THE MOVEMENT BETWEEN. DANCE IMPROVISATION, WITNESSING AND PARTICIPATORY PERFORMANCE.

by

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All photos by Katie Banakh
Chapter 1: Introduction

Dancers bring dancing into being from the imaginative and kinaesthetic scope of their own bodies. They inhabit their bodies, in diverse and nuanced ways, to comprehend and express existential possibilities that are perhaps otherwise unavailable to them. Performers and choreographers also do this to see how their particular affinity with movement might reverberate in an artistic field. But dancers are also motivated by curiosity about the variable ways in which dancing can be practised and understood. When dancers use their bodies as a mode of inquiry, they generate insights that only these physical practices can bring forth. If an inquiry is thoughtfully conceived as part of a broader intellectual undertaking, and therefore as a collaboration with theoretical discourse, then a feedback loop occurs between the physical and the theoretical; developments in one mode echo back to the other with possibilities that otherwise might remain silent. Dance practitioners working in a research paradigm can bring discipline-specific insight into the direction and knowledge outcomes of the inquiry, “whereby theory emerges from a reflexive practice at the same time that practice is informed by theory” (Bolt 2007: 29). This is the dialogue that is implicit in practice-based research.

The subject of this inquiry concerns my own particular experiences of dance improvisation. To improvise is to intimately feel things as they take hold of my body and to allow these feelings to enliven or subdue my movement. Improvisation, in other words, has an intricately personal dimension for me. So to cast dance improvisation into the spotlight of academic research could have seemed at odds with what animates my experience of improvising. The flush of an improvised moment quickly loses its colour when too-heavily scrutinized from a rational perspective. But as I have discovered through this inquiry, dancing and improvising are not diminished by having to think about and articulate their processes. Indeed, much of my thinking has taken place within the processes of improvising or moving themselves, as a beneficial form of somatic reflexivity. Noticing what is going on in the dancing, and then writing or talking about these observations, has determined the artistic as well as the theoretical orientation of this project. In turn, responding to the challenges and insights of broader theoretical and artistic discourses has enriched and deepened my engagement with dancing.

As with any research, the course this project has taken, from its inception and original aims, to the values and conditions that underpinned the final outcome, has been unpredictable. Drawing on resources in the approaches of other artists and theorists, this exegesis charts the most significant junctures of this course. It also articulates the issues that emerge at these points, issues which are personal, interpersonal, physical, artistic, theoretical, or combinations of these dimensions.
I began this PhD project by making a dance work. This was as a way to test how I might proceed, knowing that I was committed to dance improvisation, but not knowing exactly how best to develop my engagement with this form. At that stage I was also distracted by a desire for choreographic recognition. Having been a dancer and choreographer for many years, one who had also developed a strong interest in improvisation, I wanted some public acknowledgment and credibility for this interest. But the model for this credibility (as I then perceived it) was as a choreographer and so I made a work which attempted to merge improvisation with choreographic intent. *the weight of the thing left its mark* was originally performed at Dancehouse, Melbourne in April 2009 with dancers Paul Romano, Olivia Millard, Sophia Cowen and Luke Hickmott, and sound by Madeleine Flynn and Tim Humphrey.¹ The work was a conversation I wanted to stage between my aspirations as a choreographer (and the authorial role) and the practice of open improvisation. As a choreographer I wanted to give the work a recognisable structure and authorial signature. In terms of the open improvisation, I was interested in the state of attention the practice required coupled with the idiosyncratic qualities of embodiment each dancer brought to this. These different aspirations were not easy to reconcile in the work.

Framing *the weight*... as a structured improvisation created difficulties on both sides of what I then saw as a polarity – improvisation on the one hand and choreography on the other. In attempting to reconcile (perceived) differences between the two, my approach was to create structures (or boundaries) that were fixed, but in which a more open-ended improvisational experience could manifest. This approach was only partially successful, partly because there was confusion amongst the dancers in the work about how the piece was functioning and how their improvisational states could be realized. Some of the dancers approached the work as if they were maintaining their already existing improvisation practice and, while sensitive to my directions, still maintained a sense of their own flexible autonomy within it (an approach I encouraged)). But other dancers, with less experience as improvisers, struggled to allow themselves this licence. They looked to me for ‘permission’ to improvise; to give my approval for how they approached this and the choices they made (given my position as choreographer this was understandable). But I was interested in them exploring improvisation openly and from their own associations in movement, associations that did not require my intervention. They also tended to hone their movement into readily repeatable, identifiable qualities so as

to diminish or avoid encountering moments of complete openness. The process I established was essentially a rehearsal process in which I discovered the different structures. Once these were established we improvised within these structures. But this process did not adequately equip all of the dancers to deal with the demands of open improvisation once they confronted an audience. The structure was sufficiently strong to indicate a choreographic intention but not so strong as to create clarity for the dancers within it. The principles of open improvisation, of following what emerges in that moment, were inhibited by this structure. As a consequence of trying to incorporate both choreographic definition and improvisational openness, the outcome was sometimes unproductively confusing for performers and audiences alike.

After the weight of the thing left its mark it seemed important to begin the PhD project again; to sincerely and rigorously shape an improvisation practice with clearly defined values and conditions at its core, and from which could emerge a distinctive sensibility in performance. It was also clear that I could not do this from the position of external choreographer; I felt compelled to activate my own body as performer if I were to properly understand what values and conditions were required, and therefore how to proceed. I also wanted to give more emphasis to my own performance practice of open improvisation, a practice that I maintained as ‘separate’ from my choreographic experiences. My relationship to performance improvisation as a distinctive, if somewhat marginalised, subset of the local contemporary dance sector is detailed in Chapter Two of this exegesis. This chapter establishes the context (and my understandings of this) out of which my practice has emerged. In it I review the local and national contemporary dance scene as well as the significant international influences. Of particular significance to this discussion is how dance improvisation relates to the broader field of contemporary dance. The work of the artists referred to in this chapter picks up on the themes that run through the project, anchoring the project in a relationship to the contemporary dance field. I also disclose, if not fully disentangle, some of the values and beliefs held by me in my dancing career, and which led to (unproductive) distinctions between choreography and improvisation. Some of these beliefs are personal (and with personal implications) while others are more widely held.

Improvisation has always been marked for me by strong feelings: feelings of satisfaction, exuberance, surprise, joy, anxiety and frustration. In the early stages of the project I grappled with how these feelings defined and affected my experiences of improvisation, particularly in performance. My aspirations at this point were primarily to learn how to improvise in performance with creativity and consistency, and to avoid the inhibitions I occasionally experienced. In a sense this was a desire to ‘get better’ at improvising by ameliorating psychological impediments to some degree. Instrumental as this seems to me now, it was a perception of the variability and unpredictability of improvising as a psychological ‘problem’. Emotion, or more specifically feeling, was certainly alive in my
improvisation and performance experiences. But it quickly became clear that this project could not merely be a psychological exploration of (my)self (a sort of quasi-therapeutic or self-help process). Conceiving of the research as narrowly self-referential shifted as I considered how what I conceived, made and presented might engage with an audience, and with a wider context of artistic and theoretical engagement. It could not be ‘just about me’. And yet questions about the place and impact of feeling and feelings remained.

The realisation that ‘feeling’ could be understood as either emotion or affect, and that these were not necessarily the same thing, was the theoretical distinction that opened up these questions of feeling. Feeling in one’s body takes many forms (the word is indistinct in its meanings) and while emotion may be present when I improvise, the impact of the phenomenon known as affect is of greater relevance. Improvisation is so often based in an in-the-moment decision to act before we can realise the full implications of the action. If I am gripped by a positively or negatively felt sensation, then my physiological response to this will be over before I can adequately reflect on it. Affect occurs before conscious reflection is possible, and before we can understand what the affective impact might mean for us (if anything at all). Emotion on the other hand, has consciously appreciated meanings in relation to our lives and histories; we usually understand something of why we are feeling this emotion. As such, ‘feelings’ of affect or emotion, while overlapping at times, are potentially distinctively different, with potentially different implications for practices of dance improvisation. The differences between them also provided distinctively different implications for how this project might
unfold. While the psychological implications of the ‘self who improvises’ were always present for me, thinking about affect became a much more energising conceptual theme for the project, as well as for potentially contributing to the wider understanding of dance improvisation.

Chapter Three of the exegesis examines aspects of the theoretical work on affect that has invigorated much scholarship in recent years. While acknowledging the importance of the philosophical strand of thought that theorises affect (stemming mainly from the work of Deleuze and Guattari), of more relevance to my project are certain psychological, but non-positivistic theories of affect (Gregg & Seigworth 2010). In particular, I utilise the work of Teresa Brennan, Silvan Tomkins and Daniel Stern. Teresa Brennan opens up the idea that affect exists both within our own bodies and as an atmosphere into which we move; that is as both something that we generate internally and which has been generated outside of us. “The dyadic and complex level of affective transmission”, states Brennan, “is marked in terms of how it is that one party carries the other’s negative affects; his aggression is experienced as her anxiety and so forth” (Brennan 2004: 119). Brennan also outlines how judgment is an affect, felt by one as an affective “possession”, and (potentially) unwittingly transmitted to another. The projection of judgment can therefore have inhibiting, or even destructive implications if no awareness is developed towards such a transmission. Whether affect is in a positive or negative form, Brennan articulates how awareness of affect can be cultivated, in what she calls “the practice of discernment”, as a way to understand its impact (Brennan 2004: 120). In the terms of improvisation this has meant developing a practice that has allowed me and the other dancers, to carefully notice (to discern) what is happening in our bodies, and towards awareness of our own tendencies, patterns and avoidances in improvisation.

Silvan Tomkins proposed a categorical theory of affect, with nine specific origins for all affective sensation (Tomkins, Sedgwick & Frank 1995). His ideas have been influential in my case, not because of the categorical certainty he attempted to define: it was Tomkins’ definition of interest as an affect, and therefore as a state of embodiment rather than as a purely cognitive phenomenon, that has been central. To become interested in something is to have this interest freely manifest in your body at a physiological level. To become interested in one’s improvisation is to follow one’s physical imagination without reserve. How then do I create

2 Perspectives on affect arising mainly from the philosophical work of Gilles Deleuze understand affect as a trans-individual phenomenon; collectively constructed and emergent, and with affect finding its ‘becoming’ in the moment of an event. Psychological discourse on affect is more aligned with individual states and cognitive processes including emotion. These two approaches to affect theory seem to be the most prominent but there are others and the field is complex and multidimensional. For a discussion and brief outline of the different conceptions of affect see ‘An Inventory of Shimmers’ the introductory chapter in The Affect Theory Reader (Gregg & Seigworth 2010).
the conditions that foster imaginative interest when I improvise? This question has been a central theme of this project.

To some extent building on Tomkins’ ideas, Daniel Stern’s work further refined the appreciation of how affect bears on improvisation and dance. Stern’s research into the psychological development of babies details with great precision how the relationship between mother and infant is an interpersonal attunement in movement, rhythm and ‘vitality’ that leads to healthy developmental growth in the infant. Stern’s ideas are much less beholden to categorical definitions of affect. Instead they relate more to the ‘abstract’ moment-to-moment variations in movement and dynamics that exist in mother/infant relationships that also express particular qualities of embodied feeling; what he calls vitality affects (Stern 1985). Vitality affects are constantly shifting and changing in the physical (and vocal) interplay between mother and baby and while they may indicate the presence of emotion, they are often simply the affective feelings of being alive. Stern’s ideas very strongly match my experiences of improvisation as a shifting terrain of feelings, sensations and actions that are inflected with particular qualities (vitalities) but which need not be attributed to a specific emotion, or by implication, autobiographical revelation or meaning.

It was the experience with the weight of the thing left its mark which led me to seek a method of defining and building a practice from a common understanding amongst the dancers. I was seeking ‘a practice of discernment’ that was expansive and open and which would support our individual free associations in movement. The practice should also facilitate noticing; noticing how affect fosters or inhibits our tendencies in improvisation and so develop awareness about such conditions. This led me to the Dance Movement Therapy form called Authentic Movement as a means of rigorously investigating and practicing embodied discernment. Chapter Four details the studio investigations of this project — the improvised dancing through which the performance was investigated and conceived — and which was based on Authentic Movement. Authentic Movement is a therapeutic relationship between a mover and a witness. The name Authentic Movement is the most commonly used for the practice but I have used another throughout this exegesis - the Mover Witness Dyad (MWD).³ This is because the name Authentic Movement itself, and its implication that we should be searching for some kind of truth in what we were doing, initially caused some confusion amongst us and so was replaced.⁴ Thus, while the form is

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³ Although Authentic Movement was initiated by the work of Mary Starks Whitehouse (the first person to describe, what she called, “authentic movement” in the presence of a witness), it was Janet Adler who established the practice as a discipline, along with the first school dedicated to its study and practice (Haze & Stromsted 1999: 107).

⁴ The question of the practice’s name and the problems associated with the concept of authenticity are taken up by Ella Goldhahn in her article ‘Is Authentic a Meaningful Name for the Practice of Authentic Movement’ in which she suggest the alternative name The Mover Witness Exchange (Goldhahn 2009).
a powerful contemplative movement practice, my intentions were never
guided by the theoretical parameters of Jungian psychology (in which the
form was originally conceived). I was not using the MWD as a therapy,
but as a context for investigating dance improvisation.

To give a brief encapsulation of the MWD, the mover moves in response
to whatever associations take place, and ideally, without reference to any
other demands for how movement might be understood. The mover’s
motivations need not be predetermined. He/she gives him/herself over
to the act of ‘listening’ to and attempting to move according to whatever
associations emerge, without assessment or judgment. Because the
mover’s eyes are closed, these movements are not externally directed, but
call on internal somatic, affective and imaginative associations. There is
no obligation to move except when the mover feels motivated to do so.
Each mover follows their own set of associations, creating individual
qualities of movement and presence. The mover may be quiet and still, or
animated and wildly energetic. They need not pursue this with a
choreographic sensibility. One does not need to interpret or organize the
various manifestations according to a choreographic or performance
imperative, only to listen to and follow them.

![Image](image.jpg)

(Proper photo caption goes here)

Importantly, the dedicated involvement of the witness enables the mover
to explore within the confines of a secure relationship. As in Winnicott’s
discussion of a “holding” environment created by an infant’s mother, the
witness’s presence makes it possible for the mover’s experience to unfold
without reserve. They are metaphorically ‘embraced’ by the witness’s
presence. Pragmatically, the mover can keep their eyes closed because
they know the witness will stop them from bumping into walls. But the
witness also attempts to watch with a non-judgmental disposition that supports the psychosomatic experience of the mover. This is an ethical stance, based on trust, which requires the witness to assess their own responses to what they see without a judgmental division between ‘good’ or ‘bad’. The witness is attentive to the mover’s experience even if this confronts the witness’s own attitudes, experiences, expectations and so on. To an extent, the witness actively constitutes what is possible in the emergent dynamic between mover and witness – they participate in the activation of a field of open engagement. The knowledge that the witness is in attendance - actively engaged with the mover’s experiences - is fundamental to the mover’s openness. It releases them to play with and enter into various states of embodiment with safety and free of external demands.

The MWD is an intimate and powerful practice for the development of an improvisation practice. But the practice also introduced a specific relational framework for practicing movement improvisation that extended my thinking around how improvisation is received and assessed in performance. Thus, Chapter Five discusses the issues I encountered in trying to find a suitable context and form for a performance that honoured the orientation of the MWD and the mutual exchange that takes place between mover and witness. Central to this search was the incorporation of the witness role into the event so that in watching the dancers, the witness did not simply become subsumed by the role of audience member. Watching improvisation from the stance of an audience member is, I believe, different from the disposition taken by a witness in the MWD. The re-casting of the audience as ‘witnesses’ to the performance, coupled with the ontological demands for suspending judgment this made on them, was perhaps the most important feature of the research. Chapter Five gives voice to aspects of the experiences of the ‘witness/audience’ members (the term I use throughout the exegesis) while also analysing the ways in which the ethical attitude of the MWD impacted on their reception, involvement and understanding of the event.

It was upon realising how important the participation of the witness/audience would be to the shape and outcome of the performance, that the course of this project shifted again. In order for the project to adequately reflect the role of witness in the MWD – how the witness significantly embraces and facilitates what the mover does – it became necessary to think about the witness/audience as active participants in the event: as co-creators. Audience participation in performance therefore emerged as a key theme, bringing with it alignments and allegiances to certain other performance practices that emphasize performer-audience co-creation. It was not until the enactment of the performance itself that the full implications of the research became evident. These implications necessitated further thinking about how ‘participation’ as it was operating in my project might be referenced against other performance practices.
The theme of participation also required an examination of theoretical ideas which also help clarify the staging of interactions between performer and audience. Chapter Six begins with a brief discussion of how Gernot Böhme's concept of ‘atmosphere’ is helpful in bringing the theoretical and practical investigation of privately experienced affect (and its influence on improvisation) into the aesthetically inflected and public realm of performance. The ethos and structure of the performance, with the mutual exchange between movers and witness/audience transferred from the MWD, became a situation in which ‘atmospheres’ with aesthetic qualities emerged and dissipated. I argue that these atmospheres were subjectively perceived (by all participants), as well as objectively constituted (as something in the room), and generated by the interactions of the movers and the witness/audience. Chapter Six continues to give a brief overview of some concepts of (audience) participation from the dance field and, subsequently, to explore the participatory aspects of this project in reference to a wider field including that of Contact Improvisation, performance art and the theatre.

(Official Millard and witness/audience member)

Finally, in Chapter Seven I discuss the conclusions of the research from a personal, artistic perspective as well as pointing to the wider relevance and potential extension of the project. I briefly recapitulate the trajectory of the research to remind the reader of the original motivations and thus the manner in which the conclusions were developed and reached. By summarising the key developments and ideas along this course I intend to give proper context to where and why the investigation arrived at the point it did. If the power and process of reflexivity has been a key theme
of this research, then the conclusion also engages this process. I reflect on how my thinking and artistic process have been transformed by this project and how the performance event became a highly particular form of performance with implications that resonate beyond my own artistic development – hopefully including as a contribution to the local improvisation community I review in Chapter Two. Locally, as elsewhere, dance improvisation remains an under-represented form of performance, both in practical and theoretical terms, and can still be shrouded in layers of mystery and misunderstanding. I hope this project will, in some modest way, help to address this situation.

Beyond the theoretical references in this exegesis, the resources which evidence and/or articulate this research, and which have helped form the conclusions, are as follows:

*The studio practice of the MWD:* This includes the physical practice of the MWD conducted by Olivia Millard, Peter Fraser, Jason Marchant and Sophia Cowen and myself, post-dyad discussions and whole-group discussions (whole-group discussions were recorded), personal journal writing and reflections on the studio experiences.

*The performance documents:*

1. *The invitation to witness/audience* (Appendix One): this described the research project, the nature of the involvement for
witness/audience, and the required commitment. This is briefly discussed in Chapter Five.

B. The notes for witness/audience (Appendix Two): more detailed instructions about the event and sent only to those who accepted the initial invitation. An ethics consent form was also provided to participants.\(^5\) This is briefly discussed in Chapter Five.

C. The Watching Scores (Appendix Three): these were provided to witness/audience members before the performance event. Designed as a pack of cards, I called these ‘frames for perception’. These were intended to give some insight into the conception of the performance as well as suggest ways witness/audience members might bring attention to their own bodies when watching. The scores were divided into four suites: 13 artist statements (whose ideas resonate with this project), 13 Statements Towards a Manifesto (describing the principles of engagement), 13 Reflections on the Mover/Witness Dyad (from our studio practice), and 13 Suggestions for Watching (to be followed or not).

The post-performance discussions (Appendix four and as an audio file): these discussions between the dancers and the witness/audience form the basis of much of the discussion in Chapters Five and Six.

The relational and reciprocal exchange in the MWD means that both parties ‘give and receive’. In this exegesis I have prioritised the ways in which the witness/audience ‘gave’ to the process: how the presence of a witness in the studio helped form the performance event, and on how the witness/audience experienced the performance event (and their articulations of this). What is largely absent from this project is what the dancers received from the presence of the witness/audience – that is, the ways in which we as dancers felt the support of non-judgmental watchers, how this influenced our movement, and how this manifested in the outcomes of the performance. While I discuss this briefly from my own perspective as one of the dancers, I acknowledge that what the other dancers experienced (individually and as a group) is missing. This is a significant gap in discussing what transpired, first in the studio, and later in the performance. The studio process was teeming with possibilities and these were always collaboratively experienced and reflected upon as a group. We all took turns at being witnesses for one another and after each session a discussion between mover and witness (in the manner of the discipline of the MWD) and then as a group, took place.\(^6\) These experiences and discussions were very influential in how I came to

\(^5\) Deakin University’s faculty of Arts and Education Ethics Advisory Group gave ethics approval for this project in May 2013. Signing a consent form when participating was required of both the dancers and the witness/audience.

\(^6\) These discussions were, for the most part, recorded on my iPhone. I have not included a transcript or audio version of these discussions as an appendix. While the discussions
understand this studio practice, and consequently how the performance event came into being. The contents of these discussions have found a small place in this project as the basis for some of the Watching Scores (appendix three), particularly as these relate to the experiences of the studio practice. It has not been possible, however, to do justice to all of the many, lively issues and perspectives this project has exposed. Consequently I have needed to hone selected aspects while omitting others, so as to work within the limits of the exegesis. In concluding this introductory chapter, I must acknowledge that while my collaborators’ experiences barely figure in this account, their imaginative physical involvement, patient and sustained commitment, and lively, intelligent discussion has been of vital significance.7 To Olivia Millard, Peter Fraser, Jason Marchant and Sophia Cowen I owe an enormous debt of thanks. Their involvement as ‘delegated’ performers and collaborators was immeasurably important to defining and working through the issues in this project. However, here I must focus on writing from my own perspective – one where the multiple roles and experiences of researcher, performer and author are entwined.

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7 Attempting to qualitatively capture, process, and write about the experiences of the dancers will be collaboratively undertaken in 2016 by the dancers in this project – Olivia Millard, Peter Fraser, Jason Marchant, Sophia Cowen and myself.
Chapter Two: Improvisation and Contemporary Dance - the Background and Review of a Field

The Australian Context

There has been a long history of engagement with improvisation on the part of contemporary dance practices. Often improvisation has been used as a compositional tool for discovering (and then defining) movement material within a choreographic process. But since the 1960’s improvisation has also been a mode of performance in its own right, allowing for an instantaneous merging of creation with performance. It is through this latter approach that my practice most comes alive and through which I am most fulfilled when I am dancing. Personal experience, however, can also have value as part of a research methodology within a practice-based research context. It is from within this framework that I have investigated my own place in dance improvisation culture and in the hope that the relevance of my investigation will extend beyond the merely personal.

My background is as a dancer and choreographer in the Australian contemporary dance field. I have danced with companies such as Australian Dance Theatre, Danceworks and One Extra Co and, as an independent dancer and choreographer, I have maintained a strong relationship over many years with Dancehouse (the Melbourne organization committed to fostering more experimental work in contemporary dance). Improvisation practices have been one aspect of the dance that I have created and in which I have participated. I have also had some experience of improvisation in the contemporary dance studios in New York City and Barcelona and have participated in classes with teachers such as Andrew Harwood, Julyen Hamilton, Deborah Hay, Rosalind Crisp, Joan Skinner, Randy Warshaw, Miguel Gutierrez and others. But my background is firmly antipodean and it is out of and to this more local improvisation community that the questions posed and investigated by means of this research speak in the first instance.

If I reflect on my own encounters with artists from Europe and the United States, they have been intermittent and rare compared to the amount of time I have spent practising within an exclusively Australian context. Many Australian dancers assume our practices are similar, or exist in response to international developments, but we cannot always be sure. Despite a more sustained crossover between Australia and the other dance centres today, geographical isolation is still a reality. Not all Australian dancers can gain ready access to intensive experience of the intricacies and density of contemporary dance activity that crosses between the Unites States and Europe. Do mistaken assumptions about

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how international artists think and practice blinker local artists to the wider implications, debates and aesthetic positions within which our activities might be understood? Should a positioning within the international field be important for local artists? Unless the comparisons between the local and international spheres are made we cannot know how they intersect or how progressions are made. This point was taken up in the *Talking Dance* forum at Dancehouse (Melbourne, 1993) at which New York-based dance artist Douglas Dunn was the guest speaker. Audience member Sally Gardner made the point that “...in performing and creating there is a need for personal closeness and an understanding of the personal vision or whatever it is, but it seems to me that that can be balanced by a kind of distancing that comes from a knowledge of what has gone before or what others are doing and that distancing is very freeing” (Dunn 1994: 57). For Dunn, his immediate context for making work was always the most appropriate. Yet even though he is based in the modern dance capital of New York, this context comes with the potential for a loss of continuity.

So there is a kind of decentralization and a localizing going on which is socially very positive....But aesthetically I would consider it an interruption, for the moment. There was a kind of interesting line of progress in modern dance that I saw and took part in, which doesn’t really exist right now...the kind of atmosphere in the sixties and seventies, of real, marginal but intense interest in aesthetic progression is really hardly existing at all now. (Dunn 1994: 54)

Perhaps then, aesthetic continuity is always a potential issue for dance? But as Gardner’s comments indicate, a particular challenge exists in Australian contemporary dance in understanding historical lineage of a form developed in the United States and Europe. The pioneering roots of particular practices or discourses, while appreciated, are not taught in this country with full knowledge of the context in which they were developed (Dumas 1988). These roots have become recognizably entangled such that the transmission of particular values cannot always be directly attributed to a particular source with its original context no longer remaining in view. With this comes a conglomerate of various, obscured influences, which in the United States, for example, would be more easily attributable to a particular lineage of practice and to a body of critical and theoretical discourse (Dempster 1987: 6). Elizabeth Dempster makes this point as far back as 1987 but it remains relevant today:

*The story of the development of contemporary dance in Australia is at the present time a shadowy one, an imprecisely drawn collection of disparate tales of immigrations and emigrations, of dislocation, appropriation and adaptation. It is a narrative marked by borrowing and bricolage, where source and original context are sometimes acknowledged, more often obscured and disguised.* (Dempster 1987: 6)
In raising this issue, Dempster highlights the manner in which contemporary dance in Australia has become blind to its own origins. The danger is that assumptions about dance practice take the place of a culture of investigation, where questions about how a practice, in full knowledge of its origins, might then be extended under local conditions. Dempster, along with Russell Dumas and Philipa Rothfield, have all made assertions about the impact that ballet has had on dance culture in Australia, such that balletic values dominate to the detriment of all other physical sensibilities (Dempster 1998; Dumas 1988; Rothfield 2010). The sway this technique now holds is partially as a result of the limited access to, and understanding of, the different qualities of modern and postmodern dance, creating a situation in which ‘difference’ is mistrusted and devalued and a consequent adherence to the ‘generic’. “There are many instances”, states Rothfield, “in which a balletic sensibility had functioned to dismiss modern dance practice as not dance, unskilled and lacking in virtuosity because it is blind to the kinaesthetic values which underpin that practice – a blindness which derives from its own kinaesthetic specificity” (Rothfield 2010: 314).

Amanda Card has another perspective on the problem of choreographic difference. She notes that a small group of highly skilled professional dancers have become the dancers of choice for many of Australia’s most recognised choreographers, creating a select group of dancers who move between choreographers and their specific projects.

The identification of the relatively small pool of performers being employed by an even smaller group of choreographers and companies will ring alarm bells for some of you. If a small group of expert dancers, our Super Group if you like, are producing a lot of the movement material for a range of choreographers who are predominantly working in a directorial mode, you might have valid reservations about the state of choreographic invention. You could be forgiven for suspecting an emerging homogeneity. After all, if everyone is abdicating responsibility to their dancers, amongst whom there is a replication across a range of choreographers, this fear would seem to be well founded. (Card 2006, p. 32)

Earlier, Russell Dumas had claimed that the repertory model for contemporary dance companies inevitably fails, because without sustained physical engagement with qualitative values, specific to an individual choreographer, the dancers fail to authoritatively embody the differences each choreographer offers (Dumas 1988).

More recently, a trend towards interdisciplinarity in dance, performance and live art practices has involved many Australian dancers and choreographers. Dance mingles and merges with other practices, and these practices utilize choreographic principles. In announcing the establishment of the Keir Choreographic Award, Phillip Keir said of the award that “we try to focus on choreographic rather than dance because we wanted it to be seen more broadly – not just one form of dance and try
to invite artists who are probably better known in other mediums to get involved” (Lin 2014). Parallel to this has been an increased Australian interest in interrogating the medium of dance, mirroring the European move during the 1990’s towards “conceptual dance”; that is, dance motivated by concepts more than by aesthetic qualities. (Brannigan 2010) In his book *Exhausting Dance* (Lepecki 2006), for example, Andre Lepecki theorises the diminishing presence of movement in some, largely European choreography, as challenging the centrality, or even necessity, of movement to dance. But, as Erin Brannigan points out, both of these developments have also produced a degree of anxiety amongst Australian dance practitioners about the continued integrity of dance as a discipline. “This disciplinary unease is reiterated in [Australian choreographer Helen] Herbertson’s observation that the essential characteristic of ‘physical specificity’ that defines the form is also in danger of becoming simply a “tool” for other art forms to use”(Brannigan 2010: 7). If other performance practices lay some claim to the choreographic order, and if dance foundations in movement become shaky, what gives dance its constitutional distinctiveness? Dance has also become an academic discipline, taught within Universities, and as such subject to the expectations of scholarly engagement and theoretical objectification. In contrast to “in-body research” (as Elizabeth Dempster phrases dance’s production of somatic knowledge), in academia the dancer must “...master the relevant metalanguages and demonstrate competence in the reproduction of valued theoretical registers of writing and commentary” (Dempster 2004). In the convergence of dance with other, more powerful, systems of knowledge or practice, dancing itself loses some of its claim to distinctive authority through adaption, modification or translation. If there is a difference that the discipline of dance possesses, it deals with the question of how to dance (this difference). Each artist, who understands him/herself as a dancer, animates this question through the nuancing of differences in the act of dancing itself.

