimmer of fatigue. My muscles feeling somewhat stretched like dense chewing gum and a bound ache at their centres. Determined I walk on.

Taking the bound and bodily slapping sounds of my earlier movement as a score I experiment with the sound of slapping myself. I am also interested in this moment in spirals, binding and breath. I find myself repeating a spiraling action with my chest open, head tilted towards the ceiling again and again as the sound of my breath escaping in the most extreme moment of the spiral is completely other to any I have heard before. It grasps and squeaks with small signs of distress.

I don my dress that takes on play, flight and the lightness of my actions. I wanted here to capture something of saying “no” to spectacle. No to spectacle of several kinds: theatrical play in the pseudo flapper dress, of power breakdance moves, of flying high into the air and falling into the floor. I wanted to capture these with more of a flash of light and to complete their action in darkness. I wanted to arrive at a place of gesture where the vibrancy of the very human gesture, placing hand on forehead, could be just as dynamic and powerful as say a backflip might be.

Frank Sinatra croons and I swoon towards my dance partner. The corde lisse has taught me a lot about myself and suspension, tension and viscosity. ‘Strangers in the Night’ came from I dream I had about the taboo of the "hello boys" crutch to audience moment. If the rope is considered as a potential partner the cute flirt into a promiscuous straddle climb to Frank crooning seemed possibly a little too cheeky but, then again? Also within that was the idea of the cute little girl who then performs a male gymnastics climb requiring strength and determination in the timing. I was also in that moment playing with the acrobatics of my face, playing with facial expression and use of the muscles in my face in addition to the rest of my body. There was also a lot of tension surrounding this choice and how I played that out in the moment of performance.
Still playing out the juxtaposition of ideas, aesthetics, philosophies and physicalities I run and leap onto the red mat against the wall. Once seated on top I slowly return to the gesture of hand on forehead. This gesture has been repeated in different guises throughout the performance and here I am particularly interested in the type of touch/contact/tact between my hand and my face. I am at a distanced position from the audience however I feel an intimacy generated between myself and them through the fine attention I am paying to my action. I let this slide.

Lurching through the air and taking the corde lisse straight out from its centre axis I find a tense suspension. I follow it back in and allow my body to swing inverted within its circular wake. As its spinning subsides I return my feet to the ground maintaining my grip on the corde lisse. Holding for a moment longer than necessary I release my fingers without moving my hands and the corde lisse releases its tension and loosens itself again after compacting its coil while spiraling.

I have to still myself to walk without urgency to the sandbag. I ease the sandbag into my hands while in a second plié. I straighten up and then begin to jump holding onto the “TV” sandbag I had found in the corridor. Jumping with the sandbag as training built a lot of strength in my legs and feet, the irony while performing this task at the very end of my performance is the jelly-like feeling my legs now have. How many jumps did I say I would do? Are the lights fading out yet? Here we go just a few more. I finish with the sound.