**The Melbourne Improvisation Scene**

Improvisation as a performance practice in Australia occupies a curious position in this debate about choreographic difference and distinctiveness. Improvisation has recently enjoyed some popularity amongst Australian choreographers who have not previously been adherents or consistent practitioners. For example, Melbourne choreographer Luke George asks in the program notes to his 2010 work *Now, Now, Now, “Can we be in the now?”* By utilizing improvisation within a choreographic form he seeks heightened ‘presence’. Yet improvisation is not fully accepted as the sole means for giving definition to a choreographer’s ideas and it maintains a subsidiary role as choreographic tool (something I return to later in this chapter).

Long-time improvisation practitioners in Melbourne, those for whom practising improvisation has always been the core motivation, such as Al Wunder, Peter Trotman, or David Wells, rarely speak directly into the
contested space of the wider Australian contemporary dance field. These practitioners may not see dance as the best context for discussing issues central to their work. But how then can an improvised performance practice help define and detail difference in an Australian context in a manner that both includes dance and that acknowledges debates and developments from other parts of the world?

Some of my improvisation experiences have also been specific to a small, almost insular section of the Melbourne improvisation ‘scene’. I am deliberately drawing a distinction between the improvisation and contemporary dance scenes as a gap exists here, despite a fluid and overlapping boundary. While there are many artists who utilize improvisation in their dance practice, in Melbourne a separate kernel of activity exists, currently basing itself mainly at Cecil Street Studio (Fitzroy, Melbourne). It is a small, tightly knit, egalitarian community that privileges low-cost live performance, participation, and an almost familial relationship between performers and audiences. It prioritises ‘practice’ over ‘training’ and participation over artistic profile. Most members of this community do not apply for arts grants, they maintain other jobs and while being very committed, do not necessarily see themselves as integrally connected to the ‘professional’ contemporary dance sector. The community includes performers for whom text, music and voice are central as well as movement or dance. Artists and groups such as Peter Trotman, Noelle Rees-Hatton, Andrew Morrish, Born in a Taxi, 5 Square Metres, State of Flux, David Wells, Alice Cummins, Kevin Jeynes and many others have regularly performed or taught classes at the studio. The Contact Improvisation scene in Melbourne also has strong ties to this community. The Cecil Street scene has largely emerged from the teaching and performance work of expatriate American Al Wunder, whose Theatre of the Ordinary has been holding improvisation classes and performances in Melbourne since 1982. Wunder was originally a student of Alwin Nikolais (who used improvisation as a basis for learning

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9 Andrew Morrish is a notable exception who regularly represents himself and the practice of improvisation at wider dance forums such as the National Dance Forum held concurrently with Dance Massive 2011, 2013 and 2015.

10 Cecil Street Studio was established by Martin Hughes and Fiona Cook in 1996 as a privately run studio dedicated to improvisation practices. It has since been passed on to a committee of interested people. For more background on this studio and its community see (McLeod 2003).

11 It could be argued that bulk of the contemporary dance sector in Australia functions under the constraint of very little funding and therefore little practical distinction exists between those who apply for funding and those who don’t. But I am drawing a distinction between ‘professional’ dancers, who have usually trained in dance at a tertiary institution, and who identify themselves primarily as dancers, versus those who consciously choose to work in another field while practising improvisation as an ‘amateur’, if rigorous, pursuit.

12 The journal <proximity> magazine, while mainly focused on Contact Improvisation in Melbourne also published articles on “new dance and movement improvisation” including many of the activities at Cecil Street Studio. This magazine fostered a more deliberately international perspective than other activities at Cecil Street. See http://proximity.slightly.net/
dance technique) in New York. Wunder’s approach to improvised performance now encompasses any medium (voice, music, text, movement, or combinations of these) according to the interest of the performer, and his approach, disseminated through his teaching and his classes, is particularly accessible to beginners (Wunder 2006).

Perhaps Wunder’s sense of community, and its footings in an approach that gives little value to a distinction between ‘amateur’ and ‘professional’, stems from his earlier association with Nikolais. Nikolais’s work was fostered through a twenty-year association with the Henry Street Settlement (in the Lower East Side of Manhattan). By teaching classes to the kids from the largely working class community, and performing at the Henry Street Playhouse, Nikolais (and his dancers) introduced his dance methods to several generations, as well as training the dancers for his productions (Jowitt 1988: 353-355). Wunder himself began by teaching children at the Henry Street Settlement under the apprenticeship of one of the Nikolais Company’s principal dancers, Phyllis Lahmut (Wunder 2006: 9). Wunder remembers that male dancers were in short supply at a time that Nikolais was planning a work requiring a large group of dancers. “So with less than fifty hours of dance training under my belt” writes Wunder, “I found myself in Nikolais’ dance company, rehearsing for my first public performance” (Wunder 2006: 7-8).

One of Wunder’s primary teaching methods is the model of ‘positive feedback’ after the performances, which form part of his classes. The performer receives, from other participants, their reflections on what was ‘liked’ about the performance (specifically without any reference to what was ‘not liked’). This process is not entirely uncritical but certainly very biased towards the positive. Such an approach to learning about improvisation is seen by Wunder as necessary in facilitating the risky prospect of open improvisation. It is premised on the belief that when positive experiences of improvisation override negative ones, a more productive environment for learning is created. Wunder suggests that the negative “...imposition of judgment over oneself can slow down and even stop the intuitive creative process” (Wunder 2006: 122). The positive feedback model pervades much of how improvisation is practiced and how it is received in this community. The model engenders an egalitarian culture of acceptance and integration of all who perform. While its value for beginners is particularly clear, does it also create resistance to a more critical engagement with improvisation? Everything becomes ‘likeable’ because the frame of reference is always ‘What did you like about this performance?’

The Theatre of the Ordinary classes have facilitated an entry into performance for many people who did not have previous dance/theatre/voice training, as well as a new context for those who do. The most successful proponent to emerge from this scene has been Andrew Morrish who has gone on to an international career as virtuoso
improviser and skilled teacher, based on his mercurial capacity to improvise with language as well as a strong commitment to movement (Morrish 2000). But there are many other performers who pursue improvisation in performance in the form that Wunder has established. The most consistent forum for improvised performances in this community has been the monthly (or weekly) event in which individuals or groups share billing in performance evenings as a way to gain necessary experience of performing. For example, Conundrum, hosted by two improvisation groups – the theatre group 5 Square Metres and the Contact Improvisation group State of Flux, but involving numerous invited guests - ran on the last Sunday of every month from 1996 - 2006. The Year of Fridays (1997) ran for a full year every Friday evening with a mixed billing of variously consistent or occasional performers. Other more recent collective events have been The Little Con and Up the Ante. Each performer or group in a group show is allocated an approximate amount of time in which to perform, and an order of performances is established on the night of the performance. The performers mingle with audience in a studio setting where everybody sits together to watch the performances.

These performance events seem to share a number of implicit protocols about improvised performance, some of which exist as foundational principles but others are perhaps the result of habit rather than artistic choices. Perhaps the habitual attributes aren’t always ‘protocols’ but may simply be responses to the conditions of a lack of time, money and critical engagement and that have solidified into assumptions over years of doing it in a certain way. In my experience, the single most influential convention is that the genesis of improvisation is openness of intent, usually without the use of specific scores. “The performer has, by holding the performance open to their choice making, stated that the performance is a forum in which something will really happen...They have deliberately decided to not decide until they are in the moment of performance” (Morrish 2000). The improvisation is the performer’s discovery of emergent material; the way to improve one’s capacity to discover material, or allow it to emerge, is to practice in performance. ‘Open improvisation’ could also be seen as what Joe Kelleher describes as a practice of exposure, not as in any confessional sense, but in the sense of the performer’s exposure “…to what surrounds them, everything that is there, as if the furthest things in the universe – the furthest and least likely to be called upon...are no less in reach than the most immediate” (Kelleher 2012). Open improvisation involves an unremitting scanning for the points of interest this exposure can create (imaginative, physical, psychological). The dancer attempts to remain attentive to the inexhaustible question ‘What is this?’ That which imaginatively rises up and physically takes hold becomes the substance of the improvisation.

Audiences for this kind of improvisation in Melbourne, often performers themselves, accept that the performer may not always succeed in finding ‘interesting’ material; that the performance may in fact, drag. ‘Failure’ is
tolerated in the particular audience-performer contract the form creates because there is an understanding of how challenging it is to be consistent in this pursuit and because ‘practice’ and ‘performance’ have been combined into the same entity. Virtuosity in improvisation relates less to physical or technical ability and more to a capacity to sustain an unfolding of spontaneity. Theatrical presence and the temporal shaping of an improvisation are also emphasized. “In improvisational performance practice the performer’s ability to find material is endorsed and it is these skills which form the basis of becoming an improvisational performer and...which have to be honed and refined in the search of satisfying theatrical experiences” (Morrish 2000).

An ethos similar to that of Contact Improvisation in its embracing of “no fault dancing”, of being “released from judgment”, is also strongly infused in the practice (Novack 1990: 174). Value and skill is ascribed to “finding material” and to the presence of the performer in doing this. Yet the aesthetic qualities within each performer’s improvisation that might define it as discrete and discernable as a ‘work’ ironically exist within a relatively stable, even predictable, theatrical format. The format entails usually short ‘open’ improvisations (in solo, duet or small groups), often accompanied by music, and in an intimate, if theatrical, relationship to the audience. Audiences occupy the same space as the performers, with the next performer ‘stepping out’ from within the seated audience to begin their performance. The consistency of the format, in turn, affects how this kind of improvisation performance is ultimately received and understood. Certain performers such as Peter Trotman and Andrew Morrish (either as the duo of Trotman and Morrish or as solo performers) or the collective Born in a Taxi have presented distinctively crafted (but improvised) works (with, for example, the improvisation a response to a specific author or genre of fiction writing) and attracting a strong following. But the majority of performers are not professionals and do not present ‘stand-alone’ critically resonant performances. They are committed instead to a communal engagement more akin to the practice and presentation of Contact Improvisation.

The Little Con (as a ‘sub-group’ within the Cecil Street community), while generally fitting this template for improvised performance, also attempted to differentiate itself. Established in October 2005 as an ‘improvisation event for dancers’ (as opposed to a more hybrid,

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13 In my experience, this format was not altered or experimented with a great deal although there were certainly exceptions to this. Paul Romano, for example, curated an iteration of The Little Con (August, 2011) where the upstairs studio of Dancehouse (Melbourne) was divided into four ‘zones’, each zone with a different ‘curator’, and with performers in each zone performing in coterminous space and at the same time. Each zone, and the performers within it, operated independently of the other zones. For the audience, however, the event was framed as a single entity. The performers were Paul Romano, Emma Bathgate, Brendan O’Connor, Tony Yap, Lucy Farmer, Fiona Bryant, Peter Fraser, Kathleen Doyle, Alexandra Harrison, Jonathan Sinatra, Gretel Taylor, Alice Cummins. For a review of this performance (and the sole review of The Little Con) see http://www.realt imearts.net/article/104/10408
theatrically focused encounter) *The Little Con* aimed to provide a practice forum for improvisers who wanted to preference and explore the aesthetics of a solo movement practice over text or narrative-based responses. Founded by Paul Romano, Dianne Reid, Joey Lehrer, Grace Walpole, Ann-Marree Ellis and myself, it also invited numerous guest performers to participate in the monthly performance, usually (although not exclusively) at Cecil Street studios.\(^{14}\) Attended by small audiences, *The Little Con* always seemed more serious than say, *Conundrum*; less conscious of engaging the audience through humour; more directed to ‘pure’ movement, less ‘entertaining’ but perhaps more exploratory and with a focus (at times) on trying new formats for the performance of improvisation. The event toyed with different contexts for performance such as large, multi-performer events happening simultaneously in several spaces, a site-specific event in the streets and gardens around Cecil Street Studio, ‘conversations’ between dance and technology or dance and writing and other experimental contexts. For a time, artists were invited to write a response to that month’s performance (but not perform) as a way to extend the encounter that audiences might have with the event but also to foster critical appraisal or creative responses. To promote the event and document the activities and writing *The Little Con* website was established.\(^{15}\) To an extent these measures were an


\(^{15}\) See [http://thelittlecon.net.au/](http://thelittlecon.net.au/) for details of the 2011 Little Con. The archive links also contain details of performances from 2006-2010. Written responses to the performances were published between February 2009 – August 2010 and written by Simon Ellis, Bagryan Popov, Janice Florence, Jonathon Sinatra, Hellyen Sky, Ilan Abrahams, Siobhan Murphy, Joey Lehrer, Paul Romano, Dianne Reid, Shaun McLeod, Ann-Marree Ellis, Anne O’Keefe, Sally Gardner, Olivia Millard, Alice Cummins, and Sophie Darling.
attempt to 'draw in' people of significance who could engage with what we were doing and so help develop a culture towards improvisation both of appreciation and of rigorous appraisal. The Little Con continued until 2011 although a brief revival happened in February 2013 (with a single performance) and two Little Con-ferences have been held in 2014 and 2015 (organized by Dianne Reid and dedicated to workshops, performed presentations and papers about improvisation).

Despite the attempt to distinguish The Little Con from other performance events of this kind, it was effectively seen by the wider contemporary dance sector as the same as the others. This was evidenced by an absence of critical interest in the event despite the participants' seriousness of intent. As with the other collaborative improvised performance events, where individuals (or groups) were given no specific attribution beyond their name, and where variations from the format were the exception, different performance events were effectively rendered as equivalent. Anecdotally Conundrum seemed to be assessed in the same way as The Little Con and once you had seen one event you understood what the next one would be like even if the individual improvisations varied enormously. Certainly considerable differences existed between performers in terms of skill, approach and temperament, and the quality of individual improvisations was very inconsistent. Despite this, there was little capacity for recognition of a discrete improvisation (within the collaborative event) or for critically evaluating a performer's capacity. Individual performers could not use the performances to make their mark in the broader contemporary dance sector. Here performers struggled to lay claim to a specific performance sensibility for their work as improvisers. How then, does one give specificity, and provide critical credibility, to an improvisation performance practice that will register with the broader contemporary dance, or still wider artistic field?

**Improvisation and Choreography**

While distinctions between improvisation and choreography are ultimately less useful than say, distinctions between individual artistic practices, differences do exist in how the two approaches are perceived. Part of this is what Steve Paxton refers to when he says:

*If the problem with technique is that it builds clones – we’re kind of building little replicants in the same ways, to keep the technique itself the same – the problem with improvisation is that you have no companies, you have no references. On the one hand you have companies that are too much the same...and on the other...you have no rigor.* (Paxton 1997: 53)

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16 See footnote 7 for the web link to the sole review of The Little Con
17 While I raise these questions, the issues of credibility for improvisation and its critical evaluation cannot be adequately addressed within the limits of this exegesis. This project does contribute, however, by engaging a specific audience in the process of becoming literate in improvisation.
It is the perception of a lack of rigour that has beset improvisation as a form. "Improvisation does seem devalued", claims American improviser Dana Reitz. "The word doesn’t indicate necessarily the work that’s involved" (Dempster & Reitz 1991: 34). In part this could be a lack of awareness on the part of audiences as to how improvisation should be assessed. Improvisation does not privilege repeatable forms as a way to organize movement qualities and so make the dancing more ‘legible’ or subject to ‘study’ (if that requires repeated viewing). In music or theatre, improvisation is often employed without a complete abandonment of a conscious structure. "In dance, however, the act of improvising (has) often connoted an even deeper immersion in the chaotic evanescence of physicality, one that was dismissed as insignificant by many" (Foster 2002: 30).

The historical, if disputed, assumption about a work of choreography is that it is pre-determined and that it is ‘made’ and not spontaneously ‘performed’. "No dance can be called a work of art if it has not been deliberately composed and can be repeated" states Susanne Langer (cited in Louppe, 2010, p 162) and this attitude has been remarkably prevalent in dance. Seen in this light, performance improvisation, in its open form, is problematic. It is resistant to the call for authorial attribution in the marketing regime that requires the promise of ‘a work’ that is a visible reproduction of what was presented in last night’s performance (Buckwalter 2010: 7-8).

As Laurence Louppe sees it, to be taken seriously in the modernist tradition from which contemporary dance stems, performers must ‘give signature’ to their intentions and artistic processes. This is problematic for improvisation artists who paradoxically perhaps have more in common with an archaic model of dance:

...a dance without works (oeuvres) where the performer, overexposed and magnified, is all there is to see. In the traditional courtly dances (danses savantes), no matter how beautiful and intelligent they are, the dancer ‘contains’ the whole dance. There is no écriture to make of her something other than a faithful and sublime executor, a sort of ‘presenter’: whereas the contemporary performer is the ‘producer’ of the movement that inscribes her in her own history, a body at work in her own thought where it recognizes itself. For the dancer as for the dance, these archaic structures are still too close and too threatening for it to be possible with impunity to annihilate the role of choreographic creator, a role which belongs to modernity and where all the partner/collaborators are engaged around a singular artistic philosophy. (Louppe 2010: 179-180)

The conception of écriture, as Louppe describes it, potentially challenges how performers approach improvised performance. Performers often practice performance as a way to fulfil improvisation’s inherent promise (of spontaneity and surprise) through the dynamic situation of audience-performer interaction and as if this ‘contained the whole dance’. The
audience demands that the performer ‘steps up’ and claims a presence before them. But the audience sees nothing of the work that develops and sustains a specific body or a specific presence. Without practising the conditions which give identifiable, referential qualities to a dancer’s movement, presence and intent, does the dancer effectively remain invisible because they have not stamped their work with a distinctive écriture? For an improviser, it is the conditions of the practice, that to which he or she determines must be consistently returned, which constitutes what comes to be known as ‘the work’ and thus that which can confer artistic visibility. Each project should therefore have its own practice, even if this project is sustained over many years.

Artists such as Deborah Hay or Dana Reitz rail against the easy division into categories of improvisation and choreography, and have practiced without making reference to these terms (Dempster & Reitz 1991). The emphasis and allegiance is not to the category or associated techniques, but the intentions and aesthetic of the myriad individual artists; the specific requirements of their projects that will determine how the dancing manifests (Buckwalter 2010: 5). Goldman also points out that the dominant understanding of improvised performance as a spontaneous mode of creation, free from script or score, is also too simplistic given the range of improvisation practices where the overlap at the margins between improvisation and composition is in constant flux (Goldman 2010: 5). Louppe’s earlier citing of Langer sets up her plea against the traditional rigidity about how improvisation is seen to function in this bifurcation:

*Improvised moments can be part of the écriture of a piece and even give it its structure, its plan, its temporality. This does not prevent the work existing as a complete artistic entity: not in terms of a definitive ‘form’, but in what is much more important, namely, the depth of understanding around a common project, the qualities of phrasing and of mutual attention.* (Loupe 2010: 162)

As if in dialogue with this statement, Australian artist Rosalind Crisp calls her work “a choreography of beginnings” stating that the work is not improvisation at all despite her long held association with improvisational practices (Dawkins, Crisp & McLeod 2011). This perspective is the outcome of Crisp’s deep investigation into the implications and manifestations of attention and the consequent impact on her dancing. Her example is interesting because of her clarity that she makes ‘works’ of dance but with a loose structural integrity so as to leave multiple openings for the open play of attention. Her perspective has surfaced because of her long-standing investigation into improvisation and how the quality of her attention threads through her dancing as “…both rigorously identifiable and constantly mutating” (Crisp 2009).

The contribution of experimental choreographer Deborah Hay also provides a salient point of reference here. Hay’s performance practice
involves a strong commitment to, if not strictly speaking improvisation, then to the autonomy of choice for her dancers. Hay does not strictly speaking ‘tell her dancers what to do’, but provokes or directs the ways in which they might think about, or attend to what they do (Hay 2001b). Given the spontaneous generation of the movement by Hay (or the dancers) and the indeterminacy of the outcomes, Hay’s work bears many resemblances to improvised performance. Yet her work is rendered choreographic by her determination of a “…concrete set of conditions, a strategy that guides [the dancer’s] attention” (Hay 2001a: 10) and which “forms and sustains” his/her body imaginatively (Hay 2001a: 8). Hay has what amounts to a specific theory of the body-self such that the body is both material and immaterial and cannot be instrumentalised. The specificity of her scores activates the dancer’s perceptual awareness over the durational arc of the performance, directing the dancer to continuously attend to the feedback each component of the score elicits. For Hay, a very specific practice, postulated as responses to seemingly unanswerable questions, leads to the realization of a specific work. Her practice ultimately gives shape to a detailed score for each titled work thus giving identity to this work as a choreographic entity. “What if every cell in the body had the potential to get what it needs, while surrendering the habit of a singular facing, and inviting being seen?” is the perceptual practice relating to the group dance O, O. Performed in the round, Hay’s score for O, O is a much more detailed document with metaphorical commentary, directions for entering, tasks for occupying the dancer’s attention in time and space. \(^{18}\) Yet it is grounded in a practice of perceptual discernment which creates the bodily substance of the dancer’s presence. The scores specific to each work create a choreography of “…tricks and traps that challenge a performer’s awareness and loyalty to the form” (Hay 2001a: 13).

“Loyalty to the form” is distinguishable from the traditional notion of loyalty to the dancing, that is, to be to stylistically authentic: to perform the movement according to choreographic intention and resulting in the inscription of an aesthetically defined dancer. Hay does not prescribe what the movement should be or be like, but radically, turns the performer toward the ongoing task of performing his/her perceptual discoveries without attachment to sustaining an aesthetically coherent, historically reflexive body. Hay’s disruptive claim:

...the tyranny of the myth of the dancer as a single coherent being – a basic element in dance training in the west. The effects of this idea can best be observed in the photographs in New York’s Dance magazine, where images of erectile dancers follow one another, page after page. My vision of the dancer, through the intervention of performance as a practice, is as a conscious flow of multiple perceptual occurrences unfolding continuously (Hay 2001b)

\(^{18}\) For an excerpt of the score for O, O see (Goldman 2007: 163).
The improvised body is also often premised on a belief in singularity – that of the individuality of the performer. Solo dance is certainly based on the singular presence of the individual performer. Ros Warby, an artist associated both with Hay’s work and her own, states that she values solo dance because of “the opportunity it provides to see a performer’s attention”, and the movement and changes this involves, uncluttered by the choreographic complexity of multiple bodies (Dempster 2014: 32). But a singular presence is not necessarily the same thing as a singular self. One of the tenets of improvisation, powerfully held in therapeutic contexts, but still prevalent in performance practices, has been to spontaneously reveal the ‘authentic self’ of the mover - the ‘real’ person. But the improviser’s susceptibility to habit and the inherent limits of ‘self-expression’ in creating art makes Hay’s critique of the “choreographed” body, equally, if not more appropriate for improvisation. “History choreographs all of us, including dancers”, she says (Hay 2007). John Cage and Merce Cunningham’s emphasis on indeterminacy is not the same thing as the unpredictability improvisation allows, “...because the unpredictable is in fact highly determined by the history of the ‘me’ who improvises, and allows an already inscribed movement memory to appear” (Louppe 2010: 52).

**Open Improvisation: International and Historical Points of Reference**

Open improvisation is a specific approach to improvisation that many but not all improvisation artists utilize. Melinda Buckwalter’s survey of twenty-six improvisation artists, mainly from the United States, notes a number of artists who approach improvisation in this way including Nina Martin, Penny Campbell and Barbara Dilley (Buckwalter 2010). Open improvisation operates without the use of scores leaving all decisions regarding space, timing, movement quality, relationships, and so on to be made during the unfolding of the performance. It does not mean the resulting performance ‘comes out of nowhere’ and practice and skill are required. However, it is possibly the approach to improvisation which draws the most criticism or misunderstanding. Because of the emergent nature of open improvisation, in which structure, content or temperament is being determined spontaneously, the resultant movement can lack definition or clarity. This is something Dana Reitz comments on when she says that dance improvisation “has the look of not being difficult, intellectually or physically, or clear or progressing. It kind of swims around itself and it doesn’t seem to have a direction” (Dempster & Reitz 1991: 33).

Performance improvisers are often attracted to the form because of the possibility of experiencing an unselfconscious flow of movement and feeling. Immersed in an activity without qualification, they are aware of their actions yet they are ‘being moved’ by these, rather than actively seeking them out. But this ‘flow’ of movement has also been a criticized by certain artists as something which dulls the senses when watching
improvisation. The potential lack of clarity Reitz describes as “swimming around itself” seems to have given this aspect of improvisation a bad name, making artists like Reitz reticent to promote their work as improvisation. Trisha Brown was suspicious of the open approach to improvisation when this functioned as an unguided performance of ‘self-expression’, which she labelled “therapy or catharsis or your happy hour” (Brown cited in Foster 2002: 50). Brown, who appreciated improvisation’s possibilities, preferred to establish structures for improvisation during her period of experimentation with the Judson Dance Theatre. Referring to the structural principles of jazz, Brown established limitations and boundaries for the performer to improvise within, thus avoiding any sense of the self-indulgent. For Brown, the dancer’s disciplined encounter with structure, lead improvisation away from therapeutic associations of individual authenticity and toward the aesthetic dimensions of a ‘choreographic’ sensibility (Foster 2002: 28). Similarly, for Deborah Hay, performance as practice, through its multiplicity of perceptual encounters, does not assume a singular and irreducible ‘being’ who in any given moment is just ‘going with the flow’ (the flow), but is actively engaged in a constant repositioning of identification. For Hay this arousal of curiosity and responsiveness in the dancer creates a subsequent extension of being, and of “…possible worlds beyond the physical choreography of a dance” (Hay 2001b). As a result, Hay attempts to interrupt the experience (or notion) of flow so that her dancers can be alert to multiple possibilities rather than singular ones.

Sally Banes states that there was resurgence of interest in improvisation in the USA in the late 1980’s and 1990’s after the surge of the 1960’s and consequent lull in the 1970’s and early 1980’s. “If many dancers in the sixties saw situation-response composition as a way of accessing “authentic” self, postmodern culture in the eighties and nineties declared that there is no singular, authentic self but only a fragmented multiplicity of shifting identities” (Banes 2003: 81). The sixties’ desire for authenticity has also been associated with ‘going with the flow’, something Hay warns against. But is it the ‘flow’ of improvisation that is reflective of (singularizing) self-indulgence or can flow also enable an opening or expansion of possibilities? Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s concept of flow is applicable to any activity which produces “the holistic sensation that people feel when they act with total involvement”:

*In the flow state, action follows upon action according to an internal logic that seems to need no conscious intervention by the actor. He experiences it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which he is in control of his actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present and future. (Csikszentmihalyi 2015: 150-151)*
This sensation is often a marker of peak experience in improvisation (Foster 2015). Yet being unselfconsciously involved in open improvisation is also susceptible to an attitude, as Brown and Hay’s critique might indicate, which aligns open improvisation with a lack of rigour, or of self-indulgence. This attitude is, no doubt, accurate in many cases. But I would argue, that the attitude also disguises the many forms of foundational practice in improvisation which have created a changeable or fractured body, when flow is present. The improvising dancer who experiences flow and is ‘moved’ by their physical experience, rather than consciously moving, can be taken beyond their perceived limits or even beyond the self to a degree. For example, utilising Csikszentmihalyi’s concept, Urmston and Hewison write about flow as a necessary condition for overcoming the fear of the physical risks involved in learning Contact Improvisation (Urmston & Hewison 2014). As such flow is a channel to embodying, and therefore to understanding, the practice of Contact Improvisation. Banes also cites John Jasperse’s 1993 improvisation “in which his body was marked not as blurring boundaries between male and female...but rather, as extremely masculine and extremely feminine” (Banes 2003: 81). When open improvisation is rigorously practiced a diversity of specific embodiment and performance presence can also be developed through its operations, the performance of which Louppe acknowledges as analogous to an écriture or choreographic signature (Louppe 2010: 162). Simone Forti, well known for her rigorous investigations into the movement of animals as a basis for her improvisation, describes the quality of engagement that marks flow as ‘enchantment’:

*There’s something I call the dance state. It is a state of enchantment… The dance state can occur in performance of choreographed work. Improvisation depends on it. When it is flowing very strongly, it is as if an angel were dropping improvisation into your lap. When it’s not, you have to bring your skills into play in a more methodical way. It still works. But part of being an improviser is getting to know what material is currently inspiring you to the point that it can induce this state.* (Forti 2001: 33)

In other words improvisation still comes from somewhere (a relationship to the world) and often requires a lot of work getting there (a sustained practice). Steve Paxton posits improvisation as a necessary process of getting lost, not in any personal, psychotherapeutic sense, but in order to extend the parameters of what is known. “Getting lost is possibly the first step toward finding new systems” writes Paxton, potentially resonating with Hay’s multiplicity when framed as openness to whatever enters the dancer’s sphere (Paxton 1987 (a): 19). If unstructured improvisation is practiced as ‘exposure’ to that which spontaneously emerges, rather than as a search for an internal ‘source’ of authenticity, it avoids reducing the dancer to a singularly inscribed, essential ‘me’. It is personal and internal but not closed, “achieved not through limitation or exclusion”, states Dempster (in reference to Reitz’s work), “but through a rigorously inclusive process” (Dempster & Reitz 1991). If the reverie implicit in
Forti’s statement goes beyond the limitations of an egocentric position, then it aligns with Reitz who says:

*The moment can’t be repeated but it’s a trained moment, it’s prepared for and comes out of everything that’s happened before. It can be like you are not even there. It goes right through you.* (Dempster & Reitz 1991)

The collaborative entity the Grand Union (of which Trisha Brown and other Judson Dance Theatre figures were members) conducted structured (and then more openly) improvised performances from 1969 until its demise in 1976. Originating out of Yvonne Rainer’s performance structure entitled *Continuous Project Altered Daily*, the members of the collective were Rainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Barbara Dilley, Douglas Dunn, Becky Arnold, Nancy Lewis and Dong. Rainer’s structure stipulated changing and variable tasks which the performers executed in understated ways but which then developed into situations requiring improvisational interpretation or extension (Foster 2002: 80). As the performers became more adept at dealing with and interpreting the implications of each task, they determined elements of the performance during rather than before the event, so creating a more open-ended, and less structured context for improvisation:

...the Grand Union offered a series of unrelated, bricolaged vignettes, awkwardly and absurdly assembled. Movement consisted largely of low-key rock-dancing, stretching, or tasklike activities – dragging a ladder, piling chairs, sweeping the stage space, or pulling a rope. Performers tested the weight of an object, reinterpreted and expanded a simple phrase of movement, or positioned themselves in relation to any of the various items strewn about the space. Unpredictably, these actions coalesced: the pile of paraphernalia turned into a throne or the rope became a noose, sketching a frame for dramatic exchange. (Foster 2002: 80)

Options were spontaneously taken up according to the interest of the individual performer sometimes as group action, but often with performers preferring to pursue their own activities, without reference to group unity or aesthetic coherence. Foster attributes this aspect to the fact that the members all had extensive performance experience, and therefore could ‘carry it off’, but also because the group embraced a relaxed attitude toward the coexistence of multiple and competing agendas. A singular aesthetic coherence was replaced by communality in a situation that was chaotic and random but somehow seemed to work. Foster also refers to Deborah Jowitt’s affectionate response to watching the Grand Union’s performances, particularly the performers’ capacity to “cope” with whatever came their way (alternately in ironic, heroic or mundane ways). Everything was accepted into the communal situation; each action or relation was attributed equal value. Perhaps making this communalism work was easier for a group that consisted of some of the most influential figures in contemporary dance (who had been influenced by other major figures such as Merce Cunningham and John Cage)? “It is
so easy to feel equal amongst princes”, says Louppe of the group’s
democratic approach and of the members’ place in dance history (Louppe
2010: 179). However, in imaginatively dealing with the complexity this
ethos threw up, Grand Union members found new ground for
performance (Foster 2002: 82).

One Grand Union member, Barbara Dilley, has maintained her interest in
what she terms “open space” improvisation, while acknowledging its
difficulty as a form. The experience of performing with the Grand Union
had unsettled Dilley, finding that “in following impulses in the heat of the
improvised moment onstage, her private feelings became public
material” (Buckwalter 2010: 55). In wanting to maintain the “deep sense
of play” she had experienced in Grand Union performances, she
developed a series of specific practices. For example, her Contemplative
Dance Practice utilized the principles of Buddhist meditation. Always
starting with a sitting meditation before going into the open space of
improvisation, the practice also incorporates somatic practices such as
Body-Mind Centering, Authentic Movement or alignment techniques. The
dancer attempts to cultivate “an attitude of attention and awareness to
the thought process and a relaxed presence in the body and mind” to
investigate how open space improvisation might be navigated
(Buckwalter 2010: 56). Dilley organises Contemplative Dance Practice as
a practice by attribution of specific time frames for each component:
sitting meditation, moving in open space improvisation, and finally a
short meditation followed by group discussion. By marking each
component’s conclusion with the ring of a bell, Dilley borrows from
meditation practice where specific stages in the discipline are temporally
perceived. The amount of time spent in each stage becomes a
consideration: attention is maintained until released by the ‘ending’ each
bell formally announces.

In order to bring awareness to various elements of the improvised
performance, particularly in groups, Dilley has developed several other
practices. Each has a particular set of limitations (attention-directing,
spatial, relational or compositional) within which dancers must
improvise. “Grid” offers dancers clear directional pathways through
space, trails to move along, which give three-dimensional volume to the
space. The “five eye practices” bring awareness to how dancers use their
eyes when improvising, in response to Dilley’s observation that dancers,
when concentrating on the internal machinations of improvisation tend
to look downward or half open their eyes (Dilley & Smith 2005). The
various practices seem designed to kindle awareness but also to organize,
define, and analyse improvised choice in the spread of “open
improvisation”.

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19 For a full explanation of the “five eyes practices” see Dilley & Smith (2005). The
practices consist of improvising with: 1. Closed eyes: internal seeing; rest; refresh. 2.
Peripheral seeing; soft focus; seeing from the corner of the eyes. 3. Infant eyes: seeing
before naming. 4. Looking between things: the space “between”, negative space. 5. Direct
looking: investigate; study; absorb.
As far as dance improvisation goes, clearly there have been (and are) multiple approaches by different artists which indicate the complexity of the form. I have indicated that there are lineages of interest and influence in improvisation; that improvisation has ‘come from somewhere’, and that the approaches of certain artists will influence how others practice it. But improvised performance also throws the individual dancer into complex, immediate situations of choice about how to improvise the body-self. These situations compel the dancer to be physically responsive, to be ‘present’ in the moment, or else risk losing sight of what they are actually involved in. It is to how artists have conceived of, or articulated, the experience of improvising, and of how this is received by audiences, that I will now briefly turn.

**The Audience is in the Room: Embodiment, Presence and Time.**

*I am getting good at being a person whose body is a channel, a medium for emotional/psychic conflict, immediate temperature taking of the context and the corporealizing of imagination in real time.*

Miguel Gutierrez (Gutierrez 2013)

Gutierrez’s statement picks up on three important openings through which improvisation can be viewed: embodiment, presence and time. His articulation of the “body as channel” again elicits openness or exposure to the particulate flow of impulses, caught by the dancer’s body, and imaginatively interpreted as physical act. All improvisation is a realization of an individual’s idiosyncratic embodiment; but Gutierrez also summons its potential for poetic force. Imagination is provided a somatic palette and expressed through tonal shifts in the musculature and perceived through the engagement of attention. These shifts reflect fluctuations in the understanding of context in the way one’s body feels the change in the weather. Conditions of space, relationship, thinking, feeling, interest, pleasure, physicality, stamina: a dancer feels the changes to these conditions in his/her body and notices the ways in which they change. Maintaining attention on these shifts marks one of the central investments of improvisation: to discern and refine somatic sensitivity as a way to stay responsive to the free association of movement.

Equally in performance, audiences may also attune to the changes in the dancer’s awareness through changes to the dancer’s presence. Mine Kaylan theorizes presence in performance (in this case in relation to theatre) as an audience’s immediate recognition of the performer as a physical and psychic being. Kaylan defines presence as that which refers to:

...a particular quality of attention that the actor or performer invites from her/his audience. This term is loaded with a personal and emotional charge: personal to the reader using it, and to the actor or performer it refers to. Moreover, it connotes a mystifying and metaphysical quality of
being, an essence ascribed to the person of the individual actor or performer. (Kaylan 1991: 48)

An essence is ascribed to that quality of presence but its crystallization may be fleeting, only to be replaced with another, each moment’s presence evolving into the next. At any point more than one option is available to the dancer hence presence is also variable. Deborah Hay refers to her practices as “a form without a shape”. For her “there is no one way that a practice might look like to an observer, whether that observer is practitioner or witness” (Hay 2001a: 13). “No one way it might look” could also describe how presence in improvisation, in the dancer negotiating multiple possibilities, is an individual constitution of multiple possibilities. Multiple possibilities create the possibility of multiple presences and an activity of reconciliation between them.

The conflict, that Gutierrez cites, in channelling what is ‘alive’ in the room (the context) is the conflict between competing interests: there is often more than one set of conditions, more than a single impulse vying for attention. But improvisation demands an eventual choice be made. How does this person “cope” (Grand Union style) with the tussle; have they embraced their reckoning or do they resile from it? Gutierrez refers to these situations as “doubletruth experiences, where multiple realities hold veracity and allure” (Gutierrez 2013). If improvisation is performed, made visible to others, then this also manifests as a functioning of presence. Somatically marked by the nature of the performer's intention, presence is variable: sometimes calm and clear, disorderly at other times. There are innumerable possible manifestations of presence. Presence relates to the infinitely particular combinations of the conditions in which the dancer finds him/herself, the dancer’s perceptions of these and his/her responses. This process gives specific energy and volume to the ways the dancer inhabits their body. It discernably “fills up” (or deflates) the dancer sometimes in subtle, even mysterious ways.

You are alone onstage and noticeably different from the person who was alone in the dressing room moments ago. Your body brought you to this stage. Here you shimmer. What if shimmering is your cellular perception of time passing? (Hay 2004)

Deborah Hay presents us with another question, one which grasps the coexistence of presence and time. In Gutierrez’s estimation, presence is either visible to, or kinaesthetically “felt” by the audience, but what happens for the dancer does not necessarily take hold as immediate, comprehensible meaning. Dancing occurs over time, but for an audience appreciation may also take time. Again from Gutierrez:

What I try to do is promote patience. Not having an instant understanding is not a liability of dance – it’s actually this kind of anti-capitalist thing that is built into the temporality of the form. You want this work to say “blah” to
you right away. But it’s a time-based form and it doesn’t work like that. It just isn’t going to deliver for you. (Gutierrez & Steinwald 2012)

Gutierrez positions patience as political. But he is also very aware that there is reciprocity in the audience-performer contract (or contracts). It takes time to evaluate, or rather, simply value, the different elements of a performance and the interconnectivity between them. If intention is not fully predetermined and is changeable (as in an improvisation), and if the (chemical) reactions between different elements not known, then a different relationship with the audience is called for. It will be up to the audience to determine how to engage. “Everyone in this fucking room is in this dance”, shouts Gutierrez (in his program notes). The audience is called to ‘figure things out’ for themselves, to more consciously participate in the creation of meaning or attribution of significance. Of course, all dancing requires this of an audience to some degree. But if, for example, as Deborah Hay has said, we “let our perception be the dance” then what is called for is a different perspective on the aesthetics of the movement than has been traditional. If the “vocabulary” of the dancing is not immediately recognizable, not to some degree specified or codified through reiteration in a choreographer’s work (defined in shapes, energetic qualities, relationships to weight and so on), and if this codification has not resulted in an audience’s appreciation of this as coherent, then the task of determining what is actually going on falls to the audience as much as to the performer. Value and meaning are jointly decided upon in what amounts to a very intimate relationship between audience and performer. A call is audible to dancers and audience alike; “we are in this together”.

Conclusion

Improvisation in performance then is dialectically poised between the personal and the public as much as it is an encounter between individual performers and an audience. Personal experience is inextricably connected to this poised encounter, yet the personal can speak to contexts, whether research or performance contexts, that reach beyond the merely self-gratifying. I entered into this project to deepen my understanding about my own practice. The personal situation of where I live has undoubtedly had an influence on how I have experienced improvisation, giving this a local flavour. But as this chapter indicates I have attempted to expand my understanding, and how this project itself might be understood, through points of reference that have an international reach. My project attempts to value my local influences but balance these by acknowledging that a wider continuity of practice could enliven both my own and other local practices of improvisation. Perhaps improvisation has also suffered from a lack of appraisal elsewhere in the world, and if Steve Paxton is correct, then open improvisation is in need of sustained critical engagement more generally, particularly if it is to assume the credibility of other forms of dance and performance. This would suggest that any unapprised ‘flow’ in improvisation practices, from
approaching improvisation as generic, might benefit from critical ‘punctuation’; that is, as critical interruptions to assumptions about how improvisation functions that might spark new thinking or new horizons for the form. If critical frameworks are required for improvisation, and an artistic framework is required for my project I need for these to be particular rather than generic. If being local assumes a presupposed spectrum of kinaesthetic or aesthetic values then I need to test these, so as to determine what might be needed for this project alone. What then is the ‘signature’ of this work? Finding the particular approach for my project and distinguishing what makes it ‘different’ is a task of discernment through physical engagement. This is the foundational precursor to performance. The following chapters detail how my project attempts to do this, firstly through a theoretical discussion, then through the articulation of the studio practice and finally through the conception and realization of the performance.
Chapter Three: Theorizing Affect

Introduction

Performance improvisation is, for me, exhilarating and absorbing. Yet, for me as an improviser, it has also entailed a significant degree of discomfort and anxiety. For performers, the encounter with a live audience and with other dancers, combined with the ‘not knowing’ of open improvisation, leads to what improvisation artist Katie Duck would call being driven by “biology”. In her terms, this is the hormonal rush that such an encounter arouses and is primarily created through the visual ‘taking in’ of the situation. Looking another dancer in the eye or seeing the audience can stimulate one’s nervous system, leading to excitement and charged physicality but potentially also leading to nervousness, fear or uncertainty (Buckwaler 2010: 19). Other improvisers also talk about the adrenalizing impact of performance and how the interaction between performers and audience creates this state. Responses to this situation, and how it is dealt with, vary, although it is generally seen as strongly motivating and therefore positive. Kent De Spain writes that improvisations for him feel:

...incomplete without the presence of an audience, both because they [his improvisations] are designed to be seen and because I use the pressure of the gaze to transform my conscious state, to “crack me open” in a way. Where in the studio my conscious mind sometimes dominates my experience, in performance I am less in conscious control and more available to energies and influences beyond my “self”. (DeSpain 2014: 60)

Improvisers also discuss the flip side of this coin. For Steve Paxton, if the adrenalizing effect is not addressed, the danger is that he lapses into “movement babble” produced by the accelerated firing of physical reflexes. Deborah Hay also talks of audience/performer interaction in performance as an experience of “speed”, meaning a loss of composure and necessitating discipline and consideration to dampen its escalation (DeSpain 2014: 61).

While the responses to performance are as diverse as the practitioners who engage in it, one thing seems common to all. The situation of performance is highly charged and produces embodied, hormonal, that is affective responses. Affect is the terrain on which these encounters take place no matter whether the responses are of excitement or of inhibition. The divide between negative and positive experiences of improvisation, the affective states they produce, and the opening up or closing down of awareness they facilitate, has prompted me to experiment with ways to understand, shift, or accept this uncertainty as part of the legitimate spectrum of improvisational experience. I can relate strongly to De Spain’s statement about the positive focusing power of performance and the exhilaration this can produce. But I have also experienced
performances where I have felt seriously undermined by anxiety and uncertainty.

When I’m improvising in an anxious state I find that I think a great deal in a manner which dissociates me from my actions. I think about the worth of what I am doing. But this kind of thinking is different from noticing. It is different from attention that is engaged with something, immersed in something. It effects a distancing from my physical engagement and I begin to pre-emptively evaluate the situation rather than actually being involved in it. Anxiety seems to obscure my capacity to be proprioceptively alert. Instead of listening to/for openings in proprioceptive awareness that might lead to new experiences of movement or engagement I become locked into habitual patterns of action or thought. My gestures and movements become empty even as they express themselves, shapes devoid of any relationship to a sense of significance that might animate them. Such negative experiences inhibit my capacity to move openly and to fully maintain a presence of engagement with what I am doing, creating a powerful inhibiting influence over my improvisational experience.

The gaze of an audience towards the elaboration of my dancing, whether choreographed or improvised, is a fundamental relation in performance but one which is accompanied by the potential for judgment (Louppe 2010: 185). Judgment may be brought to bear by the uncertain otherness of an audience but may equally be an internalised condition of self-appraisal.

*If the choreographic act, including the formulation of its intention (propos) is a shared act with multiple resonances, there is often an undesirable partner, a clandestine passenger accompanying many artistic enterprises: 'the inner spectator' which, while the work is being made, judges in the name of (ever changing) public opinion, inscribing the work according to consensual criteria. ...[T]his 'look'...is often internalised despite ourselves and is capable of bending the creator and his/her group to the law of compliance: a depository that is at once dangerous and indispensable (so as not to remain in the narcissistic circle of an unproductive regression), what the analyst would call 'the inner public' reproducing the parental gaze that the infant desires to seduce in order to be loved. It is a dangerous situation for dance: dangerous for the dancer and dangerous for the spectator in so far as it is the body which is produced, shown (in the dancer’s case), and solicited by kinaesthesia (in the spectator’s). (Louppe 2010: 185)*

As an improviser my dancing may also be informed by a pre-formulated intention, no less than, or possibly incorporating, a choreographic intention. But improvised performance also generates aspects of intention in the moment of enactment, and so exposes the formulation of this intention to uncertain scrutiny by an audience (something choreographed work generally seeks to avoid). I may not always understand where my movement is coming from as I execute it; I don’t
always have awareness of what this movement is ‘saying’ or a clarified strategy to work with. I may be ‘searching’ for clarification even as I articulate, but I can quickly change course if I begin to lose focus. Because it is so agile, improvisation is particularly vulnerable to bending to the (perceived or ‘inner’) sense of what this particular audience is responding to (right now) - to their ‘seduction’. This is partly what can be so lively about improvisation. But its fluidity can also change its intentionality; its changeability can equally be the relation that fosters predictability, drawing the dancer back to habit or cliché. At its extreme it can also restrict the performer to a narrowly subjective, narcissistic display. Improvisation is consequently challenged by considerations of ‘the inner spectator’ (derived from self-assessments) as much as by the external considerations that are in relation to the entire audience.

Louppe cites the dance company as the ideal context for the choreographer to avoid negative encounters with internalised publics. The group situation provides space and time for physical investigation while avoiding an “encounter that could validate from a buried and very archaic place, a ‘judgment’ upon both the artistic propositions and the presence of the bodies” (Louppe 2010: 185). Of course the real public is still held in mind. But the rehearsal situation is necessarily private. Safely out of public sight, the dancers conduct a choreographic dialogue, elaborating amongst them a common understanding about the bodily states to be presented in future performance. This process relies on “a field of shared experience” such as the daily class or other types of workshops (Louppe 2010: 186). The shared experience spreads and disperses the weight that pre-emptive judgment might bring down on such a process.

While improvisation is less commonly understood in terms of ‘rehearsal’ the privacy of time spent in the studio, away from an audience, is no less important. For my project, time spent free from public scrutiny became central, so as to ‘practice’ for a time setting aside the inner spectator to my own improvising; to allow myself to become interested in moving as an end in itself and to observe differences in motivation and movement. Private time for improvisation is time for noticing these differences to build a capacity for awareness. The process of noticing and differentiating between embodied responses is something Teresa Brennan calls ‘discernment’. It is only through a process of discernment that one can bring into conscious awareness aspects of what our bodies feel and produce in the interaction between proprioception, movement and social relations. In other words, affect produces embodied forces that we must learn how to deal with and judgment, Brennan tells us, is a powerful affective force (something I discuss in Chapter Four) (Brennan 2004: 126).

No less important for my project was working with a group of dancers amongst whom a commonly understood approach could be formulated. This new approach was also to be a departure from the model for
performance to which I had been exposed in Melbourne. The sharing of bodily states in such a process is the foundation for what Louppe calls a “philosophical community” (Louppe 2010: 186). I could not imagine attending to this project alone in the studio – I needed the presence of others to alleviate the inhibiting impact that my ‘internalised audience’ might bring to bear as well as to create a field of shared experience that avoided a purely self-referential situation. The ‘other’ of the audience (and the ‘other’ dancers) was also a relation which needed a particular practice; a situation for encountering the audience which did not escalate into adrenalized and habitual bodily responses and that might disturb awareness. This was the where the Mover Witness Dyad (MWD), with its relationship between mover and witness, became an indispensable process for practicing, thinking through and shaping a differentiated community of shared experience that still held in mind (but at some distance and as a re-signified entity) an audience. I discuss this process in Chapter Four.

Dealing with the adrenalizing effects of performance, and the ways in which positive and negative judgmental forces shape what I do, are experiences which solicit affective responses in my body. Therefore one aspect of this project has been to try to understand the conditions that underpin each pole of the affective spectrum as they relate to dance improvisation. This has prompted an examination of theoretical perspectives of how affect is constituted and how it operates. The study of affect is highly complex and contested with some significant differences between the different intellectual strands and between academic disciplines; of significance for this project have been particular psychological approaches to the study of affect (discussed below) (Gregg & Seigworth 2010: 5-9). Affect can be defined as the immediate physiological responses our bodies produce when they are caught up in situations or respond to external stimuli that can be appraised as ‘pleasurable’ or ‘unpleasurable’ and so indicating ‘approach’ or ‘withdrawal’ (Stern 1985: 201). These situations or stimulations create felt responses that act on the autonomic nervous system rather than as functions of cognition. They are distinct from the more consciously appraised responses of emotion, although they are intricately linked to the construction, attachments and qualities of emotion. Emotion, associated with memory and rendered as identity, is the subjectivity, the “I”, through which we engage with the world. An affect is the immediate appraisal of the present moment; pre-reflective feedback sensations, often unconscious, our bodies provide to us in heightened situations, which can provide either the motivational resources to act (as in the case of excitement) or shut us down (as in the case of debilitating fear).

Given that improvisation is a direct engagement with the present moment, affect, as autonomic marker of that moment, is an important theorised concept through which to examine the form. While affect precedes subjective identifications, it is also still important that affect and emotion, immanence and subjectivity, intersect and overlap in an
examination of improvisation. While touching briefly on distinctions between psychological and philosophical theories of affect, this chapter will particularly focus on psychologically oriented ideas about affect, which, as I will explain, have been important for understanding the studio practice outlined in Chapter Four.

Improvisation need not be an acting out or representation of affective states, but it can certainly tussle with or be driven by them. In my experience as a performer, the presence of an audience when improvising has been the factor that most readily precipitates both positive affects (excitement, interest, surprise) and negative ones (fear or shame). Improvised performance is an inherently charged situation because negotiating questions such as “what will happen?” “What is happening?” and “Is this working?” creates an immediate (self) critical dynamic between creation and reception. The charge of performance registers in the actions and physicality of my body as a visceral response. The rush of excitement, the state of interested involvement or acting with clarity of purpose, that performers experience when improvising are what connect them to an audience. Sometimes performance functions as a positive experience inflected with pleasure, openness and creativity. But equally at other times, negative thoughts about how the improvisation might be received stalk the performer. Then the expanse of the performance space across which the performer, must traverse, and faced at one end with a potentially judgmental audience, creates a psycho-spatial dynamic to the audience/performer relationship. Judgment commands the space, capturing the exchange between performers and the audience. If negative thoughts grip the performer’s body, inhibiting his/her capacity to move freely, then these thoughts are also seemingly configuring space into an oppressive substance through which to move. The performance space, it appears, must be moved into, traversed and occupied with a presence that fills it. If one was not ‘doing something interesting’ to command the space, then space could seem like an endless and barren expanse. In this situation, negative affect gives movement inhibition a spatial dimension.

Is it possible to educate against the distracting influence that certain affects provide, while educating toward the affective conditions that are positive and generative for dance? Improvising without an audience present does not arouse the same affective responses as performance does and, consequently, performance is often regarded as the most appropriate context in which to practice performance improvisation. Yet it would appear to be a difficult context in which to reflect on and understand the affective dynamic which underpins it. Is it not better for a performer to be consumed with the question ‘what is going on right now?’ a question which supports attending to the present moment, rather than being concerned with their own identity as a performer in that moment. To some extent, my affective responses to performance have been personal. But navigating the various responses to the affective arousal of performance is a reality shared by many improvisers (DeSpain 2014: 60-67). How then does one get beyond any inhibiting effects of
affective possession and find the clear space of creativity? And if my response has been personal, then to what extent am I personally responsible for my affective situation? Is another scenario also at play, one in which a degree of affect has been passed onto me from external sources? Does affect float and, as Teresa Brennan would have it, transmit between, across, into and out of people and their relations (Brennan 2004)? There are always others in the room when we perform, and so is it really solely the performer's affect, disabling or generative, which creates the situation and atmosphere of performance? Or is ‘the energy in the room’ something that can be considered to be emanating from and mingling across many people, many sources, as a contagion, and so understood accordingly? If the energy in the room connects everyone in the room then this has implications for how dancers interact with each other as well as how performers and audiences interact.20

When I embarked on this project, my understanding was that all responsibility for dealing with the affective situation of a performance lay with the performer. Certainly this is an accepted understanding. Audiences do not buy tickets to performances on the basis that they will be responsible for the performer’s affective equilibrium and so the outcomes of the performance. Performers accept that this is their part of the contract, even while interacting with each other (and audience) in a shared dynamic of affective negotiation. And this is how I pursued the project – to establish a practice which would enable a group of dancers to understand our own individual movement and affective tendencies through developing awareness, in a context which was free from the amplified intensity of performance. This was in the hope that the practice would then strengthen our capacity to be openly aware and not disarmed by negative affect as encountered in performance. But what if the affective situation is both of an individual’s making as well as a shared concern, across bodies and space as a kind of ambience or atmosphere, as Brennan suggests (and to which I will return later in this chapter)? Then a practice directed towards understanding affective influence on improvisation would require a capacity to discern which affects ‘belong to me’ and which exist outside of myself and to which I ‘expose myself’ when dancing with others or performing for an audience. In such a

20 Brennan’s idea that affect can be transmitted from one individual to another has been criticized by other affect theorists. Certain theorists, often drawing from the Deleuzian philosophical tradition, do not understand affect as something “contagious” (between individuals), but as something into and through which we move: a field which has been collectively determined by the people and objects who inhabit a particular situation, event or context. Sara Ahmed states that:

...the concept of affective contagion tends to underestimate the extent to which affects are contingent (involving the hap of happening): to be affected by another does not mean that an affect simply passes or “leaps” from one body to another. The affect becomes an object only given the contingency of how we are affected, or only as an effect of how objects are given (Ahmed 2010: 36).
paradigm, affect is cast as both an individually experienced phenomenon but also as an energetic field in which all bodies (and all objects) coexist, correspond or conflict with.

Defining Affect

Affect is a component of what we feel in our bodies, feelings that relate to our ‘aliveness’. All theoretical points of view about affect agree that it is something that registers in the body, that it is a phenomenon of embodiment operating at the level of the autonomic nervous system. It is the frontline of experience and perception; an immediate physiological responsiveness to something to which we are exposed, and our reciprocal bodily capacity to affect this situation in return. Hence our bodies are never ‘affected’ in isolation, that is purely within themselves, but always in reciprocity of engagement in which feelings, perceptions, tensions, and atmospheres are passed between bodies or translated across different senses, and emerge from a particular situation or context (Gregg & Seigworth 2010). The body’s capacity to both feel and be felt relates to its ever-changing place in a situated, energetic field of relations.

Affect can be understood then as a gradient of bodily capacity – a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations – that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility, an incrementalism that coincides with belonging to comportments of matter of virtually any and every sort. (Gregg & Seigworth 2010: 2)

Affect ‘feels’ but does not ‘think’ and manifests in the immediacy of a physiological response. Theorists of affect note a distinction between prereflective affect and emotion. After the immediate impact of this response diminishes, taking form in our consciousness, we embed the experience as an emotional response, something more personally attributable as subjectivity. Here the mediating role of reflection and language bring affect out of its indistinct and impersonal autonomic functioning into conscious definition, aspects of which are retained as part of ‘who I am’. “An emotion is a subjective content”, says Brian Massumi, “the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal” (Massumi 2002: 28). Consequently, affect remains at one remove from direct expression of the self; an affective response is not necessarily a personal declaration but potentially merely an autonomic response. But Massumi also makes the point that affect does not entirely lack socially-directed volition, a capacity more fully associated with consciousness:

The body doesn’t just absorb pulses or discrete stimulations; it infolds contexts, it infolds volitions and cognitions that are nothing if not situated.
Intensity\textsuperscript{21} is asocial, but not presocial – it includes social elements but mixes them with elements belonging to other levels of functioning and combines them according to different logic. (Massumi 2002: 30)

Affect’s impact is mercurial - quick to manifest and equally speedy in retreat (Watkins 2010: 269). But for it to be possible for the body to “infold contexts” and manifest volition, it must retain some ‘memory’, or rather (and as Massumi names it) a bodily ‘trace’ of past experiences, actions and situations. How else, in the face of affective arousal, would one option for action be perceived as better than any other? This is not conscious memory but a ‘memory in the flesh’ defined through repetition; an activation, and then reactivation, of the autonomic nervous system in response to an affective context, impelling or inhibiting the possibilities for action. These possibilities become either increasingly familiar, or remain novel, with both still offering (varying) degrees of openness and indeterminacy. This, states Massumi, is “the beginning of a selection: the incipience of mutually exclusive pathways of action and expression, all but one of which will be inhibited, prevented from actualizing themselves completely” (Massumi 2002: 30). In effect, the trace eventually defines a disposition or a “tendency”: a residual effect of the affective situation remains and then accumulates, even after the explicit impact of that situation has dissipated (Gibbs 2010). This process lies at the heart of psychosomatic habituation through which movement habits and their neurological patterning are laid out: out of ‘mind’ but still within the bounds of volition, asubjective but fundamental to the formation of subjectivity.

Theorizing Affect

The phenomena understood or conceived as affect are important in the fields of psychology, philosophy, the neurosciences, biology, sociology, cultural studies and anthropology. Between and within these disciplines there is much disagreement and ambiguity about definitions and theoretical positions relating to affect (Gibbs 2010: 188). “There is no single, generalizable theory of affect” state Gregg and Seigworth, “not yet, and (thankfully) there never will be”, thus positioning any ‘theory’ of affect as always “singularly delineated” in as much as we all experience a particular body, a particular set of encounters with others and the world (Gregg & Seigworth 2010: 3). Nevertheless, there are two prominent theoretical “vectors” around which discourse has accumulated and developed. The first largely spins out from the work of Silvan Tomkins, the American psychologist, whose categorical and highly differentiated account of a specific and limited set of affects has, influentialy, resurfaced in the last two decades. His perspective reflects Darwinian origins: evolutionary “hardwiring” and innateness. Yet as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank, who reinvigorated interest in his work, have shown,

\textsuperscript{21} Massumi equates the term intensity with affect, or more specifically, the strength or duration of the effect of an affective event. (Massumi 2002: 24-25)
Tomkins’s ideas remain “sublimely resistant” to psychological (or other) presumptions or prescriptions of a core self (Sedgwick & Frank 1995: 7).

The second major strand of theoretical activity concerning affect, as highlighted by Gregg and Seigworth, is concerned with the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. This strand “takes on a broadly Spinozan-Deleuzian sense, emerging as an asubjective force in a perspective from which the human appears as an envelope of possibilities rather than a finite totality or essence represented by the idea of the individual organism” (Gibbs 2010: 187). Broadly, the first examines affect as a physiologically and/or psychologically circumscribed, human-centred phenomenon with ascribable, if elusive, features. The other positions affect as a force-relation, ebbing and flowing as an energetic interpenetration of the organic and inorganic; the potential to affect things or be affected in encounters that pass through or between bodies. Clearly, the two approaches are very different and are not readily reconcilable.

In this project, it is the former of these two distinct positions which I have utilised. This project has involved taking my improvisation practice back to a kind of ground zero; exploring movement within the practice of the MWD as a way to explore on the one hand, what I experienced as, the negative impacts of anxiety and indecision when improvising in performance, and, on the other, as a way to determine what motivates me (and the other dancers) to move when free of an audience’s expectations. But the project also involves making a ‘work’ that attempts to both honour the ethical and paradigmatic aspects of the MWD but also ‘capture’ something of this for presentation; to give form, presence and points of reference to what the dancers do.

These have been paradoxical aspirations in many ways. The intimacy and privacy of the MWD does not easily translate into performance. Nor do the different stances and articulations of affect sit comfortably together in the same project, particularly as they remain, intellectually, largely separate from each other. I will describe and discuss both the studio practice of the MWD and the making of the performance work in separate chapters. But it is hopefully sufficient to say at this point that the MWD practice is premised on each individual being able to explore their own affective and movement tendencies, but with reference to whatever internal situation emerges for them (with eyes closed). The practice relates to the psychological and therapeutic contexts from which it emerged and as such asks each dancer to observe, feel, self-identify, self-motivate, or self-create from a relatively discrete, individual position. While the attending of the witness toward the mover provides a clear enabling relationship, between whom energies and affects may in fact flow, the MWD prioritises, indeed identifies, the internal choices, feelings, memories, and embodiment of the mover. Because of this, the psychologically oriented discourse of Teresa Brennan, Silvan Tomkins and Daniel Stern has proved relevant and important for this aspect of the project. Their ideas speak more explicitly to the embodied practice of
discernment and noticing that the MWD has entailed, on terms specific to each dancer, while also acknowledging that the body-self is always social.

However, the conception, formation and performance of a work - with its relational engagement of an audience and emerging from the practice of the MWD (and its subsequent development into a dance practice) - this requires an alternative approach. Here the internalized stance of each dancer needs a different conceptual thread to weave each dancer into the group, and connect the dancers to the audience. This is to give substance to a performance, rather than merely act as a self-reflexive, therapeutic process for the dancers. I will turn to this aspect, and its theoretical framing, in Chapter Five in a more detailed discussion of the performance itself. For the remainder of this chapter, I will first briefly discuss some of the theoretical features of affect from both major theoretical positions but then give exclusive attention to more psychologically derived theories about affect, particularly as they relate to dance improvisation.

The Transmission of Affect

Teresa Brennan would call addressing a distinction between internal and external affects as “a practice of discernment” in which developing sensory awareness filters out the “affective flotsam” that unconsciously assails us in heightened situations (Brennan 2004: 124). That she calls it a practice resonates with dance but also indicates that diminishing the impact of negative affect takes time and attention. A practice implies an integrated strategy that is considered, intentional, embodied and sustained. Brennan points out that historically formulated ego-identifications (the ‘I am this person’ projections of ourselves) can interrupt our capacity to freely sense what is actually happening with and through our bodies. “Uneducated, unconscious senses are not aware of any psychical, intelligent connection with the internal and the invisible body, and this unconsciousness extends to the rest of the environment” (Brennan 2004: 194). The foreclosure of sensory information is never total however, allowing for intermittent patches of feeling but also creating an incomplete, or erroneous conclusion about what is taking place, thus leading to errors of emotional judgment.

Brennan’s work on affect and feeling involves the integration two opposing intellectual positions which are here summarized by Susan James:

*According to the first, which she takes to be a contemporary commonplace, our affects are our own. They are generated within the individual subject and are the fruits of its experience and history, so that to understand them is to understand how individuals create them. The second strand contends, by contrast, that at least some of our affects come from outside. They are things that happen to us rather than things we do, and we are passive in the face of them. However, for this account to be right, passions or affects that originate elsewhere have somehow got to get inside us.* (James 2007: 46)
The philosophical belief in the transmissibility of affect, that it was something which existed outside of individuals and could ‘infect’ them, which held sway until the 17th century, has been replaced in modern times by scientific and psychological positions, premised on the singularity of each individual (Brennan 2004: 101). Our affects now belong to each of us alone, with the interchange of energies and emotional qualities impossible to scientifically support. Brennan challenges this position, contending that the transmission of affect is very real and has a biological explanation. Affective situations produce hormonal changes in biochemistry, which are circulated around the body in the blood, and then transmitted through smell (although sight and hearing are also involved) (Brennan 2004: 9). The negative affect of aggression is communicated to another through an olfactory exchange, returning to the aggressor as ‘the smell of fear’ in the other.22

As a dancer, I contend that the affective disposition of another dancer would always have an impact on me; how he/she does something and how he/she seems to me will always affect how I interact with him/her. If the exchange is based on chemical signals, I am not aware of this. But in the workings of a dance studio or performance the idea that affective shifts circulate between dancers does not seem hard to accept, even though the prevailing individualistic sensibility precludes this. Energy is the currency of dance and dancing with others always entails a mingling and exchange of these energies. To the dancer, empathic attunement to another’s movement qualities is part of the exchange and if movement is affectively inflected, then this is to be considered (something I will discuss later in this chapter). Proving that this exchange occurs at a biochemical level is beyond what is possible here. But for the purposes of a project examining how attention operates both within the individual dancer and between them, notions of affect and their circulation provide a useful point of departure.

A Context for Improvisation: Negotiating Positive and Negative Affect

A dance improvisation practice that aims to develop and employ awareness of the impact of affect, an impact that so often dictates the terms of the engagement, alternately motivating or inhibiting movement or performance, needs to be able to discern between such differences. Such a practice which I could name, after Brennan, a practice of discernment, involves observation of the relative grip or influence that different aspects of affect may have on an individual (or on group relations) and the qualities these entail. Yet this practice need not be

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22 It is beyond the scope of this exegesis to adequately take up this debate in a scientific sense or to prove the adequacy of Brennan’s proposition. However, it is useful for the project to think about the transmission of affect as an artistic proposition, that is, as an idea to be experimented with in the practice and creation of performance. Brennan’s argument is set out in detail in chapter 4 of her book The Transmission of Affect (2004).
purely ‘self-expressive’. It need not function as a biographical correspondence between movement and identity. Such a practice would not need to seek any essential markers of identity if the field of affective engagement is seen as potentially asjunctive. Yet more subjectively attuned, psychological theories of affect offer insights which make accessible the internal discernment of differences in affective responses and the conditions which create these differences. Silvan Tomkins’s humanistic approach offers a categorical specificity to the study of affect.

In my dance improvisation practice, as is the case with many other dancers, AM functions as a creative, rather than as a therapeutic situation (Olsen 2007). Yet it does create the conditions to productively encounter or negotiate negatively affective experience as well as the creative. Accordingly, a creative context for dance improvisation is one in which movement can emerge spontaneously without being ambushed by negative encounters with psychological or physiological phenomena, particularly if these are beyond my current awareness. Experiences of positive affect when improvising provide the motivational energy for action and constitute the core of imaginative engagement with movement. Imaginative engagement begins through being interested in something - in this instance, considerations of being-in-movement. A creative experience of improvisation integrates psychological, aesthetic and physical choices, self-consciously pursued but intuitively articulated. It also has the potential to extend beyond the sometimes, limiting narratives of self or identification, to create unanticipated connections between things.

But in noticing my movement as it unfolds, what does it mean for me to become interested in something and so provide the motivation to maintain this engagement? In confronting this question, the writings of Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and in particular her work on affect, have proved valuable. Kosofsky Sedgwick’s work has been based on her reading and interpretation of the work of psychological theorist Silvan S Tomkins who wrote an extensive theory and categorization of affect. Interest in his work has more recently been reinvigorated by Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank’s critical but affectionate commentary, bringing his dated ‘scientism’ into contemporary context, but also illuminating Tomkins’ capacity to detail and understand the dimensions of, at the very least, psychological notions of affect.

Psychological affect, it seems, has been difficult to theoretically define. Susan Best points out that Freud struggled to define an adequate theory of affect, particularly one which would align with, as he saw it, the more crucial theory of drives. For Freud, the primary relevance of affect was in the study of negative affects, such as fear or shame, as these produced a “highly impelling” charge, compared to the lightly impelling charge of the positive affects (Best 2002: 207). In other words, for Freud, positive affect does not motivate action to any significant degree. But if positive affect does not motivate to the degree that negative ones do, and are not
nearly as impelling as drives, then how, asks Best, can we account for our want to interact with a work of visual art and the aesthetic pleasure this provides? Encountering artwork is not a situation which impels us to take action in the face of danger or humiliation. We do it because we want to. Aesthetic pleasure, she claims is sparked by positive rather than negative affect.

For Tomkins, both negative and positive affect can be conceived of as a motive for our actions. Utilizing receptors activated by the individual’s own responses, we immediately seek rewarding or avoid punishing experience (Tomkins, Sedgwick & Frank 1995: 45). Positive affects are forces which productively motivate an individual to do something and in a particular way. Separate from, but entangled with Freud’s concept of drives, affects, as Tomkins defined them, ultimately exert an even greater influence on someone’s actions or motivations than do drives. Because of an affect’s capacity to be maintained beyond an immediate satisfaction of need, it remains as a powerful prompt even when no immediate requirement for action is present. Once we determine that an experience was frightening for us, we maintain a fearful stance towards this experience, even if no immediate prospect of this happening is present. Affects linger and are maintained through associative memory, motivating us to avoid or engage in experiences, and are implicated in neurological shaping of our postural and movement habits, usually in ways of which we are not fully aware. Our bodies are the site of all affective experience, with bodily engagement potentially eliciting an affective response whether positive or negative.

Tomkins defined eight (and later nine) specific affects, which inflect in positive or negative ways. He defined the positive affects as Interest-Excitement (marked by a facial expression with eyebrows down, tracking, looking, listening), and Enjoyment-Joy (smiling, lips widened up and out). Tomkins identified a resetting affect that facilitated the sudden change between positive and negative affects and which he named Surprise-Startle. The negative affects are Distress-Anguish (crying, arched eyebrow, mouth down, tears, rhythmic sobbing), Fear-Terror (eyes frozen open, pale, cold, sweaty, facial trembling, with hair erect), Shame-Humiliation (eyes down, head down), Contempt-Disgust (sneering, upper lip up) and Anger-Rage (frowning, clenched jaw, red face) (Tomkins, Sedgwick & Frank 1995: 74).

The six or seven negative affects are the forces which potentially propel us away from perceived ‘dangers’, such as a situation we associate with a feeling of shame. These affects effectively inhibit awareness of anything but the most intense dimensions of movement, and so potentially make accessing creative experiences difficult, in the nuanced, but uncertain, arena of improvisation. But the two positive affects in Tomkins’ definition, interest-excitement and joy-enjoyment, offer much more scope for creating openings in awareness (as with interest) or for communion (as with joy). Kosofsky Sedgwick credits Tomkins with a “...crucial move
in identifying interest as an affect – one that’s on a spectrum with excitement, and that has a distinctive role to play in (for instance) organizing perception as well as motivating exploration” (Sedgwick 2011: 146). Interest-excitement is involved in learning and given to novelty. It engages with the unfamiliar and is thus “...a kind of psychic stretching, perhaps even a restlessness about things as they are, things known” (Best 2007: 510). It is woven into the process of thinking such that cognition and affect dance between each other. Tomkins describes the process in this way:

*In order to achieve full acquaintance with any object one must vary one’s perspectives, perceptual and conceptual. One must look at the object now from one angle, now from another. One must watch the object as it moves about in space. One must switch from a perceptual acquaintance to a conceptual orientation, to remembering it and comparing it now with what it was before. One must also have motor traffic with the object. One must touch it and manipulate it and note what happens to it as one moves it, pushes it, squeezes it, puts it in one’s mouth (when one is young), and otherwise produces changes in the object. To the extent to which such manipulation is guided by hypotheses and suggests new hypotheses, one’s acquaintance with the object is enriched and deepened.* (Tomkins, Sedgwick & Frank 1995: 79)

And this describes in essence what we have been trying to do in our practice of the MWD. Through this practice of discernment, we have been bringing into question our individual hypotheses for imaginative movement and experimenting with new ones. For Tomkins there was in fact no singular theory of affect, but multiple theories, each specific to an individual and summarizing a larger set of affective experiences. And because these are theories, they are subject to evaluation and change (Sedgwick 2011: 147). To try movement and states of being from this angle then another, to play between the subjective and objective experience of this, does create greater awareness. It is an embodied form of questioning, of imagining and of thinking through something. The dyadic contract between witness and mover in the MWD fosters commitment and concentration and facilitates this experimentation. Qualities, movements, memories, thoughts, associations, relationships can emerge from the concentrated, contained, space and time the dyad facilitates. The mother-infant context also prompts reminiscence of our pre-reflective, infant capacity to see the world as boundless, and where people, objects, affects, feelings and movements overlapped before the boundaries of identity took hold. ‘Interest’ can be felt and followed even without immediate clarity or understanding. Such interest is a constant motivator in all contexts for improvisation particularly when these are perceived as safe or sustainable. Becoming lost in a movement interest, in the reverie of this, offers a release from narrowly self-referential or habitual patterns and opens up to the surprising connections, qualities or performativity that improvisation can sometimes bring into being.
Vitality Affects

For me, and (I believe) for the group of dancers, understanding that there might be specific conditions that sustain one’s interest in improvisation, and that ‘interest’ is an affective condition, has been particularly important. Thus ‘being interested’ is an act of embodied attending that requires a particular state of awareness. But to direct a dance or performance practice toward the specific engagement of all of Tomkins’s categorical affects seems much less rewarding. Indeed, criticisms about Tomkins’s work at a theoretical level centre on his prescriptive categorization; they are criticisms that refuse that affect could ever, in fact, be defined and limited to such bounded terms. Clearly this approach does not sit well with any current emphasis on the decentering and mutability of identity or subjectivity. Following Darwin’s ideas about the evolutionary function of affect in human-specific interaction and species survival, Tomkins’s work was also premised on the centrality of the face (along with gesture and postural signals) to communicate affect (Stern 1985: 55). Yet dance does not generally function as an expression or exemplification of categorical affect. Dance movement produces and displays variable, abstract qualities often not specifically tethered to the communication of a specific affective category such as distress or shame. An explosive leap does not necessarily communicate anger, whereas the specific set of anger in the face certainly does.

So does this mean that movement in some kinds of dance cannot be thought of in terms of affect because the face is not necessarily activated and because it is instead focused on the dynamic, but abstract, activation of the body? I could turn here to the work of Rudolf Laban whose analysis of movement distinguishes with great clarity between different qualities of movement, as abstract entities, and their impulse in the subjective “inner attitudes” of each individual. Laban’s Effort Elements categorises the components of movement into the perceptual dimensions of space, time, weight and flow as well as situating each element on a continuum (space: indirect to direct, weight: light to strong, time: sustained to sudden, flow: free to bound). The effort elements combine to indicate an individual’s “inner attitude” towards movement (Bartineff 1980: 51-53).

23 Teresa Brennan is critical of the “lists descended from Darwin”: the work of theorists, in the wake of Darwin, who have attempted to observe and name affects in a categorical manner. For Brennan, these lists do not account for “more complex affective states such as envy, guilt, jealousy, and love” (Brennan 2004: 5). As a ‘descendent’ of Darwin’s ideas Tomkins’s theories are categorically reduced and articulated. This is a criticism that Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and Adam Frank also acknowledge in their article on Tomkins’s work entitled ‘Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins’. They make this point however: “Sublimely alien, we found this psychology, to the developmental presumption or prescription of a core self; sublimely resistant, we might have added, to such presumption” (Sedgwick & Frank 1995: 7).

24 Following Darwin’s theories, Tomkins postulates that humans, like all species, display affective responses through an inherent, but limited series of facial expressions. In humans, these ‘signals’ are bolstered by affective postures and gestures, and are designed to communicate purposefully and ensure species survival.
But Laban theorises another set of categories and an associated analytical method. This project, however, is searching for a creative space for improvisation through understanding the conditions which elicit either negative of positive affective responses in improvisation. It is not an attempt to analytically establish direct links between specific affects and specific movement states or patterns.

While potentially resonant with Rudolf Laban’s ideas, the work of developmental psychologist Daniel Stern has provided greater insight into the relationship between ‘abstract’ movement and affect as it operates in this project. Stern’s work comes out of an examination of the stages and processes new born (and then infant) babies go through in their development of a sense of self. The crucial infant-caregiver relationship that Stern intricately details to explain the developmental processes that an infant experiences, is also particularly pertinent to understanding the practice of Authentic Movement (and to which I will return in the following chapter). As Stern points out, not all felt experiences, or qualities of feeling, can be accounted for within the taxonomy of categorical affects. Another classification of affect is needed, distinct from the categorical classification, and which articulates the qualities our bodies feel when we perceive dynamic and temporal patterns and changes. “These elusive qualities are better captured by dynamic, kinetic terms, such as “surging”, “fading away”, “fleeting”, “explosive”, “crescendo”, “decrescendo”, “bursting”, “drawn out”, and so on” (Stern 1985: 54). These qualities are related to the vital processes of life (breathing, hunger, falling asleep, feeling the arrival or departure of a thought or emotion and so on) and as such are readily perceived by infants. Our bodies experience these vital processes continuously (although our awareness of them is intermittent) while categorical affects discernably appear and dissipate. Because of their relationship to vital functioning, Stern names these “vitality affects”:

_The infant experiences these qualities from within, as well as in the behavior of other persons. Different feelings of vitality can be expressed in a multitude of parental acts that do not qualify as “regular” affective acts: how the mother picks up baby, folds the diapers, grooms her hair or the baby’s hair, reaches for a bottle, unbuttons her blouse. The infant is immersed in these “feelings of vitality”. (Stern 1985: 54)_

Vitality affects are experienced both in conjunction with and separately from categorical affects but are often characterized by a sensation of movement. The experience of a “rush of anger” is a unification of two distinctive evocations of affect; ‘categorical’ anger mingling with the temporally and dynamically contoured, ‘vital’ experience of the rush. Diverse ‘rushes’ and sensations are aroused in our bodies, sustained and diminishing over periods of time, and exhibiting as particular qualities of action or behaviour. This temporal dynamic Stern calls an arousal contour, that is, the pattern of change over time. And while vitality affects
may merge with categorical affects they can also exist in behaviour that has "no inherent categorical signal value", for example:

*One can see someone get out of a chair “explosively”. One does not know whether the explosiveness in arising was due to anger, surprise, joy or fright. The explosiveness could be linked to any of those Darwinian feeling qualities, or to none.* (Stern 1985: 56)

This is of great significance for dance in which the dancer is in responsive engagement with feelings in the body which aren’t necessarily a representation or communication of a categorical affect. The communicative capacity of movement is thus more open-ended - more directed towards variation, multiplicity and interpretation - than the direct signalling of the face. Stern cites abstract dance as an example “par excellence” of vitality affects saying that, “the choreographer is most often trying to express a way of feeling, not a specific content of feeling” (Stern 1985: 56). He means, of course, emotional or signifying content, citing a remove between the choreographer’s initial experience of that feeling and its ‘abstraction’ as dance material (a way of feeling). But also implicit in this statement is the remove between choreographic process (consideration and revision) and the ‘finished’ dance. In dance improvisation, neither remove exists. The specific content of feeling, whether categorical or vital, is both encountered and expressed (or suppressed) in the same instant, merging feeling with form, and merging creation with performance. ‘Content’ for the dance improviser is both specific and abstract; movement variably inflected with vitality or categorical affect, but invariably an immediate engagement with an immediate feeling.

**Affect Attunement**

Stern’s work is also crucial in understanding the ways in which movement, through its inherent relationship to vitality affects, can be understood as a medium for “affect attunement”. Affect attunement bears a resemblance to Brennan’s notion of the transmissibility of affect, in that it is a form of interpersonal exchange that happens beneath conscious awareness and outside of language. But Stern’s concept is premised on a different process than olfactory transmission; one premised on the interpersonal bond between mother and baby and which is fundamental to the way in which an infant learns to relate to others (Stern 1985: 156-161). A mother tries to follow and attend to the needs of her infant; to understand their immediate needs, discomforts or pleasures, so as to attend to these. If a baby is hungry or is tired then the mother needs to be aware of this so as to deal with this. But feelings exist as inner states and a baby cannot actually tell her mother what she is feeling. In order for a mother to know and follow the needs and feelings of a baby, she must ‘attune’ herself to the differential qualities of movement, posture, gesture, facial expressions, sounds and other indicators of these inner states expressed by the baby. By attending in
this way the mother learns to follow what the baby needs, and conversely
the baby learns that if, for example, she makes this sound combined with
this gesture, her mother most likely will feed her. Some of this
communication stems from the expression of categorical affects; if the
baby is irritated she throws the rattle away with a deliberate frown, if she
is scared she cries. But as Stern points out, categorical affects are only
intermittently expressed - perhaps every 30-90 seconds (Stern 1985:
156). Affect attunement requires establishing and maintaining a
sustained, continuous connection; a smooth “unbroken line” of
connection, not the “eruptions” of discretely expressed categorical affects.
All behaviour must be incorporated into the attunement process, not just
discrete emotional responses, although these are certainly important.
Being manifest in all behaviour, and being consistently present at all
times, vitality affects then, become the energetic and physical constancy
required for affect attunement (Stern 1985: 157). “Vitality is ideally
suited to be the subject of attunements, because it is composed of the
amodal qualities of intensity and time and because it resides in virtually
any behavior one can perform and thus provide a continuously present
(though changing) subject for attunement” (Stern 1985: 157).

Stern’s work also provides an apt paradigm for the “continuously present
(though changing) subject” of improvisation and implicit in the question
of “what is happening right now”? Improvised dancing that is informed
by vitality contours becomes the subject of an attunement between
dancer and audience, again composed of qualities of time and intensity.
But this attunement also exists within the dancer him/herself when
attending to one’s own experience. The tracking of the qualities, manifest
in any behaviour, poetic or mundane, becomes the basis for the thread of
“being with” that sits within the dancer, as well as the thread between
dancer and dancer, or between dancer and audience. In the following
chapter I discuss the ways in which the dancers in this project sought to
discern their vitality affects, and follow their contours, in the studio
practice. This practice also established a committed relationship between
the dancer and the person watching the dance which manifested as
‘threads of attunement’.

Conclusion

The performance of dance improvisation creates a situation in which
affective responses influence the activities of the performance. Whether
experienced as positive or negative, affect has a powerful role in the ways
in which dance improvisation is brought into being; this is particularly so
in performance. Affect also underpins the relational exchange between
audience and performers, with the range of affective arousal manifesting
in multiple, and often unpredictable, ways. Judgment by the audience
might lead to inhibition on the part of the performer, just as the
perception of approval or connection with the audience might stoke
excitement for the performer. The study of affect is a potentially
important theoretical pursuit in building more nuanced understandings
about dance improvisation: certainly this has been the case for this project. But conversely, dance improvisation has the potential to diversify, and give embodied texture and energetic quality to the study of affect; to ‘flesh out’ the study of affect by taking it into the experiential realm of the body, as the surface (and depth) of affect’s engagement. This project, and therefore this chapter, have utilised psychological perspectives on theorising affect because these have helped to think about my initial developmental aspirations for this project, and then, to significantly extend beyond these aspirations.

However, philosophical theories of affect, particularly those in the Deleuzian tradition, also offer important ways to examine affect’s relationship to dance improvisation. This tradition does not understand affect as a phenomenon of the self, as psychological theories tend to, with each individual a ‘boundary’ (across which affect is projected). Rather, this tradition sees affect as a relational field of engagement, replete with forces and bodies (human and non-human), that comes into being through the situation-specific interactions between all of the forces and bodies who/which inhabit this field. These affective forces are “autonomous”, states Brian Massumi:

...not through closure but through a singular openness. As unbounded “regions” in an equally unbounded affective field, they are in contact with the whole universe of affective potential, as by action at a distance. Thus they have no outside even though they are differentiated according to which potentials they are most apt to be expressed (effectively induced) as their region passes into actuality. Their passing into actuality is the key. Affect is the whole world: from the precise angle of its differential emergence. (Massumi 2002: 43)

Dance improvisation might also be seen not as an individual performer’s bounded, ‘internal narrative’ of affective experience but also as a transparent exposure to whatever forces are alive and mobile in that moment in time, and in that situation. This approach offers much for a future study of affect and dance improvisation. But the approach is also one in which dance improvisation can contribute to theorising affect by energetically articulating details of the human body’s capacity to affect and be affected.

But to return to the intentions of this project, it is now time to move into the dance studio, where, to recapitulate Louppe’s idea, the dancer is (as yet) free from an over-exposure to public scrutiny. Yet, it is also the studio in which the improver must ‘tread lightly’, that is non-judgmentally, in any encounters with his/her own ‘inner public’. The next chapter details the engagement of a studio practice which attempts to unhinge each dancer’s improvisation from the anticipation or expectation of judgmental audience scrutiny. This was not practiced in isolation, however. The studio practice that manifested amongst the dancers in this project was a shared experience, fostering a community of common
interest, a “philosophical community”, (after Louppe) and based on the discoveries from the practice.
Chapter Four: Studio Practice and the Mover Witness Dyad

Introduction: Judgment as an Affective Force

In ‘Landscape of the Now’ Kent De Spain discusses the impact that the ‘gaze’ of the audience has on the performer, whose attention is sharply focused as a consequence. He cites numerous performers who discuss the “adrenalizing” or inhibiting effects of performance (DeSpain 2014: 60-72). To become adrenalized or to feel physically inhibited is to experience an affective state. For most practitioners this audience-performer transmission is a strongly positive impact (that’s why they do it) but there are also potential negative implications. For example, Deborah Hay talks about the effect as feeling like ‘speed’ or an influence which accelerates and confuses her perception (DeSpain 2014: 61). Anna Halprin raises issues of audience judgment; even if she claims to be immune from this now, she states she worked hard to reconfigure judgment into something positive (DeSpain 2014: 62). Barbara Dilley, on the other hand, talks about accepting inhibition as a valid state for performance (DeSpain 2014: 63). But primarily, the practitioners De Spain discusses, strongly ‘feel’ the impact of the audience as an affective state.

For this project my response to dealing with the affective rush of performance has been to seek a way of clarifying its impact before actually stepping into this arena. In order to establish what some of the affective conditions for my improvisation practice are and how affect actually manifests, I sought a practice which would create some ‘space’ away from the pressured situation of performance. This was also as a way to understand how to more consistently achieve a state of fully involved attention in improvisation. In the terms Tomkins conceived this would mean to stay fully interested in what I was doing. Of course, performing experience is valuable and is also the context towards which this project was headed. But I felt as if I needed to step back from this in order to investigate the foundations of my practice. The investigation of the Mover Witness Dyad (more commonly known as Authentic Movement)), to which this chapter is dedicated, was to an extent a return to the state of the beginner. This involved setting aside performance so as to allow the time, and create a lack of urgency, for an, as yet unknown, practice to emerge. And yet, as the practice of the Mover Witness Dyad (MWD) has shown me, improvisation still needs to be seen if it is to maintain its rigour. A witness is required to watch the mover (the pairing at the heart of the MWD). However, being witnessed (as it is understood in the MWD) is not the same condition as being watched (by an audience) in that the witness in the MWD provides structure imbued with an unconditional support and care for the mover. In other words the witness’ presence motivates the mover without stimulating the adrenalized ‘activation contours’ (after Stern) that improvised performance is usually subject to. My aspiration was for this activity to lead me to a practice of detached moving, detached, that is, from the perceived expectations of an audience.
As well as detaching from audience expectation, the studio practice was intended to fortify the consistency with which I might access Forti’s ‘dance state’. I have worked with the MWD as a meaningful creative situation and as a kind of ‘strengthening’ of attention for improvisation that is completely removed from the need to perform. At times, when improvising, my free association is moved by autotelic interest that is unattached to any external considerations: to be immersed in improvisation that is motivated by intrinsic interest and as its own reward. This is the state of flow as Csikszentmihalyi defines it and, as with many activities, improvisation in this state becomes the merging of action and awareness: “A person in flow has no dualistic perspective; he is aware of his actions but not of the awareness itself” (Csikszentmihalyi 2015: 152). But to maintain this state without interruption perhaps begins with a practice of discernment that both narrows the possible field of attention and observes the minutiae of involvement in it (Csikszentmihalyi 2015: 153). To be either distracted (my own thoughts) or interrupted (external impingements) takes one out of the state of flow. So how do I summon this state as well as maintain it? This seems crucial to learn as an improviser and yet has implications for performance that perhaps cannot be learnt in performance (unless one never feels the impact of the audience). By allowing myself to play within what is engrossing me without external demands - to allow myself not to perform – only then can I determine the intricate dimensions of my physical interest. The premise is that if this allowing for interest can be practiced, then it will eventually become integrated and embodied into my capacity as an improviser. My question became can the sustained practice of the MWD strengthen my attention (interest, curiosity, wonder) and access a state of flow, even when an audience is present?

For me the MWD consistently began with how I perceived and responded to bodily sensation and affect. Closing the eyes in the MWD encourages an inwardly directed bodily attention – a kind of ‘scanning’ for sensation - generating a more proprioceptively attuned approach than when improvising with my eyes open. Sensation is a difficult phenomenon to adequately describe but it emerges as a pre-reflective signal of interest or ‘concern’ in the body. It may have different qualities or textures, and with a distinguishable tone which in turn inflects the movement. This tone may be reflective of purely muscular-skeletal signals within the body or it may be a bodily-situated, affective state, such as anxiety. Affective tones are involved without a necessary cognitive awareness of why one is feeling something that might tie the feeling to a particular experience or situation. They simply exist in the body. Hubert Godard also makes the point that affect first registers in our bodies in the postural muscles: that is, one’s affective disposition is embodied in one’s musculature even before one moves and “every affective charge will bring with it a modification, however imperceptible, in our posture” (Godard 2004, 57). The MWD’s focus on bodily states of being makes it a useful practice for discerning the affective charge, with its accompanying postural and
muscular activation, that initiates and energizes (or inhibits) a great deal of one’s spontaneous movement. Through the practice’s emphasis on free association in movement, this usefulness is also applicable to dance improvisation.

I am not attempting to diminish my exposure, or responsiveness, to what my body feels, thereby diminishing the effects of the ‘affective charge’ that might be behind this feeling. The opposite is true. But I would like to be able to discern differences between felt qualities and determine whether they ‘belong to me’, born of the dancing itself, or whether they are a response to something outside of myself. It is here that Teresa Brennan supports my search for an appropriate practice. Brennan says: “The production of habits appropriate to discernment is a matter of personal practices involving comparison, recollection and memory, and detachment” (Brennan 2004: 126). For Brennan, when attending to one’s inner states as well as to one’s engagement with others, discernment means distinguishing between the application of “judgment” and between what she called “living attention”. In the whirl of daily life, multiple affective responses constantly interrupt our ability to effectively consider our feelings. To employ the defensive closure of judgment, before the flexible disposition of reflection can be brought to bear, means prematurely hardening ourselves to situations or to people. It also potentially involves a misconstruction of events. “If we conceive the moment of judgment as the moment in which we forcefully embrace or project an affect, then we can accept that the judgment itself is a deployment of energy directed toward an object, and as such, an affective force in itself” (Brennan 2004: 126). The act of judgment itself, then, can also have a debilitating effect through its potentially misdirected force and so draining our reserves of attention. The distracting effects of judgment require the establishment of habits attuned, through recollection and comparison, to the differences between different feeling states, and to their appropriateness to the situation. By avoiding affective possession, and through a personal practice of discernment, one is better able to sustain and direct attention, such that awareness can be developed.

Developing such habits also involves a sense of detachment. Insight, according to Brennan, is not achieved in the state of passionate possession that affects can incite:

*It is achieved in that brief suspension of the state of projection that leaves a refreshing inner silence by its absence, in which one can detach from any possessing affect, and attend. To detach in accord with the procedure involved in comparing past and present affective states is to marshal and move attention toward a negative affect when one experiences it. The key to the nature of this real detachment (as distinct from a sadodispassionate projection of detachment) is that it is an exercise in feeling, but feeling of a calming and discerning variety.*
Attention, as Brennan conceives of it, equates to awareness; not a ‘daydream’, fantasy or preconception (directed internally or toward the other) which are directed by the determinants of the ego. “As the ego is always focused on its own ends and judgmental structure, it cannot attend in this receptive way.” Instead, Brennan hints at another form of agency which she calls “the other I” and which attends receptively. She proposes that an identity based on discernment, that is, through “the other I”, is not the same thing “…as an identity based on the ego’s status-bound boundaries” (Brennan 2004: 134). According to Brennan, the ego-derived sense of self, developed in the web of social interactions, depends upon “boundaries formed by projecting and introjecting affects” (Brennan 2004: 134). As a means of maintaining self-identifying and self-containing boundaries, within a social context, “alien affects” are (judgmentally) deposited in the other. “The urge to do this – and maintain boundaries by aggressive means – intensify as the affects one wants to live without, anxiety especially, thicken socially” (Brennan 2004: 134). “The other I”, as Brennan sees it, seeks to consciously examine the flow of affects - their projection and introjection - and avoid the unconscious exchange of negative affects in social contexts. This capacity is best discerned and developed through practices of awareness, such as through meditative practices, which can diminish the effects and exchange of negative affects as a social phenomenon. Through these practices, the individual weakens the mobile forces of negative affect, by consciously discerning their presence.

Perhaps this is mysticism. But it is also a stance that dance and choreographic practices have often reached for, attempting to get beyond the limits of an individual (egocentric), and so, limited perspective. Merce Cunningham famously utilized chance procedures to determine choreographic outcomes so as to eliminate his own intentions in choreography. “When I choreograph a piece by tossing pennies – by chance, that is – I am finding my resources in that play, which is not the product of my will” (Cunningham in Franko 1995: 77). At stake in this procedure is how dances were produced but also how they were received.

The aim of this introduction has been to provide terms that can explain my search for a particular context and associated practice. In this practice, I have attempted to confront and examine (to discern) the affective cloud in which the performer’s capacity to think, notice, and feel can become obscured. While this was a personal interest, I also wanted to work with others: for our improvising to also respond to some form of social interaction. I wanted to find a way in which each dancer’s motivations could be personally explored and productively articulated, but which also allowed for the formation of a group; a group conceived as individuals in cooperative coexistence. This explains perhaps why we took up a practice, the MWD, which is focused on the individual (a mover), and requires the attentive presence and participation of another (the witness), yet is resolutely opposed to the idea of performance. Out of
the practice of the MWD we developed another group practice specific to the project and premised on each person’s particular investigation of improvisation through the MWD. This became a practice of cooperative detachment whereby each dancer could maintain an internal, private focus even while operating within a group.

There were a number of ways in which the physical practice that I, and the four other dancers engaged in, resonated with the structural, philosophical and theoretical frameworks of the MWD. Equally, there was a notable divergence from the application of the practice in a therapeutic context and how we understood and utilised it. The main difference was that we were practising or using the method strictly as a creative technique, toward making art, and not as a therapeutic one, even if residual therapeutic aspects may have emerged. None of us were ‘trained’ as Dance Movement Therapy practitioners; we have never been ‘taught’ by or been witnessed in the practice by a dance therapist and we have no psychotherapeutic expertise. The MWD is primarily underpinned by an intention to heal, while our motivations were quite different. My own interest is in how the practice can enrich a contemplative understanding of dance improvisation. This has also been the case for other dance artists (Olsen 2007). US dance artist Jennifer Monson, for example, has utilised the dyad “as a means not just of deepening appreciation of the natural world, but of generating new ecological knowledge and of exploring environmental values” (Stewart 2010: 32).25 Even if the contemplative process inherent in the MWD, and which informs healing, also informs dancing, the emphasis in this case potentially defined very different insights and outcomes. There were particular philosophical or theoretical tenets which we chose not to allow into our frame of reference. For example, we did not pursue the practice as a refining of spiritual consciousness as many practitioners do.26 The practice often did seem mysterious to me, beyond rational explanation, but there was never an intention for this aspect to become thematic. Yet this did not disturb the efficacy or value of our practice; merely gave it different contours and qualities. The emphasis of this project was always to access understanding about improvisation, dancing, and ultimately, the performance. Consequently, at a particular point in the process, a different emphasis emerged between the therapeutic intentions of the MWD and employing the form as a dance practice.

The Studio Practice

As a group of dancers we explored the form in various studios for a period of three and a half years. Usually we would meet to move together

25 See also Emma Meehan’s writing on Irish dance artist Joan Davis who used Authentic Movement in her site-specific, audience participatory performance project entitled Maya Lila (Meehan 2010).

once a week for around three hours. Group members would attend, or
not, according to their own availability while I would always be present.
The practice involved working in pairs (or trios depending on numbers);
one person would move with eyes closed while the other person would
‘witness’. At the end of their time the mover would verbally reflect on
what had happened for him/her and then the witness would verbally
reflect on what they had seen. Then the roles would be reversed and the
same procedure followed. Often we would describe aspects or
characteristics of the experience of the movement session ‘in and of
themselves’. Those listening would accept this without debate – it was
accepted that we could never interpret the experiences of someone we
were watching – only describe the experience of ‘witnessing’ what their
partner had done.

Initially each person moved for 20 minutes, but we quickly increased the
length to 30 minutes which became the standard length of time
(sometimes we would practice for 40 minutes or longer). This was to
provide enough time for each mover to ‘drop into’ the experience and still
have plenty of time to experiment, play or inhabit the experience. It
would usually take me approximately 15 minutes to ‘let go’ of what I had
been doing previously – whatever ‘mood’ or disposition I had arrived
with - and become fully attentive within the experience itself.

After both partners had both moved and witnessed, the entire group
would come together for a group discussion. Each person had the
opportunity to feed back to the group something of what had happened
to them. These discussions would involve a more summarised account
and hone in on the most notable thoughts, feelings or occurrences. They
would then lead into a more generalised discussion where each member
would ‘freely associate’ in thought and discussion, drawing in other
associations as they emerged. This process was a powerful method for
sifting through relevant ideas and to pinpoint those that, through their
constant reappearance, became most prominent. It was a method of
collaboratively thinking through the experiences amongst the group, and
testing the ideas these experiences prompted.27

The group of dancers consisted of Peter Fraser, Olivia Millard, Jason
Marchant, Sophia Cowen and myself. All were dancers of many years
experience from a range of backgrounds and practices. But all of us were
either specifically interested in improvisation or the use of improvisation
in Authentic Movement (or both). This was important as the practice
needed dancers who had their own motivations and interests well
established and were not looking to me as choreographer to define this
for them in detail. It was also beneficial for the project that these dancers
were articulate and held strong, considered opinions about their

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27 As stated in the introduction, the discussions were a very important process in the
development of the research. However, the transcripts have not been included as an
appendix due to the length, personal content and wide-ranging topics that sometimes
emerged. Ethical consent has been obtained from the dancers.
interests. As a result the discussions were robust and opinions were considered and expressed from positions of many years of experience. They were thoughtful and thought-provoking. The discussions were also open and respectful, in part because the terms of the MWD practice required this, but also because the personalities in the group valued this.

The majority of the group discussions were recorded on my iPhone, although the discussions in pairs were not. I also maintained a journal for most of the period of the studio practice which documented what I considered to be the most important issues arising from these discussions, as well as my own personal reflections on the practice.20 The movement practice, the paired and group discussions, and the journal writing became the collective form for thinking through the issues as they presented themselves physically throughout the project. I will discuss in more detail later in this chapter some of the questions and thinking that emerged from this practice.

Once we had practiced the MWD for approximately three years I established a simple structure that would suit the performance. After this point we all moved together, in a group score (which I discuss in Chapter Five). At this point the practice shifted from a ‘classical’ practice of the MWD to something which reflected its principles but no longer involved us witnessing each other. We practiced this score in anticipation of an audience becoming the witnesses to this practice.

**Methodological Considerations**

Recently proponents for a research paradigm appropriate to the creative arts have pointed to the specific requirements required for creative arts projects to be activated as research. There has been considerable debate about how to articulate such a paradigm such that it best suits the needs of artists, while also satisfying the need for academic suitability (Barrett & Bolt 2007; Carter 2004; Kozel 2007; Riley & Hunter 2009; Sullivan 2010). But there is agreement that such a methodology, often referred to as Practice as Research (although other designations are used), sits as an alternative to traditional academic methodologies.29 While such creative arts projects involve a range of materiality, embodies, techniques and forms, they come to a position of ‘knowing’ not through proving a theoretical premise or as the representation of a pre-existing idea. What is at stake is practice: the ‘doing’ of something towards an as-yet unknown outcome in an emergent process of invention (Bolt 2007: 30). The arts value the condition of invention states Paul Carter, because the condition “embodies a distinct way of knowing the world...a powerful, because complex and multi-sensorial, method of real-world analysis” (Carter 2007: 16). Real-world, because invention is situated: in the

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20 Citations from this journal appear in italics later in this chapter in the section entitled **Attention and Emergence: Authentic Movement and the Studio Practice.**

29 For a brief discussion of the various nomenclatures for this methodology see (Haseman 2007: 147)
personal and material interests of the artist/researcher(s) as they collaborate with external materials, bodies, situations or forces and thereby creating the discursive relation of their work:

*The point...is to assert the value of invention – which, I maintain, as the distinct focus of creative research, is located neither after nor before the process of making but in the performance itself. This can be the case because the making process always issues from, and folds back into a social relation. It is this back-and-forth or discourse, that provides the testing-ground of new ideas, and which establishes their interest. From the point of view of creative research, materials are always in a state of becoming.* (Carter 2007: 19)

The subjective and embodied nature of art practices means that research deals with knowledge that alternates between the explicit and the tacit, on the basis that no opposition need exist between them. ‘Skills’ (or embodied knowledge) that have been generated through practice are apprehended intuitively (Barrett 2007: 4). “This notion of intuitive knowledge is closely related to what Bourdieu has theorised as the logic of practice or of being *in-the-game* where strategies are not predetermined, but emerge and operate according to specific demands of action and movement in time” (Barrett 2007: 4). Making an artwork is a process of trial and error and its dimensions - qualities, implications or effects - cannot be fully predicted prior to its creation. Because each creative art project is incipient, the methodology/practice which frames it, or makes possible its discovery, should be designed accordingly. But this design is often articulated either concurrently or retrospectively and with considerable deliberation about how to ‘theorise’ and write about the project. This is contrary to more traditional research expectations of the pre-established research question and defined method, a point Kim Vincs makes about her own PhD dance project:

*When I began my PhD in dance through practice and exegesis, I will freely confess that I did not have a methodology in place to situate my dance practice in relation to the written exegesis I was to produce. This was quite deliberate. I felt that I needed to produce some dancing in order to see which questions and issues the dancing brought forward. This, in essence, was my methodology. I made a series of dances, and gradually identified the issues each one presented, and the questions that they raised about dance. I then used these questions to fuel the making of further dances and the development of a methodology for the project as a whole.* (Vincs 2007: 101)

The process also revealed the multi-layered complexity of what was being made. Vincs's final dance work had no single or core concern, instead producing multiple effects which were often at odds with each other when moving between different discourses, such as ideology, philosophy or aesthetics. “They worked with different languages, different frames of reference, and even different sets of values” (Vincs 2007: 102). In such open-ended situations of enquiry, the artist-
researcher must subsequently seek out the most appropriate methodological and theoretical supports, often beyond discipline boundaries, something Graeme Sullivan calls ‘postdiscipline practice’ (Sullivan 2010: 112).

Often such complex projects require sustained reflexive strategies to ‘pin down’ or articulate what is actually occurring in the practice. Graeme Sullivan lists four features of reflexive practice which he regards as being crucial to establishing a transformative (visual) arts methodology. Such projects variously manifest as self-reflexive, reflective, dialogic and questioning with each aspect informing the others and changes over time consequently becoming ‘braided’ into the work (Sullivan 2010: 110-112). Self-reflexivity requires an artist’s personal interest to be informed by a “transparent” understanding of the discipline so as to foster personal insight and change: to “see through existing data, texts and contexts so as to be open to alternative conceptions and imaginative options” (Sullivan 2010: 110). A reflective capacity in Sullivan’s terminology relates to a meta-analytic level where “information gathered” and relevant conceptual strategies are considered and reviewed, as well as to consider other approaches (Sullivan 2010: 110). The capacity to be in open dialogue with what emerges from practice tests the plausibility of an interpretation of a research finding. “This means that significance of meanings derived from a process of inquiry is subject to debate and discussion, initially within the research project itself, and eventually among the research community” (Sullivan 2010: 110). Finally, questioning content and contexts as problematic within given situations reveals responsiveness to change and the potential to enact change within artistic, social, political, educational or cultural contexts (Sullivan 2010: 110). Together, and in flexible interaction, these elements determine an overall attitude of reflexivity that Sullivan cites as important in creative arts enquiry.

Given the disorderly and ambiguous evolution of creative arts projects, reflexivity is clearly an important attitude for discerning, capturing and articulating the process of development and change. But central to my project was the necessity to give space and time for the pre-reflective to express itself. In the previous chapter I discussed the theoretical parameters of affect as the pre-reflective states of embodiment to which our bodies are continually exposed. In methodological terms, then, this project sought a process whereby the pre-reflective was in dialogue with the reflective. This might be seen as a phenomenological tendency in the project in that the pre-reflective experience of improvised movement became the basis for generating reflection. As Kozel articulates it:

*The impulse toward phenomenology as a method is based on the realization that we can loosen our rationalist structures of meaning sufficiently to permit qualities that are associated with the pre-rational, such as ambiguity of meaning, fluidity of existential and conceptual structures, scope for entirely new thought, perceptions, including contradictions,*
reversals of meaning, or paradoxes. A notion of the pre-conceptual world, not yet contained by our conceptual framework, is essential for us to be able to conceive of change. If we intend for reflection to suspend itself in the face of the pre-reflective, we make a commitment to maintaining the connection between reflection and its other in a fundamentally non-dualistic way, effectively a commitment to the porosity of reflection. (Kozel 2007: 19)

The notion that reflection might be suspended in the face of pre-reflection is pertinent to my project. The practice of the MWD, (which I discuss later in this chapter) is also grounded in this suspension; our practice became a concerted attempt to “forget expectations” and reach a state of “non knowing” (however fleetingly) as the point of initiation (Kozel 2007: 20). But we did not practice in this way to satisfy phenomenological method. While the MWD could be seen to be a phenomenological “bracketing” of experience, this project never utilized phenomenological method in a deliberate fashion. Certainly no phenomenological data or conclusions were sought. I did not ask each dancer to articulate their pre-reflective engagement in such a way that this might, through phenomenological analysis, lead to common or ‘essential’ structures of experience (Ravn 2010: 28).

Although processes based on turning the subject’s awareness towards an immediate aspect of movement sensation and from this approach to explore possible inherent qualities of movement and of the body are interesting ways to explore movement subjectively for the dancer, they do not work as phenomenological method...Phenomenology centres round an account of subjective experience, and this focus should be distinguished from subjective accounts of experience. (Ravn 2010: 28)

Indeed I did not attempt to discover how each dancer functioned within the practice, merely for them to be able to discuss and reflect on what they did on their own terms. If this had a reflexive effect on their dancing (or thinking) I did not seek to discover this – this was theirs alone - however our discussions did facilitate my own reflexive consideration of the project. The quote from Kozel above, merely reveals the impulse in our method to reflect on our subjective somatic experience and for me to achieve a reflexive stance towards the creation of the performance.

However, I did work within a group context. As the group of dancers we moved and witnessed for each other. Later in the process, once I had established the parameters of the performance score, we danced together. For much of what eventually became a 40-minute score we moved with our eyes closed and used aural cues to avoid bumping into each other. Then when we opened our eyes we attempted to maintain our private engagement despite being amongst (and aware) of each other. Initially this was distracting, but as we continued, we realised the possibilities of not engaging with each other; of not consciously ‘picking up’ on other’s movement motifs (composing); of not making eye contact, or if we did of not feeling obliged to ‘communicate’. To a degree we
became ‘objects’ for each other in our field of engagement. But despite this attempt, it was impossible to fully objectify or ignore each other. We were privately attending to our own interests but at some level we could not deny the social context of our activities.

Thomas Csordas defines somatic modes of attention as “…culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one’s body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others” (Csordas 1993). Sensory engagement is employed in attending to something through the body but he also emphasizes the ‘with’ and the ‘to’ (the body) as being co-existent; that is, the subjective and objective dimensions which comingle in a culturally dynamic setting. Attention with the body involves perceptual phenomena but these are never isolated from a broader cultural context and exist as potential objects within this. In other words to attend to the body’s sensations is not to attend to a body lacking social context, but "to the body’s situation in the world" (Csordas 1993).

The sensation engages something in the world because the body is “always already in the world”. (Merleau-Ponty) Attention to a bodily sensation can thus become a mode of attending to the intersubjective milieu that gives rise to that sensation. Thus, one is paying attention with one’s body. Attending with one’s eyes is really part of the same phenomenon, but we less often conceptualize visual attention as a “turning toward” than as a disembodied, beam-like “gaze”. We tend to think of it as a cognitive function rather than as a bodily engagement. A notion of somatic mode of attention broadens the field in which we can look for phenomena of perception and attention, and suggests that attending to one’s body can tell us something about the world and others who surround us. (Csordas 1993: 138)

The crucial emphasis is that attention is somatic. It resides in our bodies not merely as cognitive brain function but as a holistic engagement through the entire organism of our body. Csordas’s notion that somatic sensation can arise in an ‘intersubjective milieu’ makes sense for a dance project where the personal and the social intersect; the concern for one’s body is not in isolation but in dialogue with those around us. Yet my premise for this project is that attention to one’s own body should first be elaborated in isolation, as a dancer must at some level, before elaborating cultural interactions. Affecting change at a physiological and/or psychological level involves a process of confronting psychosomatic tendencies in movement that have become habituated in a person. Inefficient movement patterns, poor posture and skeletal alignment, chronic pain, an inability to adequately mobilize parts of the body are all examples of such problems that individuals may face. Techniques developed to address such functional problems, often referred to as Bodywork or Somatic Practices (such as the Feldenkrais Method, Alexander Technique, Body-Mind Centering, ideo-kinesis etc.), attempt to stimulate or re-educate the systems of the body (muscular, skeletal, nervous, lymphatic etc.) as a way to encourage flexible relationships to being in and using one’s body. Even if these tendencies stem from a
culturally elaborated environment, the methods for addressing them as ‘problems’ (or in our case as questions) have often involved inherently private processes. Once change has been realized on an apparently personal level, then change can also be realized intersubjectively, at which point improvisation can be elaborated more effectively as a social or cultural interaction.

Authentic Movement

Authentic Movement is the commonly applied name for the practice I have been calling the Mover Witness Dyad. Initially I also used the term Authentic Movement (and still do at times when discussing the practice with those who are familiar with it). But at a certain point in my practice I realised that I and the other dancers were being distracted by the implications of the title. We kept coming up against the question of whether what we were doing was ‘authentic’ and this had an inhibiting effect. This was an impossible question to adequately answer and actually a distraction from the task of discernment. Everything we did was authentic insofar as authenticity is ever possible to attribute to movement. The term also tied the practice to an essentialist agenda which was the opposite of what I hoped to achieve. I was not attempting to find an essential identity – the ‘real me’ from which my movement might emerge. I was more interested in multiple possibilities for movement expression and discernment that while they might be self-identifying were not reductive to a singular me. Practicing the MWD with questions of whether the movement was authentic was counterproductive; it placed a judgment over what we did. Because of this situation, I chose to use the designation the Mover/Witness Dyad for the practice. However, in the following section I revert to the use of the term Authentic Movement as this is what is used in the wider field of Dance Movement Therapy.

Authentic Movement (AM) is a contemplative movement practice initiated by Mary Starks Whitehouse and developed by others, most notably by Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow. The practice involves an exchange between mover and witness in which the mover openly explores movement, with their eyes closed, according to personal inclination. The witness is present to keep the mover safe and to ‘reflect back’ the experiences of the mover through active, non-judgmental witnessing. The witness is not required to decipher or analyse the movement but to capture and hold what has taken place and to name “...associations engendered within themselves” in a communicative interaction with the mover. The presence of a witness significantly changes the quality of engagement for the mover and enables a level of deep attention that, in my experience, is not possible without their presence. AM is one approach amongst several technique applied in the wider field of Dance Movement Therapy (DMT), DMT can be defined as “the psychotherapeutic use of movement and dance founded on the principle of motion and emotion being inextricably entwined. This
relationship is the channel through which a person can embody a deeper consciousness of the self” (Payne 2006: xv). Authentic Movement has uses as a therapeutic aid, in personal development and also as a contemplative context for exploring dance improvisation. “An important aspect of this turning of attention inward in Authentic Movement is that it is engaged bodily. Consciousness is physical. Whatever one might be aware of, thoughts, feelings, images, sensations, one experiences them in their bodily manifestations “ (Olsen 2007). The form parallels dance improvisation in its emphasis on open, exploratory movement which is grounded in the particular relation each individual brings to embodiment.

The roots of DMT reach back to early modern dance and the work of Isadora Duncan, Mary Wigman and Martha Graham and initially shared a common perspective on the creative and holistic potential of dance (Levy 1988, Chodorow 1991). However DMT gradually diverged from modern dance as certain key practitioners began to realize, and then theorize, the therapeutic implications of their movement practices, taking DMT into a more recognizably (and qualified) psychotherapeutic context. Dance Movement Therapists are trained in psychotherapeutic techniques that can be utilized to assist patients suffering from conditions ranging from psychosis, to autism to ‘everyday’ neurosis (Adler 2006, Chodorow 1991, Levy 1988). While there now exist a range of approaches, that relate to the different working practices that emerged from the work of the founders of the discipline, they all still share a common understanding that movement can manifest as “the mysterious interface that mediates between body and psyche” in a “constant reciprocal interaction” (Chodorow 1991: 1-3).

As one therapeutic technique in the DMT lexicon, AM, is premised on a self-reflective psychological attitude generated through the practice of what is called the ‘dyad’. This is a specific form of movement and reflective exchange between a mover and a witness which “recapitulate[s] our first primary relationship in which being seen is inherent”, that is, between infant (mover) and mother (witness). The mover, with eyes closed, is given open space and time to move on any impulse, feeling, sensation, or thought that interests or prompts him/her. After a specific period of time (15-30 minutes) mover and witness take turns to discuss what they experienced or observed thus potentially bringing conscious awareness to what was unknowingly enacted. The roles may then be exchanged to alternate between the position of mover and witness.

The three key figures in the establishment of AM as a therapeutic discipline, Mary Starks Whitehouse, Janet Adler and Joan Chodorow, each articulate theoretical positions strongly influenced by the psychology of Carl Jung (Pallarro 1999). Central to the theoretical construct of the practice as therapy is a belief in probing the symbolic manifestations of the unconscious. An individual may better understand their personal
situation through the psychological interpretation of symbolically loaded imagery, revealed through dreams and other situations or activities which delve beneath “the surface of the ordinary” (Stromsted & Haze 2007: 58). Similarly ‘active imagination’ is the Jungian concept in which free expression is given to language, painting, sculpture, movement and other creative activities that tap into, and eventually give form and insight into unconscious material. In this ‘depth psychology’ paradigm, it is possible for psychological ‘truths’ about an individual, to be slowly brought to the surface, to consciousness. An individual may be negatively effected by a lack of awareness of their ‘shadow’; the, as yet, unknown but detrimental psychological content, manifesting as an unconscious ‘projection’ and that hinders their daily interactions. Projection implies “that people may bring prior experience to their present circumstance which may distort or limit their realistic assessment of what is happening” (Stromsted & Haze 2007: 61). By bringing aspects of the shadow into an individual’s awareness, the person strives for a sense of wholeness with a balance between consciousness and the unconscious – in Jungian terms, the concept of individuation. “The growth of personality” writes Mary Starks Whitehouse, is only possible through interpenetration of consciousness with the unconscious” (Whitehouse 1999a: 78).

According to AM principles, an individual’s sustained practice may reveal psychological content, possibly repressed or unknown, and manifesting as bodily dispositions. Such content becomes organized in specific parts of the moving body as spatial and rhythmic patterns (Adler 1999: 142). Removing sight is seen as important in quieting the turbulence of daily life, thus allowing one’s attention to turn inward. “Shutting out external visual stimuli thus facilitates deep sensing experience, which has the ability to reach into the very tissues of the body and evoke imagery, emotion, body sensation, memory and dreams” (Stromsted & Haze 2007: 58). Psychological ‘depth’ is penetrated in a temporal exploration that slowly allows layers of formless, often irrational kinaesthetic experience to emerge. Continued practice over time gives shape to these experiences as more coherent, allowing them to be understood as specific psychosomatic patterns. The dyad thus posits the simultaneous interaction between a conscious self and a pre-linguistic, undifferentiated self, intersecting in a field of embodiment (Stromsted & Haze 2007: 57-58).

The practice aims for a non-judgmental, non-interpretive disposition towards the moment of unfolding experience for both mover and witness: there is no right or wrong and equal value is attributed to any action, response or state of being. This stance, coupled with the inherent privacy and intimacy of the dyad, develops trust within the relationship and facilitates openness to whatever emerges. Unconditional acceptance is seen as crucial in allowing movement to emerge in response to difficult or painful sensations, thoughts or feelings. The witness ‘holds the space’ into which the mover moves (Adler 1999: 142-143). The metaphor echoes
Winnicott’s notion of a ‘holding environment’ where the mother’s literal holding of the child creates psychological containment (Meekums 2012: 53). The witness literally keeps the mover safe (by stopping them from walking into walls when their eyes are closed) but also by providing a ‘safe’ context for psychological content to emerge.

Over time, a mover learns to internalize the witnessing role; that is to see themselves as others might see them; to discern the specific qualities of their actions, thoughts or sensations.

Witnessing is regarded as a dynamic process between mover and witness. It implies that the physical manifestations of a mover’s experience are not merely ‘looked at’ but ‘seen’: not merely dispassionate observation but dedicated participation that brings “a special quality of attention or presence to the experience of the mover” (Adler 1999: 142). In attempting to separate their own bias, psychological responses (unconscious or conscious) and cultural attitudes from what they see, the witness aims to reflect back to the mover without ‘transference’ – the involuntary projection of their own unconscious material (Whitehouse 1999b: 63). The witness thus aims to support, rather than distort, the experience of the mover.

Initially the witness’ presence acknowledges and gives credibility to the mover’s experience, yet the mover is self-conscious of being watched. But as the mover drops into a more immersive state this may suddenly shift into unselfconscious engagement with what they are doing. Practitioners often differentiate between the experience of ‘moving’ and ‘being moved’. The former implies a more identifiable, self-conscious generation of movement, the ‘I who chooses to move’, and which may be more controlled, familiar or discerning. ‘Being moved’ involves the momentary, but surprising rush of unconscious content emerging from an unknown source, creating an energetic surge as ‘repressed’ or unfamiliar material bursts to the surface of the body. “It is a moment when the ego gives up control, stops choosing, stops exerting demands, allowing the self to take over moving the physical body where it will” (Whitehouse 1999a: 82).

According to Janet Adler, in the face of this internal shift by the mover, the witness is suddenly “awakened” to his/her own state of being: kinaesthetic responses, feelings, images, or memories are kindled by the mover’s immersion yet belong to the witness. “When the witness is fully alive to the mover, she is, paradoxically, completely present in relation to her own inner experience” (Adler 1999: 144). The witness becomes involved in his/her own self-reflexive meditation on personal history, identity, experience, and so on, through an affective arousal that has been precipitated by the mover’s arousal. Such arousal then places the witness in the position of having to decide what to do with these sensations. In the early days of exploration into AM, practitioners assiduously maintained a strict delineation between active mover, and a witness who watches in attentive stillness. But later practitioners began to expand the
possibilities for how witnesses might become implicated. Susan Schell describes an urgent need to start drawing in immediate response to witnessing (something previously kept for after the dyad). “The essential thing was to provide a tangible conduit to ground the abundance of material coming to me while witnessing” (Schell 2002: 27). Initially the content of her drawing was seemingly unimportant, acting as a way to anchor her attention to the immediate experience of the mover. But as she continued the process, she “saw that the drawings were a continuation of my relationship to what had been compelling me in the movement” (Schell 2002: 27). In other words, she became an active witness through a physical embodiment that was enacted whenever this instinctively seemed necessary to her. She later extended this permissive witnessing to other activities such as writing and also moving. Central to acting on such necessity is the importance of affirming the integrity of ‘activating impulses’ by closely observing their persistence. As a consequence, witnessing holds a similar experiential capacity for somatic and personal exploration and discernment as moving does. Even as the differential roles are maintained, an energetic dialogue is more effectively established between them (Schell 2002: 27-30).

The transfer of affect described by Adler and Schell is generally understood to occur in AM as an interpersonal encounter, that is, from the respective positions of a self-reflective mover and a self-reflective witness. These are embodied positions, respectively moving or watching, but both positions are in direct relationship their own personal histories and identities. However, Adler also refers to the situation in which “transpersonal energies” are aroused which exceed the limits of the interpersonal:

*When this transpersonal energy was apparent we realized that the attitude of the witness toward the mover was quite different. Because in these situations the material with which the mover is working is not about her personality, the witness is seeing from a place not circumscribed by personality. It seemed that under these circumstances the dynamics of transference and countertransference, as we have come to understand them in therapeutic work, are less central, less binding, and somehow expanded.* (Adler 1999: 148)

Adler posits a situation in which material is expressed that does not originate in the subjective positioning of “I am doing this” or “we are doing this together” but from the position of “this is being done to us” or even “through us”. Adler’s claim makes it possible to imagine a dance improvisation practice which is not based *solely* on negotiating the identifications of a personality (the ego) but also through some other channel that transmits between and beyond the boundaries of individual subjects. I will return to this point again through the prism of affect.
Attention and emergence: Authentic Movement and the Studio Practice

As with AM, the movement dyad in our studio practice involved a mover (or movers) and an attending witness(es). It was an open, improvised practice which left determinations about how or when to move entirely up to the mover, and gave equal value to all movements or articulations no matter how small or seemingly inconsequential. There were no predetermined objectives and the only structure was to keep one’s eyes closed and keeping to a time limit, usually 30 minutes for each mover. The lack of predetermination and the feeling of extended time allowed each dancer to notice and enact the qualities which bubbled up, free from external distraction or interaction. The length of time a mover maintained their involvement had a significant impact on what they experienced, particularly if the time was too brief. It took approximately 10-15 minutes for any external connections to fall away and for our attention to become fully involved with interior sensory engagement. The practice allowed the mover to roam through a vast repository of movement possibilities and states of being, without recourse to a particular code, agenda, composition or predetermined intention. Thus we were enabled to assess which movements and states we were actually drawn to, which ones were reiterated through habituation, and which ones emerged as a surprise.

Today the Authentic Movement session lasted 40 minutes. This was much more immersive than 20 minutes. It seems to take about 15 minutes to feel as if I am ‘in’ the experience so 40 minutes is much more satisfying and intense. There were lots of questions and thoughts sluicing through my head today and this was initially about a critical stance to what I was doing but then about the sense of strangeness the practice can elicit. Sometimes things seemed just beyond my comprehension. (Journal entry, 10/6/11)

What precipitated movement, at least in the initial 10-15 minutes, was a conscious ‘scanning’ for sensation or feeling of any kind, as it presented itself in that moment and as an initiator of movement. I did not attempt to make this a pre-meditated or systematic scanning for information (for example such as starting at the feet and scanning sequentially through my body until I reached my head) but tried to let phenomena emerge of their own volition. I rarely created imaginary propositions to inhabit, that is, images, imaginary situations or pre-determined bodily states to respond to or climb into. Inevitably, I would begin with a perceptual ‘wander’ around my body and my state of feeling, to notice or observe what was lively or dull in certain parts of my body, and to notice what affective or energetic qualities were suggesting themselves. My task was to ‘listen’ and wait for movement to suggest itself without expectation, and if possible, without judgment. Are the sensations light or heavy, thick or open, easy or laborious or some gradations in between? What kinds of movement responses feel appropriate to these sensations?
I spent ages simply ‘listening’; trying to determine what it was I was feeling, sensing or experiencing and waiting for an impulse to interest me or compel me to move. I realize I have a narrow understanding of what it means to ‘listen’ and sensed that it can be so much more. I also had a bifocal attention throughout much of the session. One level of attention was analytically directed towards what I was doing and questioning this, with a self-conscious awareness of Peter’s presence as witness. But there were times when my attention was almost animal. A kind of dumb, blunt attention with no gestures, no limbs, no points, no definition just a full-bodied amoebic, roundness. (Journal entry)

‘Listening’ is a term often utilized to describe an internal scanning for impulses in improvisation. Lisa Nelson makes an interesting distinction between ‘listening’ and ‘reading’ during her experiences of performance improvisation.

Listening is a more open state...It’s like when you jump into water and you don’t know whether it’s going to be hot or cold. Listening is much more an animal state, you don’t know what features you’re going to find, there’s no interpretation yet you’re letting things go through you, you’re listening and you’re following, so that’s one level. But when you’re reading you’re making sense of things. If I make an action I may read it as linear, from what has been laid out before...Reading for me is a kind of compositional activity and listening is a much more sensory activity, so they’re kind of in dialogue with each other. (Nelson 1997: 79)

Melinda Buckwalter reiterates this distinction between generative and compositional approaches to improvisation when she distinguishes between “material-based work” and “form-based work” in which the former is a “...particular process of generating or sourcing material” with the latter being an approach to how “...I placed, re-stated, or integrated whatever movement I contributed to the class/ensemble/performance” (Buckwalter 2010: 31). While the more analytic ‘reading’ state may be present in AM, it may act as a distraction, potentially interrupting the experience of a more sensory, ‘animal’ state of attention. Compositional awareness, the deliberate shaping of the experience as Nelson describes, is contiguous with but discernably different from the formless discernment that ‘listening’ entails and which AM facilitates. AM is a generative process within which the formless wandering of attention is fundamental. The sense of time is open-ended, the spatiality is directionless and the relationships to external stimuli can seem distant or muted. It functions as an individual interrogation of internal, somatic sensation which creates the conditions for the spontaneous emergence of movement.

At one point early in the session, I remember repetitively rubbing my hands on the tops of my thighs as I sat on the floor. This action became an ‘engine’ (as Peter saw it). For me it was a ‘how do I begin?’ state: a question without answer or direction. Eventually my voice emerged as guttural and charged
with breath. It was strange to embody this animal quality but I stayed with it for what seemed like a long time until I became accepting of its strangeness and then it began to alter and morph into variations and extensions. After this point I felt I had fallen into the experience of being in darkness and had lost any external connection. There were moments of peaceful engagement where my fingers became sensitised and delicate. I was swimming through something...reaching, probing, uncertain, exploratory, directionless. There was also a section where I found some quietness lying on the floor and executing tiny rolls of my body. Each small shift of weight was rapturously appreciated without qualification. (Journal entry, 10/6/11)

Movement qualities or activities can emerge without being called forth, yet these states could not be compelled to appear. Giving insistence to the question ‘What am I doing?’ or by trying to bully my attention, while productive in a certain sense, seemed much less satisfying or absorbing. This question, when present as ‘listening’ in AM as a loose and unhurried stance, and not as a ‘reading’ of the material towards a specific goal, created a safe context for unfamiliar material to emerge. Facilitating ‘emergence’ became an aspiration for the practice. Any conscious demand for action seemed to sabotage access to subconsciously motivated bodily states. Consequently, less vigilant engagement was needed than in, for example, improvised performance, as there was no imperative to compose or produce anything.

I realized today that the Mover Witness Dyad creates the conditions which facilitate emergence, that is, letting things happen and keeping personal issues at bay. It is a practice of ‘getting (identity) out of the way’. The qualities that emerge, and which sweep you along, are often the most satisfying. But I’m no longer sure this is the same thing as ‘attention’. Attention is certainly part of it, but a particular understanding of attention. It isn’t a precise, directed, piercing quality. Sometimes it is about releasing a strong grip on attention, and facilitating a softer, cradling of attention; a cajoling, a prodding, a massaging of attention; a waxing and waning. I always seem to begin with a scanning of my body to notice any physical sensation or mood. This is certainly attentive. But perhaps it is about attending less in some instrumental way (“pay attention!!!”), than in the way you might tend to animals, plants or children that have developmental processes which need supporting. Perhaps I could call this ‘attending’ rather than ‘attention’? (Journal entry)

Monitoring the tone of my attention also became a part of the practice. A lightness of engagement was crucial to allow full inhabitation of an experience in which unconscious capacities may manifest.

Inhabitation and emergence

My journals sometimes referred to AM as a kind travel or as tourism; of ‘going to different places’; roaming, wandering or spending time in a state
of being before randomly moving on. These ‘places’ were states of embodiment; particular qualities of affect physically expressed, exploring the particular architectural shifts of my bodily structure (the shapes and associated feelings of how bones shape with other bones), a personal memory or thought stimulated through movement. Wandering could be a process of simple observation or it could be an engagement with particular questions (What am I doing? What is this like? Why am I doing this?). These experiences could range from the affectively familiar to the strange and were often fleeting; without personal significance or sufficiently interesting to be maintained. But if, as often happened after a long period of wandering in AM, I had forgotten about questions of attention, and was more directly involved in its manifestations, then states of being emerged that were surprising and unexpected. Becoming increasingly immersed through a process of attentiveness created the conditions under which emergence is actually possible. The practice was directed towards facilitating emergence as a condition of discovery. It fostered engagement and creativity through a deep connection to movement and action in which being and doing merge. This is a state of inhabitation as I see it. It is a state of physical imagination where participation is its own reward. By practicing the conditions in which connection to movement can emerge, by practicing emergence, I eventually began to recognize the sensations that precipitated this and so honed my practice towards these sensations. Rather than a specific technique, the practice was a highly individual set of conditions approached in a mindset of not trying, not caring, and of being detached from expectations of it.

Inhabitation allowed me a more unselfconscious presence by being immersed in something meaningful without concern for being watched. Experiencing movement free from self-consciousness is potentially important for improvisers if they have been schooled to spatially and psychologically acknowledge an audience (to face the audience) or if, as a dancer, the acknowledgment or assessment of their work has always been external to themselves (parents, teachers, peers, choreographers, audience). A dancer may consequently find it difficult not pre-emptively evaluate and censor their improvisation – to be judgmentally conscious of how their work will be interpreted and received – and so setting up roadblocks to imaginative openness. The anxiety this situation may unconsciously produce may also manifest in increased muscular engagement, speed, intensity and so on. In an anxious state, neural pathways, which define one’s habitual movement patterns, become over-utilised and the capacity to sense spontaneous movement possibilities becomes diminished: the furrows of a well-worn neural track, along which the flight response travels, but also acting as barriers to creative exploration.

I tried to be light in this today. That is to just ‘be’ and not to drive myself emotionally and with thought. It was difficult initially and self-consciousness shadowed my efforts. I found myself assessing what my
actions would look like if my witness were an audience. In this sense performance improvisation has created a particular habit in me which is hyper-vigilant in trying to perceive my status in relation to the audience. (journal entry)

AM practitioners cite the difference between an experience of consciously moving and of 'being moved'. The latter state is rich with subconscious material, and if Adler is correct, can also contain the possibility of a 'transpersonal' dimension. The mover may be surprised by the content and by the quality of being carried by something other than his or her own conscious will. This is akin to the dance state that Forti describes in which charged physicality and creativity seem to merge with movement effortlessly 'appearing' to the improviser (Forti 1984: 7). But this is a difficult state to both access and maintain. Perhaps a more intermediary state is that of quiet discernment of one's movement leading to a felt connection with what is being done. Not being 'carried' by it, but inhabiting it nonetheless.

Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with some of the issues and intricacies arising from the studio practice of the MWD. This practice began by addressing the affective conditions that underpin my experiences of improvisation with the intention of allowing the improvisation to emerge without feeling subject to the demands of a 'public' (real or imagined). As a practice of discernment, the MWD lead to a great deal of understanding about my own motivations and inclinations, as well as fostering the conditions for understanding, development and change. But over the period of time that we were involved in this process, my thinking about its implications began to shift, particularly as I started to address the 'social' implications of performance. The MWD was initially useful for developing my own capacities in improvisation, but it took a very different turn at the point at which I needed to establish what the performance actually entailed, when different questions began to take prominence. The MWD prompts contemplation and reflection but also reflexivity. As such the practice facilitated another layer of consideration and thinking that brought forth questions about how a private practice might contribute to a public performance. The performance event was formed from the practice but I did not seek to use the practice, in a significant sense, as a choreographic tool - to generate movement content which I then considered or composed. Nor did I choose to 'display' my 'strengthened' capacities for improvisation in a conventional performance. I became more interested in the dynamic between the mover and the witness and the ethos upon which that this was premised. My focus became to create a situation that would allow the MWD’s relational dynamic to exist within an event that could also be considered as a performance. Because of this change of emphasis, the original developmental aspirations for the practice, the 'getting better at improvising’, began to be less necessary or important. It began to be less
‘about me’ and became more focused on the relationships between movers and witnesses, and through which new or unanticipated effects might emerge to constitute the performance itself. The next chapter explains how my changed thinking transformed into the aspirations and parameters for the performance event.
Chapter Five: Encountering Performance

Introduction

This project draws on practices and principles of the Mover Witness Dyad (MWD). From the MWD I have attempted to create: first a dance practice directed towards developing and supporting my dance/movement art practice; and then a performance by staying true to structural and philosophical parameters suggested by the mover/witness form. The investigatory, studio practice of the MWD has also been utilized as a research methodology, particular to this project, in which emergent questions have been defined and pursued both theoretically and in practical terms. The relationship between mover and witness, fundamental to the MWD, has become an ethical and physical paradigm for this project. The project’s concluding performance was specifically shaped by the experiences, observations and questions the practice produced. As a dyadic relation, the MWD emphasizes the somatic free association of the mover who is supported by the enabling and active presence of a witness. The driving question became how I might maintain the ethos of the private mover-witness relationship in a public performance. What emerged from the research driven by this question was a particular approach to performance, inviting a specific quality of participation, and that was propelled by the ethos of the practice.

The MWD is a therapeutic relationship, never intended as a performance practice, despite its use by dancers as generative of performance content. But the very idea of performance implicates a third constituent (beyond mover and witness), that is, the (social) field of the performing arts in which aesthetic judgment is negotiated. The dyad’s grounding in psychosomatically motivated movement does partner well with a developmental exploration of dance improvisation. But to reframe this practice as a performance in its own right is necessarily experimental. Initially this situation seemed contradictory, perhaps impossible. Eventually however, in maintaining the ethos of the MWD a hybrid performance situation emerged, with a distinctive form that intertwined the therapeutic and the artistic, and offered an extension of what performance might entail and reveal. The hybrid performance became the most significant consequence of this project, offering new possibilities for the performer-audience compact by reconfiguring this into a triangulation between performers, and those in attendance who

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30 Somatic practices with therapeutic aims are often practiced and circulated in particular dance practices, workshops, classes and choreographic approaches as a way to extend understanding. Use of the MWD, known in dance contexts as Authentic Movement, has been strongly profiled by dance journal Contact Quarterly, including a special issue dedicated to this practice. See Contact Quarterly, Vol. 27, number 2, Summer/Fall 2002. See also American Journal of Dance Movement Therapy and Andrea Olsen’s article ‘Being Seen, Being Moved: Authentic Movement and Performance’ (Olsen 2007).
alternately respond as participating ‘witnesses’ and participating audience.

As Derek McCormack observes, a fundamental question animates all Dance Movement Therapy (DMT):

...how might participation in somatic therapeutic practices disclose some of the ways moving bodies are generative of a sense of experience as an experimental field? The point of thinking about this question is not to excavate from a practice such as DMT an experimental sensibility in spite of [my emphasis] the therapeutic ethos of the practice. (McCormack 2013: 92)

The point with my project has not been to “excavate” an experimental performance situation from the MWD in spite of its therapeutic ethos but to be animated by the continued presence of this ethos. This was a pursuit of the practice’s emphasis: on facilitating the immanent emergence of movement, of accepting all psychosomatic or affective qualities as relevant and of avoiding assessment or judgment of the movement. As chapter three details, the practice is concerned with the field of affects perhaps best described by Daniel Stern’s concept of vitality.
affects (Stern 1985). The abstract and sustained changes in embodied vitality have been allowed to emerge, become discernable and freely develop. In maintaining the ethical relation of the MWD, it was the participation of the witnessing audience which opened up my practice to a new set of possibilities and questions, and eventually, a specific structure and articulation of the performance. The consequent sense of "experience as an experimental field" across and between performers and witness/audience has energized the event, effectively posing the question to all in attendance: "What is going on and how do I creatively engage with this?" The ethical conception of a 'witness' taken from the therapeutic context has been critical to the conception of this performance. In the MWD as therapy, the witness makes specific care-directed contributions to the operations of the practice – they provide a therapeutically safe context for the exploration of emergent affective content. The witness attempts to observe the mover's unfolding experience with a non-judgmental disposition: to receive without personal projection or expectation. As such they provide a facilitating presence as a projected 'imaginary' onto whom the mover can project aspects of their own embodied experiences and tacitly make sense of them. It is this relation which gave shape to the performance.

Practicing the MWD and questioning it from the point of view of dance improvisation, led me to think about how the dynamic of the relationship might be maintained in performance. In the creative practice that developed as an extension of the MWD, four dancers (Olivia Millard, Peter Fraser, Jason Marchant and Sophia Cowen) and I established a structure for improvising together. We initially experimented by improvising as a group with eyes closed and then immediately following this with a period of eyes open. This was extended to include improvising with eyes open or closed as an intermediary stage. However, our aim was always to maintain the somatic free association of our improvisation even when our eyes were open. This very simple structure was most richly articulated in the enabling presence of witnesses. It was this realisation which led to the experimental strategy for performance in which the audience was cast as analogous to a group of witnesses engaging with a similar disposition as that fostered by the MWD. Clearly an audience is not usually asked to suspend judgment or leave expectations aside. To do so requires a different approach to watching performance, premised on a different set of values and principles. This differentiated role involves an active monitoring of one's own responses and a physical involvement in the activities, or to put it another way, a 'participation' in the composition of the work. The audience became to some extent equivalent to a group of witnesses through the invitation to participate with the non-judgmental disposition of the witness.

Of course it is impossible and undesirable to dictate how people might respond – only to invite the possibility of experimentation. Those in attendance remained, at some level, an audience in the conventional sense - a group of people making private assessments and personal
decisions about what they are seeing. The resultant tension that emerged between these differential roles, and the ways in which it energized the performance, became the most powerful outcome of the project. Whether or not they chose (or were able) to take up this invitation, the audience was still confronted with a fundamental premise of the MWD: “how is it possible for me to be in an active, attentive engagement with the dancers while maintaining an enabling, non-judgmental disposition?”

The conception of this performance as participatory has aligned this project with art practices for which participation is currently seen as an urgent and essential component. This adjustment to the traditional theatrical agreement between performer and audience elicited an adjusted dynamic between the two groups. As Jacques Rancière has convincingly argued about theatre, there is a false binary at work in assuming a division between an active performer and a passive audience. An audience, even if seated quietly, will always actively reconstitute what is being presented from their own experience and their own imagination. It is not necessary to directly include them in the production of theatrical activity for them to be active. (Rancière 2011) And yet, the quality of attention that the witness gives to the mover in the MWD seems different to the attention an audience gives to a performance. In examining the performance art of Allan Kaprow, author Laura Cull makes the point that while Rancière’s critique of the active/passive divide is indeed accurate, Kaprow’s work also questions the necessity of “spectatorial action”. (Cull 2011) Kaprow’s work creates the possibility that audience attention can be invoked or strengthened through the participatory requirements of attending to something. Requiring a specific quality of engagement from the audience, Cull calls this “ontological participation”. (Cull 2011: 80) It was invoking this quality of participation, of attending to an ethos and thus giving rise to ontological considerations, which was the heart of this performance.

Participation in my event, as either mover or witness, might also be understood as what Erwin Straus calls “pathic participation”, particularly in relation to the spatial orientation of pathic engagement. (Straus 1966) Straus was interested in the experiential differences between sensation and sensing, or what he termed the “gnostic” and the “pathic” dimensions in perception. All perception is of something. But there is a distinction between the sensation of the thing (its objectification) and the sensing of that something prior to its definition as an objective sensation. Looking (as pathic sensing) happens before the properties of the thing (its colours and shapes) are objectively composed as a tree. The gnostic dimension is the extension of sensing into something with specific, discernible qualities, that are ‘knowable’, and which are therefore available to understanding in the conceptual realm (Straus 1966: 12). About the pathic moment, Straus says it is:

*the immediate communication we have with things on the basis of their changing mode of sensory givenness. Thus, we do not relate the pathic*
dimension...to the fixed or changing properties of the objects, and this means not to objects capable of attracting, frightening, or oppressing us by their properties. (Straus 1966: 12)

He notes that the pathetic “...is so difficult to understand conceptually, being the immediate present, sensually vivid, still preconceptual communication with appearances” (Straus 1966: 12).

Straus made careful distinctions between how visual sensory experience differed from acoustic experience, with each emphasizing the gnostic or pathetic differently. Sight gives greater emphasis to the gnostic such that ‘looking at’ “brings every object into the domain of the objective and general” (Straus 1966: 14). As such, seeing an object, whether attractive or frightening, is always ‘active’ in that we assess whether we need to approach, avoid or take flight. In this light, watching a performance is again conceived of as an active assessment for audiences (even if the need to ‘take flight’ is usually assessed in a metaphorical sense). Sound on the other hand is much more pathically oriented such that we cannot immediately ‘distance’ ourselves from its occurrence:

_Tone has an activity all its own; it presses in on us, surrounds, seizes and embraces us. Only in a later phase are we able to defend ourselves against sound, only after sound has taken possession of us, while in the visual sphere we begin to take flight before we have been prehended. The acoustical pursues us; we are at its mercy, unable to get away. (Straus 1966: 16)_

So how does a dance performance that did not use sound become relevant to this conception of acoustic possession? I continue with the relationship between sound and dancing in this performance later in the chapter. For now, however, it is Straus’ notion of the spatial orientation of sound, and so, he states, the spatial orientation of dancing, that I would like to develop. “Optical space”, Straus tells us, “is the space of directed, measured, and purposive movement; acoustical movement is the space of dance” (Straus 1966: 20). Sensory perception of sound is connected to the pathetic dimension. It is defined by a specific spatial orientation that is immersive and not directed towards specific points in space as sight is. When movement also operates in the pathetic, it too is defined by this spatial orientation. Music, says Straus, sympathetically elicits movements that are particular to the sound, which exist outside the realm of functional action, and which operate in the spatial orientation of sound. “Purposive movement” and dancing cannot be seen as different applications of the same elements but are instead two entirely different forms of movement. Each form has its own “mode of the spatial” (Straus 1966: 20). As evidence of how sound creates the spatial conditions under which dance operates Straus cites the difference between purposive walking and marching to music. In the latter “what we experience is not the action but our vital doing” as inspired by the music and which disrupts the organisation of the body when engaged in purposive action (Straus 1966: 22). Dance is not related to a particular direction, states
Straus, and because we do not dance to get from point A to point B, as in walking, distance is also irrelevant. Straus claims that primitive dances were often on the spot, without delineation of space, and with the dancing being “nondirected and nonlimited”. When seen in this way dancing holds no reference to spatial measure, or to spatial or temporal limit (Straus 1966: 24).

*But this change of spatial structure occurs only in pathetic participation, not in a gnostic act of thinking, contemplating, or imagining. That is to say, presentic experience actualizes itself in the movement; it does not produce itself by means of the movement.* (Straus 1966: 31)

Perhaps Straus’s understanding of dance is more directly attributable to forms of social or ritual dance. Certainly Straus is *not* talking here about dancing that has been shaped by aesthetic intentions and he also makes a clear distinction between dancing and “action” (purposive movement). “Action demands a system of definite, distinct directions and determining loci with valences varying in accord with their relationship to the directional system” (Straus 1966: 31). Yet I would argue that theatrical and “art” dance do operate within a clear directional system which directly relates the performer to the locus of the audience. Certainly Cunningham disrupted this system through his use of chance techniques to situate his dancers in space. But conventionally and commonly dancers are put at a specific distance and directional relationship to the audience thus creating the conditions for the dancers to be (significantly) optically and gnostically determined: conceived, considered and practiced from the perspective of being looked at.

My project was certainly ‘purposive’ in that it attempted to address an experimental art context and it maintained the ‘gnostic’ framework of consideration and predetermined elements (the choice of space, the Watching Scores, the time limits of sections). But it was also committed to creating the conditions which might elicit a pathetic connection to the immediacy of improvised dancing and so to the pathetic spatial orientation. Neither dancers nor the witness/audience knew what would emerge. There was no imperative to ‘make something happen’. As a dancer I was participating in something that gave life to my embodied dance history – my history, habits and inclinations - but unsettling these in the pursuit of the pathetic moment; the ‘unknowing’ of immediate experience. In the terms of the MWD, the situation allowed for experiencing *both* the more gnostically inclined ‘moving’ (moving with conscious reference to what I know i.e. my dance habits and lineage) to ‘being moved’ (that is, to being ‘possessed’ by the experience without understanding it).31 The pathetic dimension was made more prominent for me because I had my eyes closed for so long and so reducing the (gnostic) inclinations to direct

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31 ‘Being moved’ relates to what Straus calls the “ecstasy” that dance can arouse from its non-purposive, limitless, directionless activity. (Straus 1966: 29)
myself towards the witness/audience. I struggled not to make assessments or judgments but kept myself focused on achieving this.

The witness/audience were witnessing me attempting to discover this pathetic engagement. If they were able to summon up a non-judgmental disposition in watching, then they too were caught up in this moment. The prominence of ‘assessment’ or judgment was potentially diminished, partly because I requested that this be so, but also because the engagement of the dancers prompted it. The directional system of conventional performance was also dispersed as participants (dancers and witness/ audience) began experimenting with the openness of free association and of ‘listening’ to what was happening (a point I take up later). The witness/audience were also able to choose when, where and how to move in relation to the dancers and so to participate in their own ‘dance’ (of watching). In contrast to conventional performance, a pathetic spatiality was foregrounded through the emphasis given to the sensing of movement, rather than to the movement’s conscious development or composition.

But it would be incorrect to say that the performance existed purely in the “present”, as ‘total’ pathetic participation. The event continually oscillated between the pathetic and gnostic. Disruption of the conventional spatial structure for watching performance was intermittent; sometimes people wanted to watch from a comfortable distance and make private assessments; I could hear the witness/audience and so, at times, direct myself towards them. The Watching Scores also invited thinking, contemplation and consideration and so to read them you had to remove yourself from the immediacy of what was happening. I would often allow myself to imaginatively develop my dancing or even to consider how it might be seen from the outside. Attention waxed and waned for all participants. But in my experience, the oscillations between the pathetic and the gnostic orientations occurred in rhythms that were unintentional, unpredictable, and given over to the inclinations of each participant. The discussions at the end also flipped the event completely towards gnostic reflection and conceptual shaping. It was here that the performance was most keenly ‘looked at’ and with the benefit of hindsight.

**The Performance Event**

The invitation for the untitled event billed it as an experimental performance, premised on the practice of the MWD and proposing a participatory role for the ‘witness/audience’. Potential attendees were drawn from my personal and professional contacts and those of the other
dancers involved, creating a predominantly, but not exclusively, dance-literate group. In order to solicit attendees I emailed an invitation (see Appendix One) to approximately 170 people, as well as inviting some people in person. The invitation cited the event as a PhD project, listed the event dates and the performers’ names and described the parameters and nature of the event. The event took place over the evenings of Tuesday 11, Thursday 13 and Saturday 15 November 2014. The venue was The Sacred Heart Oratory, a former chapel, now converted into gallery space, and situated amongst the many reconfigured buildings in the Abbotsford Convent facility in Melbourne. The three evenings together constituted a single event and attendance at all three was a requirement for attending any at all.\textsuperscript{32} This requirement meant many interested people were not able or willing to attend, but it also meant those in attendance were genuinely motivated to attend and to participate. Twenty-three invitees agreed to participate, although five of these attended less than three times. To all these people I sent a further set of notes ‘Notes for Witnessing Audience’ (see Appendix Two) which reiterated aspects of the original invitation but which also set out the structure of the event and the expectations of the witness/audience. This read as follows:

\begin{quote}
\textit{The witness/audience’s role will be to ‘contain’ the dancers (to keep them safe as they may have their eyes closed), and to discern what is happening. But the witness/audience will also be asked to ‘compose’}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{32} This requirement was ignored in the case of a few individuals for whom attendance was otherwise impossible but important for me. I attempted to keep this group as small as possible but their presence was commented on by a few of those who attended all these evenings, coming as an interruption to the durational attentiveness and shared experiencing of the three evenings.
the event from their position of perceiving the whole. Each witness will be provided with ‘watching scores’; 52 cards, each one with a different statement or suggestion to focus perception, or to frame the improvised dancing. Witnesses are free to choose one when you want to, read it, and return it to the pack. The scores aim to reframe the role of audience into an active witness. How does being a witness reframe the role of the audience?

Your commitment is to support the experience of the mover and the other witness/audience members. Please do not talk during the performance.

When the dancers are moving with their eyes closed, please stop them if they are about to walk into walls or other people. You can do this by placing your hand on their shoulder. Accidents very rarely happen and moving with eyes closed is not dangerous for the dancers as we are so used to doing this.

No seating is provided, but you are welcome to sit or lie on the floor whenever you want. You can walk around the room and watch from different perspectives.

The Watching Scores (see Appendix Three) were intended to give the witness/audience some insight into the thinking that had gone into this project (see appendix three).33 They were also a way to focus or reinvigorate attention given that the MWD allows the mover to ‘meander’ without regard for maintaining the viewer’s interest. The four ‘suites’ of cards were divided into four specific categories reflecting the areas of engagement of the project: 13 Artist Statements, 13 Statements Towards a Manifesto, 13 Reflections on the Mover/Witness Dyad and 13 Suggestions for watching. The audience members were invited to follow the suggestions; or to consider how the dancing might be thought about in light of a statement; or as a reminder to implicate their own body in the experience of watching. Responses to the Watching Scores were intended as frames of reference, perhaps only momentary, that might merge with that individual’s personal history, perceptions and inclinations thus

33 A few examples of the watching scores:

Which is best: standing, sitting or lying down? Watch while lying down for a while.

Sincerity and trust are forms of exchange. What value should we give them?

The witness-mover relationship in the Mover Witness Dyad is likened to the mother-infant relationship. The relationship creates a connection of trust and intimacy, a safe place for the infant to experiment and develop.

An appreciation of the feeling of getting lost...of proceeding into the unknown... to reject the familiar, so rooted in our nervous system and minds, requires discipline. (Steve Paxton)
creating a unique perspective for each audience member. The scores were not intended to be prescriptive and could easily be left aside.

Beyond the iterative cycle of three evenings, and the provision of the watching scores, each evening was structured according to specific blocks of time (signalled by a bell) marking the change from eyes closed to eyes open (for the dancers). Each of the iterations, conducted in silence, lasted for 40 minutes and was followed by a seated, group discussion. The ‘Notes for Witnessing Audience’ set out the structure of the event for the witness/audience members, briefly detailing the changes over the 40 minutes as well as encouraging witness/audience members “to roam, sit, watch, or read some watching scores”. (Notes for Witnessing Audience) These notes also prompted witness/audience members to participate in a post-performance discussion where they (and the dancers) could “articulate something about what they did, felt or noticed”. (Notes for Witnessing Audience) The importance of this discussion to the functioning and evaluation of the event was also noted.

Attendees were invited to this experiment, whose central question was whether it was possible to elicit a particular quality of attention and engagement from the participating witness/audience and so reconfigure the conventional performer-audience relationship. This quality of attention was based on the non-judgmental disposition of the witness who ‘contains’ and supports the experience of the mover. The performer’s task was to stay attentive to our improvised, physical responses - to freely associate without necessary reference to each other or the witness/audience. But the witnesses were also an audience who, as external observers, could discern the range of elements at play. By choosing where and how to direct their attention, and how to move around the space, they could give prominence to some features and relations over others. They helped define its specific shape. In a sense, through exercising these choices as watchers, they also shared in authoring the event as a performance.

**Is This a Performance? – The Witnessing Audience.**

In what follows I draw on the taped post-performance discussions to reflect on the nature of the audience experience. For me as a dancer each evening was experienced as a unique composition of multiple affective and kinaesthetic qualities arranged by the shifting relations of dancers and witness/audience. For each of the dancers, moving still offered the possibility (if not the demand) of poetic articulation, of dancing. These articulations were certainly available to be “composed” (for either mover or witness) but more as relations within the attending self, than as a formal choreographic entity. Both types of participants were invited, through the various, rhythmic and qualitative modulations of affectivity and activity, “to become more attentive to the individuations of which they are composed”. (McCormack 2013: 112) This invitation offered all participants involvement in a relational field of discernment; of noticing
the perceptual differences between movement qualities, interests, presence, or relations.

For the witness/audience, as for the dancers, perceptions of the shifts in this discernable field were innumerable and diverse and it is not my intention here to catalogue this diversity. However, it is possible to say that certain patterns of engagement were evident from the both the dancers and the witness/audience, and that these patterns changed over the three nights. For now I will limit myself to a discussion of the witness/audience’s experience. I am basing the following assessments, general and inadequate to this task as they are, on the conversations which followed the scored component (see Appendix Three). These conversations, for which all participants sat in a circle, matched and enacted the therapeutic component of the MWD in which first the mover, and then the witness, begin reflexively to bring into thought and language, aspects of their experience.34 These conversations became a central feature of the event, enabling individual experiences, questions or understandings about the event to circulate. There were many impressions, points of view, issues, questions, concerns and uncertainties expressed in these conversations but I will mention only a few aspects, chosen to engage with theoretical strands that are important to thinking about the event.

In general terms, it would be true to say that these conversations helped steer a path through the uncertainty that was an initial component of the event for all participants. Indeed, the conversations were perhaps the

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34 This dialogue is an attempt to bring into understanding something of the pre-reflective mud through which one can wade in the MWD.
most significant structural feature of the performance situation. The
conversation became a socially reflexive extension of the performance
that both defined and qualified resonant features and questions for and
between all participants. In a sense the performance was ‘made’ or
substantiated during these discussions. What was most urgent, notable or
convincingly articulated was picked up on by others, giving some shared
understanding to what had happened. The initial challenge that faced the
witness/audience was to determine how to watch given that it wasn’t
immediately clear whether the event was a performance. 35 This question
was in part directed at the uncertainty that emerged between two
conflicting inclinations. On one hand some audience members became
uneasy about whether they could actively intervene in the performance,
choosing instead to stand against the walls and maintain a supportive
distance. On the other hand, some witness/audience were more inclined
to actively and noticeably ‘get involved’; for example, by deliberately
placing themselves close to the dancers, lying down in the centre of the
room, moving through the space or experimenting with other ways to
watch. A line initially emerged between these two inclinations (although
the differences gradually dissipated over the three nights). For some
witness/audience, who approached the event as a ‘practice’ (with its
therapeutic, and therefore ethical, aspirations), to violate this threshold,
and ‘get involved’, might invalidate its ethos. Others perceived their role
more in relation to conventional performance and of ‘spectating’ (with
associated benefits). They questioned whether (and how) the event
elicited such a spectatorial situation. For example, one witness/audience
member forcefully expressed it like this after the first evening:

...all the rhetoric that we were fed coming in, the little bit that I know about
the practice, was to do with the engagement, the participation, the
exchange. But in this room there was this incredible force to assume this
spectatorial distance and position, that at times I felt like I was really
fighting to resist the desire to just go and stand in the distance position
“entertain me”.

Another member had a different perspective on the same evening:

There were people standing on the periphery but there was constant
movement and there was constant change, prompted by the cards and
prompted by people moving around. There were moments when I was going
‘Who am I watching again?’ because it was fascinating to watch the
movement of people through the room, not just the people dancing...As a
witness, as an observer, who was I watching, who was I observing? And at
one point I found myself in the middle of the piece and I don’t know if the
two of you [dancers] were circling around me. That felt like it was a tension,
right, am I now part of the performance, am I part of the practice, can I move with you?

A third person’s response to this issue:

I felt like it was quite hard not to feel like I was interfering by taking a place which was involved. So the thing about standing on the back or on the wall wasn’t so much about being a spectator... How can I be that witness who is just allowing when I’m so close and interfering with any sort of breath or sound or any sort of energetic minds that might be being made by the person... because we were allowed to move around and we came in and we came in with our clumpy shoes. All of those things were incredibly delicate and that we’d come in and made it not so delicate. I didn’t know... I started going, I can’t remember if I’m meant to be audience or respectful witness.

When the different roles of ‘witness’ and ‘audience’ were conceptually merged, it appeared that those watching were prompted to think carefully about how to engage or how to watch. The debate in the discussion, exemplified above, enunciated the reflexive activation of noticing, of discernment (however vigilantly), in the face of the uncertain, and affectively delineated parameters of the event. What might the respective roles (of mover or witness/audience) entail: the capacities of the role, the responsibilities, the delicacies, the affections towards which one might gravitate, or the situations one moved away from? Confronted by ambiguity, the witness/audience were placed in a position of vulnerability which seemed to catalyse an ethical evaluation about positioning oneself in relation to the activity. Thus, it seemed that a distinctively new role of witness/audience emerged from the ethically charged situation of corporeal observation.

Experimenting with the MWD in our studio practice had also raised ethical and aesthetic questions for us as dancers. As I watch my partner move am I a watching as a dancer or as a witness? How do reconcile searching for my own aesthetic preferences in their movement with the requirement to watch with a non-judgmental disposition? How do I support and value what my partner is doing while remaining interested and involved? How do I sustain this watching over many sessions? These were ever-present processual questions, into which we, as dancers, invested a large amount of time and consideration. I felt this investment, and the importance of this ethos, needed specific indication for any ‘audience’ who might attend the performances. This was the cue for the Watching Scores. These were intended to give specific insight into my thinking towards this practice, the artistic influences and the insights gleaned from the studio practice. They were also intended to provide suggestions for how an audience member could activate or experiment with their watching by attending to their own embodiment or spatial orientation. They were conceived of as invitations, not as instructions, and could be ignored. These prompts indicated to an audience what possibilities and values were contained in the MWD and what kind of
investment of attention was necessary. The iterative cycle over three nights was also an indication of this commitment. The Watching Scores and iterative cycle were together intended to indicate how important the committed involvement of the witness/audience was to the entire event.

**Ethics and Aesthetics**

In discussing Felix Guattari’s thinking on therapeutic practices, Derek McCormack draws out a relationship between the ethical and aesthetic questions therapeutic practices produce. McCormack begins by pinpointing the ethics of therapeutic practices which:

> are ethical in the sense that they are concerned with the Spinozist question of what bodies can do, and what they might be able to do if the generative conditions are opportune. They produce opportunities for expanding the range of ways in which bodies can be affected by other bodies, and, in the process, open up new possible forms of life whose value is not specified in advance. (McCormack 2013: 114)

Value in an *embodied* therapeutic practice can never be predetermined because movements are individually differentiated according to complex affective and emotional entanglements. Accordingly, the performance of my research event attributed no *relative* value to any of the improvised gestures, movements, rhythms, positions or qualities of being the dancers brought into being. They were accepted equally. Equally, the witness/audience were free to position themselves, physically and mentally, according to their own attractions and interests but, as they acknowledged, they did so in an atmosphere in which the ethics of the situation, based on the observation of another’s embodiment, needed consideration.\(^{36}\)

To continue with McCormack’s discussion, he then outlines the ways in which institutions often apply a code-centred model for governing the ethical parameters of therapeutic practices. Despite its institutional necessity, such a method of governing therapeutic ethics can all too often become reduced to ‘ticking boxes on a form’, indifferent to the highly differentiated and enlivening affective manifestations, experiences and processes that might emerge in the context of an *experimental* therapeutic engagement. “Ethics, in other words, becomes detached from the question of experiment as a process that puts experience at risk” (McCormack 2013: 114). McCormack takes this further to suggest that:

> **To take Guattari’s therapeutics seriously is to recognize that rules form**

\(^{36}\) Mammad Aidani puts it this way:

*I always watch your body…when I’m in trouble. Your body is far more important to me to take an ethical action to protect me if I’m in trouble. Your words come second. (Dempster & Aidani 2012: 34)*
part of a relation-specific ecology of practices affording opportunities for cultivating an affectively imbued ethical sensibility – or ethos – through which to experiment experience. This sensibility is an aesthetic one for Guattari because it takes affect and sensation as necessary elements of the remaking of subjectivities and the ecologies in which they participate. (McCormack 2013: 114-115)

Hence we have a theoretical bridge between the ethical and the aesthetic, and between the therapeutic and the performative in terms of my research. The ‘rules’ of the MWD have been transcribed to the performance event, with specific roles for dancers and witness/audience, and are coterminous with the contract of performance. The ethos of the event – safely experimenting with experience and discerning its differential “ethico-aesthetic” qualities - is a circulatory system. It is a system of embodiment based on affect and sensation. It is aesthetically nuanced through the movement of dancers and witness/audience, subjectively perceived but without the possibility of locating the source of the atmospheric in any one individual (as Teresa Brennan might put it) (Brennan 2004). The transpersonal nature of the event, of being ‘caught up’ in it, meant that participation was not only invited it was to some degree inevitable.

Returning to the progression of the performance event, by the second evening a different quality of engagement emerged that seemed energized by greater clarity about the possibilities of engagement. I found that that this difference was in large measure a result of having a gap between iterations. This provided time to digest or unravel the previous evenings uncertain impacts and allow one’s body to release from the affective grasp of this uncertainty, before re-engaging into the next iteration. The iterative aspect, the repetition over three evenings, became like a meta-refrain within an event that was replete with individually differentiated micro-refrains. For one witness/audience member the second iteration prompted a more defined response, indicating a clearer investment, or interest in experimenting with his/her agency within it:

But you’ve also given us a liberty as an audience because we’re not in a configuration of sitting and watching a performance. We’re actually moving through a performance, therefore I had an experience of realizing, well I’ve actually been given an opportunity to view dance in a way that I never normally do. Like I can go up really close and watch it very closely, or I can lie down on the floor, or I can watch it peripherally. So as an audience member, because I’m here for the second time I want to make use of those choices.

Interest, as an affect, may facilitate openings for dancers, but it reciprocally fosters witness/audience engagement. Did allowing the witness/audience to choose or even create the terms of their engagement
as a participatory premise, generate a more ‘interested’ level of watching and noticing? Again, this is impossible to adequately answer. But in the quote above, the member describes an interest in creatively assessing and embodying witness/audience engagement by implicating him/herself in the active zone of performance. But participation by the witness/audience might also involve a less spatially active engagement. Activation was achieved in multiple ways, by multiple strategies, partly because this is always what an audience will invest in, partly because it was impossible to avoid in the open-plan room, but also partly because this was being specifically invited. The watching scores were a compendium of invitations to the witness/audience, to be accepted or rejected, but also adding another layer of complexity to the experience. At the close of the third night, one participant reflected on both the cards (watching scores) and the progression over the three nights:

*I had a huge problem not to gobble them [the watching scores]...Yeah, there’s just some great material in there...um, helpful and just not helpful...and just like, “oh wow, really?”. And just noticing when and why I*
wanted to have one. Tonight, particularly tonight, what I noticed was the permission to move or be roving, like allowing myself to attend to my physicality, not just be sitting there going...like when you are on the computer you don’t notice if your foot’s gone to sleep or your back can be really hurting because you’re in this thing and I think that often when I attend like that and I end up sitting very, very still for a very, very long time I can disassociate from my body very well and at the same time not, so it was it was really nice tonight to go “I need to move” And in keeping alive to my own physical state, it made me notice a lot more where I was adding my attending, where I was adding my noticing, when had I left my own body. When my body asked that it needed something...because of myself; or what I was watching, without having to be an active witness, or, you know, feel I wanted to join you or anything like that...To just be more alive to so much more of myself as a viewer because I had permission to go beyond sitting in a chair.

The sense of witness/audience activation was possible, at least for some members. But multiple, other issues were also alive. Prompted by one of the watching scores, one member asked whether watching with a non-judgmental disposition was ever entirely possible, saying:

Tonight I picked a card right at the start that says “you are invited to witness without judgment” and that kind of just gave me something for the entire duration. So I think, like, the first night I came and I was going through a few cards and my attention was really on you guys, not so much the other people in the room. And I was using the cards to kind of feed what I was watching...the movers. And then last time I got a card that said “everyone in the room is in this fucking dance”37 and that made me watch everybody else in the room and I kind of wasn’t as interested in you guys. I was kind of watching people in the audience. And then tonight I found myself not really paying...I was paying a lot of attention just not really paying attention at all because I was trying to think about how I would watch something without judgment. Like it’s kind of impossible...Yeah, so I found that tonight was not actually about you guys, and not about the audience but about myself. And I found myself just trying to figure out whether maybe I could not have a judgment, whether that’s possible to do...and just trying to be with my own thoughts.

As well as the conventional relationship between performer and audience, a triangulation between dancers, witness/audience and ‘witnesses watching witnesses’ became possible. Indeed the question of whether this event actually constituted a performance, or whether it constituted choreography, was raised by different witness/audience members. The performance itself was in question (or perhaps more acutely the question of a performance of a question). However, by the third night the respective roles had become more clearly defined. The

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37 This is a quote from Miguel Gutierrez's program notes which I used as one of the watching scores.
event took on a more clearly delineated character, despite still sitting between performance and a mode of ontological questioning. One witness/audience member articulates this experience of liminality:

And I was thinking that any work that has...and I use the word detachment...you know, it’s seeking a non-performance or a non-attractiveness. It’s not seeking to attract me. Nobody seems to be seeking to attract each other. Or get attached to anything or anybody, therefore detachment...has as much need in it as works of, you know, attachment and attractiveness. And perhaps they need as much hard work, craft, in the run up before and as much during the performances because between the first day and today there’s a world of difference. And one of the differences that everybody seems to be knowing in the crude language...using a crude word...everybody seems to be knowing their job. And obviously nobody was doing their job which was the joy and the light of this. And therefore what was my craft, as a witness? What did I, even in these two days, move to? ...The difference between the first and the third day was enormous for me. In terms of craft and in terms of being and in terms of freedom...the amount of freedom you could all breathe in and experience. And that brought me to one of the cards which said “what’s going on here?”...is a question we aren’t able to ask of survival in our families, you know. And that’s such a critical question, because I said, “oh, I can ask that here,...now”. Not only can I ask this here, now, also I can just get up and change my position and find a way to get closer to it. And then I thought, you know, the performance itself feels like a question. The performance, the work itself, is the framing of a question. And therefore maybe the answer is maybe another performance. That itself was exciting to come to.

By the third iteration then, more clarity about the ‘job’ of all participants, with associated ‘work’, was in evidence. Witness/audience members seemed more willing to utilise the malleability and reflexivity of the event in personally determined ways and satisfy their own interests or pursue their own experiments. They also seemed cognizant that their interests in this situation, the activeness or disposition with which they attended to these or towards the dancing, became direct contributions and relations to the whole. Accordingly this was a more communally creative experience, within a specific set of rules, but which invited a shared creation of meaning. Any such meanings were aired and debated in the

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38 The watching score being referred to read as follows: This practice seems to hark back to the cut and thrust of growing up and family life. Andre Green makes the point that kids grow up in situations where in the swirl of parental relationships, activities, expectations and desires most issues never get articulated or clarified. How often do kids get to ask, “What’s going on?” ”What does this mean to me?” or “How do I feel about this?” And they are constantly being watched as well. When they are older, kids have to figure out what or how much was left unsaid by their parents. Perhaps authenticity, if there is such a thing, involves being in the grip of something about which you don’t have full understanding, and honestly noticing your responses. Perhaps it means being honest to the situation, like the family situation, in which you find yourself? (Mover Witness Dyad Journal)
discussion component, which emerged as central to bringing into critical or emotional perspective, how the various participants responded, related to or understood the experience. Participation became an accumulating force directed towards both the immanent unfolding of the event and its future re-engagement; to find out how the next iteration would be different, and consequently towards a reformulation as prompted by this difference. This also strongly de-centralized the position of the dancers. In contrast to the studio practice of the MWD, in performance, the centrality and focus towards our dancing and presence was diluted by the confluence with the third point in the triangulation: dancer, witness and thirdly, participating audience.

(Peter Fraser and members of the witness/audience)
A Dancer’s Experience in Performance

The strength and multiplicity of the witness/audience’s responses, brought out in the subsequent discussions, are echoed in the situation of the dancers. However, the performance effectively marked a culmination of the developmental practice of improvisation for the dancers, which initiated this project in the first instance. As much as the hybrid performance opened up new possibilities, it also impacted on the designated aims of the studio practice of the MWD. The ‘detachment’ of the dancers, about which the above witness/audience member spoke, was a result of the transmigration of the ethos of MWD paradigm into a performance context. The MWD asks the mover to respond to his/her own impulses with eyes closed, without responding to visual perception, in the presence of a single witness. In our studio practice we moved for long periods with our eyes closed, with sight unable to dictate our direction and command of the space. Because of this, the experience of space became an imaginary one for me, an internal ‘fiction’ of limitless distance, or of comforting enclosure, or of the felt, kinaesthetic space within the body itself. Immersed in this free association, my sense of space bore no relationship to the external organisation of the room, or the people in it. Assessments about how to situate oneself in relation to people or spaces became largely irrelevant. In performance however, the intimacy that is created between a (single) witness and mover was achievable only intermittently, and as a consequence a degree of the ‘spaciousness’ of the practice was compromised. Unselfconscious inhabitation of states (of feeling or imagination), which in the studio were often accompanied by abandonment to one’s free association, was less accessible.

Allan Kaprow refers to the discipline required to avoid “artistic attachments” and the “highly sophisticated habits” these entail so as to allow innovations to emerge (Kaprow 2002: 260-261). Being confronted by our artistic attachments, our habits, was a constant occurrence in the studio practice. These included the habits of movement, rhythm and tone; the orientation of body position toward a perceived audience; and movement with aesthetic allegiances that might be construed as beautiful or humorous. It is difficult not to enact these habits, that is, to instinctively enact what is ‘known’ in the immediacy of improvised performance. Yet by embedding the ‘eyes closed’ attitude of the MWD into the score my habitualised responses to performance were interrupted. In a sense I became ‘detached’ from the traditional or perceived ‘obligation’ towards an audience (to satisfy, interest or

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39 All of the dancers offered deeply committed and insightful contributions to both the process and the performance. But despite this, in the interests of some clarity and much brevity I will discuss the performance only from my own position, without the variability offered by the other dancers. An intricate examination of the differences or commonalities between the dancers is a task for another occasion.
entertain them), towards other dancers, the space or the composition of the event.

Without sight in this performance, my relationship towards witness/audience mutated into a blend of the MWD experiences with my personal performance experiences. I did not experience the witness/audience’s presence in the same way as the unselfconscious acceptance of a witness. Nor did the performance compel me to utilise my habitualised ‘skill’ as a performer towards an audience, with accompanying knowledge about how this relation could be enacted. I could not always apply the interpersonal ‘skill’ of improvisation, that is, to ‘pick up’ on possible connections between myself and other dancers or with the audience. For example, potentially humorous references, or the development of movement ‘motifs’, were unable to be readily shared.
amongst the dancers (in the hope that the audience would also share these connections). Restricted to responding to my own somatic experience, the obligation or opportunity to knowingly ‘attract’ the audience (or other dancers), as part of the theatrical imperative to ‘command’ audience engagement, was diminished.\textsuperscript{40} This was perhaps unwittingly akin to Yvonne Rainer’s deliberate strategy in \textit{Trio A}, in which each “performer not only avoids the gaze of the performer but is absorbed in monitoring the workings of his or her respective body parts rather than engaging with whoever may be performing at the same time” (Rainer 2010: 50). In my case however I was attending to shifts in affective free association, which at times gave me a more psychologically inflected presence, than Rainer’s sustained “cool absorption”. Yet I was very aware of the witness/audience’s presence.

To reiterate my thinking about Straus: conventional theatrical performance maintains a specific ‘directional system’ in relation to the audience. When I practice the MWD in the studio I lose any relationship to this system, that is to an audience. Without sight of the room I cannot fully orient myself to the room, nor perceive how I am situated in relation to those watching or to the other dancers. In \textit{this} performance the loss of directional stability was also evident. I could not (theatrically) ‘face front’ or relationally interact because these relations were difficult to visually discern.\textsuperscript{41} But I also reverted to a conscious awareness of other people because of the presence and sounds of such a large group. The intimate safety of the studio practice was replaced in performance by a relationship with this much larger cohort. For me this came with a more self-conscious awareness of complexity and co-presence and consequently, emergent questions were ‘listened to’ with a less innocent sensibility. I could \textit{hear} the activity of the witness/audience and this gave me a great deal of information. At certain moments those watching fleetingly felt like a conventional audience (rather than witnesses in the MWD) such that the spectre of judgment emerged as a forceful presence, and creating a degree of self-consciousness. At other times I perceived those watching as too unpredictable in their movement to engender the sense of ‘safety’ experienced in the studio practice of the MWD. It became easier and safer to improvise freely when I could see others in the room, however indistinctly, so avoiding the pressing sense that others were (too) close. I did not ‘lose myself’, in what Simone Forti calls “the dance state” or what Straus calls the “ecstasy” of dance, as often as I might in the studio practice. Notably I did so more effectively in the performance when my eyes were open. In this sense the conditions of the MWD were not fully reproduced in performance. But to make this the singular objective is to miss the point; hybridity creates its own conditions.

\textsuperscript{40} See Erika Fischer-Lichte’s article on the concepts of strong or weak presence in performance for a discussion of how the performer ‘commands’ audience attention (Fischer-Lichte 2012).

\textsuperscript{41} Even in mobile, spatially open performance contexts, this imperative to ‘face’ the audience, or be ‘in relation’ to other dancer’s requires consideration.
The quality of detachment lingered. Even when dancing with eyes open my gaze was generally diffuse and peripheral. I rarely focused directly on people, things or places, and so my gaze was not utilized as a tool to indicate, direct, or ‘attract’ the witness/audience’s attention. My awareness was scanning for emergent sensory ‘aliveness’ with which I could freely associate. As such I was less inclined to direct myself toward a specific ‘other’ (a person, a direction, an intention, an energy) than toward the multiple, emergent questions floating up from an internal landscape of possibility. Such internal scanning is analogous to ‘listening’, but through the body, and to be listening, as Jean-Luc Nancy tells us, “...is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity, and as if the sound were precisely nothing else than this edge, this fringe, this margin” (Nancy 2007: 7). To witness someone caught at ‘the edge of meaning’ is also to be implicated in this process. Whether for dancer or witness/audience, the mutating ‘edge’ in this event was of the participant’s attention; its strength or weakness, it’s commitment, its waxing and waning, its presence or absence. As discussed earlier, Erwin Straus states that music creates the space of dance. But I would argue that the ‘listening’ I do in (silent) improvisation equates to listening to music - the musicality of my body free from external influence – and which creates the same spatial orientation.

If we follow the idea of ‘listening’ with the body, the terms of Body Mind Centering (BMC) are useful in making a distinction between ‘sensing’ and ‘feeling’ when moving. ‘Sensing’, as Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen defines it, is connected to the nervous system through the perceptions. ‘Feeling’ on the other hand implicates the fluid system in the body, including the circulatory, lymphatic and cerebral-spinal fluids (Cohen 2008: 64). Different situations elicit different combinations of these factors usually in ways of which we remain unaware. When initiating movement, either through deliberative emphasis or unselfconscious involvement, different qualities of movement emerge, depending on whether one is emphasizing (or caught up in) sensing or feeling. ‘Sensing’ movement involves strong activation of the weight receptors and movement perceptors – aspects which potentially inhibit movement if my body senses danger or assesses unfamiliarity (Cohen 2008: 65). If I walk in a room crowded with objects with my eyes closed, for example, I immediately slow down to counter the potential harm. Sensing arrests ‘flow’ but delivers insight. Feeling movement involves more ‘fluidity’; the trust that the movement is achievable and my body can abandon itself to its activity. In BMC terms, feeling is connected to emotional states; the sensing has dropped away, no longer necessary, and so an unselfconscious state is achieved.

**Conclusion**

In this event both sensing and feeling are central to the explorations we were involved in, whether with our eyes closed or open, but without an aspiration to ‘achieve’ one state over the other. It would be disingenuous to say that a consistency of unselfconscious attention (or even reverie as
the quality of being consumed by that state of attention) were not valued by us as dancers and that the performance did not interrupt our ability to achieve this state. But upon reflection, why should uninterrupted attention, and the abandonment to its imaginative offerings (states normally associated with skill, ease, positive affect or unselfconsciousness), be seen as more valuable to the experimental situation of the dance performance than caution or anxiety? These ‘negative’ states also throw up relevant questions about the nature of coexistence, co-presence and interpersonal dynamics. To maintain the ethos of the MWD, in other words, if the hierarchical valuing of particular states over others is not emphasized in the MWD, then there should be no attempts to achieve certain states over others in the performance.

In this sense the improvisational basis of the MWD aligns with a broader attitude towards improvisation. ‘Pushing’ to achieve a particular state in improvisation is often seen as counter-productive, a potential denial of the fundamental premise of the form: to openly accept and work with what emerges in the moment. In reflecting on Ruth Zaporah’s warning against reaching for an attentional ideal, Kent De Spain says:

*If your attention isn’t ideal, use the attention you have. If you are distracted do a distracted improvisation. The pursuit of any ideal in improvisation seems like a fast track towards trying to “make things happen,” and making things happen is truly exhausting. It pulls you out of awareness, blocking receptivity to what is happening. (DeSpain 2014: 171)*

This performance event was never intended to give particular prominence to the experiences of the dancers over the experiences of the witness/audience. We were not the experience presented for consumption by the witness/audience. The witness/audience was no less active than the dancers in creating this event. All participants were experimenting within a system of exchange that originated in the MWD and which emphasized pathic participation. The attentive ‘listening’ of the dancers was matched by the opportunities for active, attentive discernment offered to the witness/audience. The performance’s emphasis on pathic engagement gave way to the gnostic reflexivity of the group discussions. These conversations became a significant structural element that brought into focus many of the different types of attunement that were being experimented with. Giving voice to what had happened helped steer the event, defining its unfolding directions, interests, qualities, tactics and limits over the three nights of the performance.
Chapter Six: Towards a Form of Participatory Performance

Introduction

Uncertainly balanced on a line between performance and personal or private movement practice, this event’s primary allegiance was to the experimenting and experiencing at heart of the MWD. The performance was attributed to my PhD project, but was untitled; in a sense, the event was faceless, without overt choreographic identity. Choreographic identity in contemporary dance has been associated with the specific movement sensibility of an individual choreographer as an “écriture” (Louppe 2010: 179-180). In keeping with its basis in improvisation, this performance did not involve predetermined movement characteristics or values. Nor did I as ‘leader’ of the group of dancers dictate how, when or why they should move. As dancers we had practised for three years in relation to a witness and this relation was foundational for the performance. The performance as such was awaiting identification because this could only come into being through the activation of a generative system that involved both performers and witness/audience. The content and character of each of the iterations was systematically generated only through the considered mutuality between these groups. Definition of what this system produced - its becoming - was reflexively and contestably brought into being through the structured negotiations of the group. Thus the group discerned, identified or emphasized particular aspects of the event, shaping these into a joint envisaging of its defining features: its behaviour, energetics, meanings, values and problems.

As performers, the other dancers and I were not attempting, at the level of our movement values or styles of performance, to compose the event or make our actions cohere in any way. We were not attempting to observe how the qualities we were manifesting might relate to what the other dancers were doing. By being indifferent to each other the notion of “emergent choreography” sometimes applied to improvisation was not explored. But if the other dancers or I remained detached from the compositional or choreographic process, how can I claim this as a work of dance art? In fact, what I attempted to do was to frame the pre-reflective situation of the MWD as performance; a performance that being grounded in affective experience remained within the pre-choreographic sphere. But to say that the performance was pre-choreographic is not the same as saying it lacked aesthetic attributes - attributes that could render

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42 The event did have a predetermined timeframe and an established venue. It was also framed by the nature of the invitations, who was invited and the by distribution of the Watching Scores.
43 Dance artist Nina Martin, for example, has devised a practice for dancers improvising in groups called Ensemble Thinking. This practice is designed to direct each dancer away from purely private or exclusionary involvement with movement and toward their role in the larger frame of the group improvisation (DeSpain 2014: 100-101).
the event as (art) performance even if potentially on different terms to those of choreography.

My reflections here can be elaborated in relation to what Gernot Böhme (1993), in his critique of traditional aesthetics, called ‘atmosphere’. Böhme argues that the traditional conception of aesthetic theory in the visual arts was narrowly concerned with art criticism’s determinations of what constitutes good or bad art. “The old aesthetics is essentially a judgmental aesthetics” (Böhme 1993: 114). Aesthetic theory was not concerned with sensuous experience but with clarifying the objective “determinations” of the work of art (Böhme 1993: 120). Consequently the form or colour of a work, for example, are qualities which might distinguish it, separate it from an ‘outside’ and provide internal unity, thus allowing it to be viewed as objectively consistent. “The thing is usually conceived”, says Böhme, “in terms of its closure” (Böhme 1993: 120). Determinations about the distinctive qualities the artwork possessed were also related to the artist’s intentional attribution of meaning, and judgment was posited on the work’s merits as they related to (normative) aesthetic categories or values such as beauty or the sublime. Traditional aesthetics involved a ‘subject-object dichotomy’ whereas Böhme’s “atmosphere is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived” who, or which, are not self-enclosed objects (Böhme 1993: 122). If we view choreography (as the dominant manifestation of what might be called art dance) from the point of view of traditional aesthetics, then the dance work is ‘determined’ by certain qualities, such as the patterning of dancers in space, the line and shape of the dancers’ bodies, or their movement dynamics. These are determined as fixed attributes such that the choreography can be repeated in the same way each time. It is upon these attributes that the work is judged, and in the repeated performance of these attributes that we can ask whether the work exists as an objective entity. But Böhme suggests a new way to conceive of aesthetic engagement that takes into account the existential presence of both things and people so that their presence is openly and indeterminately available to perceptibility. To articulate this point, Böhme states:

The blueness of [a] cup is...thought of not as something which is restricted in some way to the cup and adheres to it, but on the contrary as something which radiates out to the environment of the cup, colouring or “tincturing” in a certain way this environment...The existence of the cup is already contained in this conception of the quality “blue”, since the blueness is a way of the cup being there, an articulation of its presence, the way or

44 This aesthetic approach is more readily applicable to forms of choreography that give prominence to the visual, that is, to the work being seen as a whole from a particular position (usually) in the theatre. Dancing that has been shaped as a choreographic determination such that its boundaries and limits (movements, timing, spatial pathways, dancer relations etc.) have been predetermined. It does not so readily relate to more physically, spatially or temporally open-ended, non-limited approaches to dancing and dance making.
manner of its presence. In this way the thing is not thought of in terms of its difference from other things, its separation and unity, but in the ways in which it goes forth from itself. I have introduced for these ways of going forth the expression “the ecstacies of the thing”. (Böhme 1993: 121)

Similarly, the presence of people can radiate into the environment, taking away “the homogeneity of the surrounding space” and filling it with “tensions and suggestions of movement” (Böhme 1993: 121). Whether in a work of art, or in other aesthetic situations, atmospheres are the manifestations of such presences; as that which go forth as the ecstasies of things, as well as that which is created by the sensuous experiences of people (in their perceptive, thus bodily, capacities), and resulting in ‘atmospheric’ constellations. These atmospheres belong neither solely to the thing (the work of art or thing) nor solely to the receiver (audience) but nor do they “float freely”. On the contrary, an atmosphere exists “as something that proceeds from and is created by things, persons or their constellations” (Böhme 1993: 122). Böhme contends the atmosphere is ‘made’ “through work on an object” (Böhme 1993: 123). If so, then in the case of this performance the object exists within, or as, the relationship between the mover and the witness/audience. The work, for both performers and witness/audience, was on how to mindfully improvise within the exchange and this work created the atmosphere(s) that emerged in these relationships.

In Böhme’s conception, atmospheres are the ontological conditions upon which a new aesthetics should be founded. The atmosphere is the common reality of the perceiver and the perceived. “It is the reality of the perceived as the sphere of its presence and the reality of the perceiver, insofar as in sensing the atmosphere s/he is bodily present in a certain way” (Böhme 1993: 122). Performance making using the ontology of the atmosphere need not be about the work instantiating specific, predetermined qualities but in finding ways for an event “to go forth from itself in a certain fashion and thereby make the presence of something perceptible” (Böhme 1993: 122). This is a condition of emergence in a temporal and spatial situation that potentially understands the atmospheric constellation between perceiver and perceived as the work itself.

By attempting to ontologically frame the ethos of the MWD as a performance I was emphasizing the emergent nature of this practice, (and not the potential emergence of choreographic properties); but what emerged was aesthetic in Böhme’s terms as the creation of atmosphere, a synthetic relation between perceiver and perceived (perception and being perceived could be run in both directions in that the dancers were perceived by the witness/audience and vice versa). The performance was an atmospheric situation suggestive of therapeutic care and the improvised bodily-perceived interactions between movers and witness/audience. If this was the overall atmosphere or ‘climate’ then many microclimates also emerged (and dissipated) within the larger
climatic conditions. In this sense it was the indeterminate fluctuations of embodied perception and presence that created the event.

Böhme also states: “This synthetic function of atmosphere is at the same time the legitimation of the particular forms of speech in which an evening is called melancholy or a garden serene” (Böhme 1993: 122). The property of “serenity” is available to both perceiver and perceived (serenity goes forth from the garden as well as being my feeling of serenity when in the garden). But the main point here is that the “forms of speech”, which might render the experience of atmosphere intelligible, are also, as Böhme sees it, part of the work of defining the new aesthetics and what it might mean in different situations. All situations are different and therefore elicit different atmospheres with potentially different meanings. Equally each evening’s iteration of the performance created a different atmosphere from the others. In this way the discussion component, which occurred after the moving, should also be considered an important part of situating, and rendering as intelligible, the event’s aesthetic dimensions. It was in these discussions that (potentially) all participants could articulate the implications and manifestations of the atmospheric constellations from their positions within the situation. ‘Giving language’ to what occurred, or how the event was perceived, clarified the tacit nature of relations within the event. This was also a function of the Watching Scores; a language-based strategy designed to ontologically frame the event.

Dance, Performance and the Participating Audience

Böhme concept of atmosphere speaks to the role of audience as ‘participants’ in the event that culminated my PhD research. Because participation by audiences in performance has more recently become such a prominent theme in dance, theatre and performance art – including, for example, through the discourses undertaken around such work by writers including Nicolas Bourriaud, Claire Bishop and Jacques Rancière45 - I will take brief excursions into three specific approaches to ‘participation’ that have helped me to think through the implications and values of my work.46 Engaging audience participation is a broad endeavour with a multitude of approaches and outcomes and therefore something which may not be possible to contain within a single conceptual framework. But broadly speaking the artists “aim for theatre [dance or performance] that goes beyond entertainment and concept/message communication”, and directly and immediately involves audiences in the outcomes or “message making” of the work (Kattwinkel 2003: x). While this is relatively new as a self-conscious emphasis in art practices, dating to the late 1960s, the notion of a polite, quietly receptive

45 See Nicolas Bourriaud’s Relational Aesthetics (Bourriaud 2002), Claire Bishop’s Artificial Hells. Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship (Bishop 2012) and Jacques Rancière’s The Emancipated Spectator (Rancière 2011)

46 While this discussion attempts to briefly compare and reposition dance amongst other art forms, I identify this as a dance project.
Audience is also relatively recent developing as a late-19th century phenomenon (Kattwinkel 2003: v).

In dance, audience engagement also has its own particular historical and contemporary formulations some of which I review very briefly here. Modern dance participated in the modernist interest of other art mediums in isolating and manipulating the expressive dimensions of the medium itself - that is the movement - rather than mimesis. Responding to the primary place given to movement (over narrative or representational) values by modern dance choreographers in the 1930’s, the dance critic John Martin formulated his influential theory of the audience being engaged by dance through the embodied transmission of kinesthetic experience or what he called “the movement sense”.47 Through empathetic correspondence transmitted through the dancer’s movement, the audience’s experience kinesthetically ‘mirrors’ that of the dancers (Reynolds 2012: 123). This notion has been criticized on the basis that it ‘universalizes’ experience and therefore diminishes the particularities and importance of difference in human experience. (Foster 2011: 3) But interest in kinesthetic empathy in dance has also recently been rekindled because of the research generated in neuroscience. The research has been into the ‘mirror neuron’ system, “the workings of which appear to parallel the embodied imitation that is central to kinesthetic empathy, and for which it may provide a ‘neural substrate’” (Reynolds 2012: 123).

Feminist critics of dance have discussed and proposed dance’s capacity or potential to communicate differently with respect to scopic representational regimes. In the 1970’s, feminist discourse coming out of film theory, posited ‘the male gaze’ in which the position of spectator was a masculine position of power and control.48 “The one who is looked at – the performer who puts her/himself on display for the spectator – is a passive, traditionally female position” (Daly 1993: 5). According to this theory, representations of women in film are created to satisfy the erotic desires of a male viewer, a situation that threw into question the very notion of representation. Non-representational dance, something which

47 In his book The Modern Dance, originally published in 1933, Martin articulates his theory of the kinesthetic transference by stating:

*Through kinesthesia, any bodily movement arouses a sympathetic reaction in the mind of the spectator. If it is a representational movement, the spectator recognizes it at once because in performing the same action he has utilized the same movement. If it is non-representational, the same process holds true. The maker of the movement has a purpose, an intention, in making the movement; the movement is transferred in effect by kinesthetic sympathy to the muscles of the spectator, and because he is used to associating movement with intention, he arrives by induction at the intention of the particular movement under consideration; it is inconceivable that any bodily movement should be made without intention, even if that intention is nothing more than to make a movement without intention.* (Martin 1989: 85)

48 See Laura Mulvey’s seminal article ‘Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema’ (Mulvey 1975).
has been pursued in contemporary dance since the 1960's, and the kind of look it might engender, has been seen as an alternative to film's objectification of women for male erotic consumption:

*In film, where the concept of the male gaze originated, the performer is flat on a piece of celluloid: in dance, the performer is live. How does that affect the dynamics of the male gaze? Is the male gaze then more vulnerable to being dismantled when the performer is live? How can a dancer – who fundamentally displays her/his body for the viewer – avoid being objectified? Does dance create a literal and metaphorical space in which spectator and performer can share the dance together, on equal terms, rather than the one serving her/himself up for the other?* (Daly 1993: 5)

Certainly Dempster has argued that modern dance practices have implies a haptic space that disrupts or ‘revisions’ the scopic contract (Dempster 1993: 9).

With a different political emphasis, Alexandra Kolb has also examined early 21st century dance practices that have solicited audience participation in more direct ways. Experiments by dancers have been part of the recent interest across art disciplines in audience participation and many artists have claimed a politically disruptive status for their performances. Kolb disputes this for many dance performances, critiquing “the aesthetic and political stances of such works, [and] questioning the rhetoric of many of their practitioners and commentators who suggest that they are liberatory, transgressive and challenging to the societal and/or artistic status quo” (Kolb 2013: 32). Instead Kolb suggests these dance projects might also equally be understood in terms of the selling of “experience” as a function of the modern market economy, rather than as an engagement with democracy (to which many performance and dance works aspired in the 1960’s and 1970’s) (Kolb 2013: 31-48).

Another precedent through which audience-performance relationships are theorized and which can provide insight into the sociality of the performance event of my project is the practice and performance of contact improvisation. Below, I examine my project’s rapport with contact improvisation; how contact improvisation brings understanding to audience engagement in my project, and in order to throw light on the interactions between improvisation, choreography and performance. I go on to examine Claire Bishop’s notion of “delegated performance”; a conceptualization of the “collective body” invoked by certain performance artists from the visual arts tradition. Finally I will discuss Victor Turner’s anthropological model of theatre as a contemporary derivative of ritual practices found in tribal societies. These references to practices in dance, performance art and theatre have been chosen for their value for thinking about my project as both distinctive and relating to contemporary developments in performance.
Contact Improvisation

While the similarities between this performance event and Contact Improvisation are limited, Contact Improvisation (CI) in performance does possess particular attributes which also manifest in my project. Clearly CI’s physical premise of sharing body weight to generate movement is absent in this event. But both CI and this performance event share values and performance intentions which are significant. Informed by the ethos of the MWD but substantiated through emergent improvised dancing and active witnessing the (semi)public performance event that we created developed a performative, rather than choreographic identity. The work eschewed formal and crafted movement for presentation to an audience - even within an improvised context.\(^4^9\) A formal, crafted approach to improvisation might amount to, if not a choreographic intention, then certainly a conscious performative “intentionality” that considers audience reception (understood in a more traditional sense). Despite important differences, this performance had values more in common with the performance of CI than the kind of improvised performance that is directly linked to the sensibility of a particular artist-performer. As Cynthia Novack points out, CI has lacked many of traditional modern dance’s concerns “with the choreographic shaping of movement materials or with the explicit expression of ideas or emotions” (Novack 1990: 11). CI has been much more directed towards the physical connection between the dancers, “the action which results from the sensations of touch and weight” (Novack 1990: 11).

CI is deeply informed by Western ethical and cultural understandings about participation and communal involvement. As an improvised partnering form practised in groups of dancers who mingle and connect in duets, trios and groups, the dancing is co-created through a dynamic, mutual, giving and receiving of body weight between dancers. Performances are created only, and by physical necessity, through a joint process of attentive, responsive observation of the point of touch between two partners’ bodies, that conterminously and spontaneously determines the “third force” of the dance itself (Novack 1990: 189). At the same time, states Novack, in improvising, each performer unifies the roles of choreographer and dancer, whereby each dancer is free to make individual (but mutually interdependent) choices in relation to the whole. Spontaneity is valued as an ideological alternative to the predetermination of traditional modern dance. “Spontaneity signifies that the dancing is ‘real’, ‘playful’, and ‘natural’ joining the making of art to everyday action” (Novack 1990: 191).

\(^4^9\) That is to say, many improvisers intentionally look for structure and the development of movement motifs within their performances and as such conceive of their performances as choreographic entities. Kent De Spain discusses this search for coherence as “intentionality” rather than as choreographic intention. (DeSpain 2014: 68-72)
There are many different beliefs about and approaches to improvisation, but, as Novack notes, improvisation is often dichotomized: “two major, often conflicting, polarities are evident, one aligned with the modern dance tradition in its emphasis on composition and intentional structuring, the other placed outside the boundaries of traditional art, with emphasis on behavior and personal impulse” (Novack 1990: 192). It is arguably the latter that is more evident in CI with its risky physical and psychological encounters. It is also the “collective endeavor” which distances the practice from the “expressive individualism” of the traditional modern dance choreographer (Novack 1990: 192). Indeed, Novack made the claim (in 1990) that “ideological prohibitions against making conscious decisions or “imposing” one’s own beliefs on others are responsible to some degree for the lack of development of contact improvisation itself into a more frequently occurring performance form” (Novack 1990: 218).

The performer-audience relationship is also pivotal to the manner in which meaning is created through the form. The practice maintains a tacit inclusion of the audience based on the close proximity to the performers, seating in the round, lack of formal stage space and the presentation of “contact jam” conditions (minimal lighting, low production values, performing in “warm up” clothes rather than costumes) (Novack 1990: 122). Dancers avoid movements which are easily associated with established dance techniques, despite generating athletic, fluid movements that are specific to CI. But the dancer is seen as being “just a person” with an idiosyncratic, “behavioural” presence, which allows for “everyday” movements (scratching, coughing, laughing, adjusting clothing), alongside the dynamic surprises of CI. This creates an atmosphere of informality and communality between performers and audience. The sometimes, boisterous energy of performances seems equally shared by performers and audiences alike, amounting to an implicit participation by the audience in the spirit of the event (Novack 1990: 122-123). In early, pre-1976 CI performances the spirit of group participation and interaction between performers and audience was especially pronounced. Dance artist Lisa Nelson reflects on her experiences of these early performances:

*The feeling was of a real shared experience among performers and audience, a tremendous feeling of physical accessibility between performers and audience. ...It was a very, very impressive postperformance state, extremely energized. There was something that unified everybody.* (Nelson in Novack 1990: 72-73)

Both CI and the performance practice emerging from my research are underpinned by ethical considerations that challenge conventional aesthetic relationships. There was no ‘choreographer’ with all participants, movers or witnesses, free to make their own choices within the event, even as these choices contributed to or had an effect on the whole. Most importantly perhaps, the partnering which is crucial to CI
could be said to having been matched by the partnership between mover and witness. Given my request for a non-judgmental attitude from the witness/audience, and the fact that the movers, at times, had their eyes closed, the situation potentially entailed a way of attending and being with others that would engender trust, similar to what is required in a CI duet or jam.

In fact, our performance became the actvity of multiple partnerships (that might also extend into trios or group activities) but with a “third force” of the performance – its plurality of ‘atmospheres’ - existing as a collective endeavour. The MWD’s emphasis on free association also incorporates spontaneity with the equivalently playful and everyday presence of the movers, who participated as “people” as much as “performers”. The actions of the movers might be seen as dancing but might also be regarded as “behaviour”. Similarly, both CI and our performance allow for what might be perceived by an audience, as moments where ‘nothing much happened’. Searching, waiting, noticing, the banal everyday gesture, and stillness – these all had a place within the therapeutic ethos of the MWD and our performance. This was comparable to the emphasis (or necessity) in CI “to focus intensively on the moving point of contact between two bodies and the concomitant and unpredictable unfolding of movement produced by that focus” (Foster 2011: 3). Both forms give priority to values other than compositional and choreographic coherence as conventionally understood - allowing the ebbs and flows of energy or activity are part of the fundamental premise.

Despite the openness of spatial arrangements in the performance it did lack the informality of performer-audience relations that, according to Novack, characterized early CI performances. Witness/audience participation was made explicit rather than implicit in my performance and it gave prominence first to emergence (through free association), and then to reflexivity (through group discussion). The ambience or ‘energy in the room’ was quite different for the witness/audience to the ‘buzz’ sometimes transmitted by the physical risk of a CI performance. Yet there was an enthusiastic sense of the event having been shared and created by all participants – of a group spirit - even if the different roles called for different types of participation.

**Delegated performance**

The experimental performance event of my research can also be understood in terms of the notion of ‘delegated performance’. Indeed, it is here that I acknowledge the important role and contribution of all of my collaborators: both the dancers and the witness/audience.

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50 The reflexivity generated through discussion perhaps shares more with Al Wunder’s model of teaching performance improvisation in which post-performance ‘feedback’ is a structural component of his classes. In this model performers are asked to articulate prominent aspects of their experience of performing, and then in return, receive feedback from those watching. See chapter three for discussion of Wunder’s teaching.
In her 2012 book *Artificial Hells*, Claire Bishop charts the historical and conceptual parameters of participatory art practices, mainly from theatre and emerging into the visual arts sphere. The intense interest performance art has shown toward the activation of the audience has been structured around particular themes. Bishop cites these themes as “...the tension between quality and inequality, singular and collective authorship, and the ongoing struggle to find artistic equivalents for political positions” (Bishop 2012: 3). Fundamental to any attempts to reconcile these tensions has been the embodied encounter between performer and audience, as framed by specific contexts. Bishop notes a recent shift away from the attention on the artist’s own body that marked the physically and psychologically transgressive practices of the late 1960’s/early 1970’s and toward creations which use the skills and presence of participants other than the artist him/herself. Bishop calls this “delegated performance” in that the artist outsources the position and agency of performer to a group of ‘non-artists’. The trend marks a modification of the valorization of the artist’s own body in performance to situations in which “this presence is no longer attached to a single performer but instead to the collective body of the social group” (Bishop 2012: 219). A kind of ‘delegated performance’ had a place in post-modern dance with artists such as Twyla Tharp, Steve Paxton and Yvonne Rainer, and more recently Lucy Guerin, for example, creating works where the (non)performers performed as themselves or followed instructions. Delegated performance in Bishop’s terms differs from theatre or dance in that an artist hires people from various social groups or situations to ‘perform’ their own socio-economic identifications such as race, class, gender, disability and age. In situations of “live installation” the artist critically frames the identity of these participants while allowing them some room for some spontaneity and agency, and so the sense of ‘authenticity’ within the performance. “Today’s delegated performance still places a high value on immediacy, but if it has a transgressive character this tends to derive from the perception that artists are exhibiting and exploiting other subjects” (Bishop 2012: 223). Such works have prompted vigorous debates about the ethical implications of these kinds of representations.

Bishop cites several examples, such as Italian artist Maurizio Cattelan’s 1991 work which gathered together a team of North African immigrants to play in a local Italian football league (they lost all their games). “Their shirts were emblazoned with the name of a fictional sponsor RAUSS: the German word for “get out”, as in the phrase *Ausländer raus*, or ‘foreigners out’” (Bishop 2012: 221). Spanish artist Santiago Sierra’s performances involved low-paid workers, which they initially produced but later developed into the display itself. His work *250cm Line Tattooed on 6 Paid People*, involved six young men who paid to have a line sequentially tattooed across their back, standing shoulder to shoulder in a performance that foregrounded “the economic conditions on which the installations depend” (Bishop 2012: 222).
Another strand of delegated performance involves hiring experts or professionals from fields outside of the visual arts. Here Bishop describes the work of Allora and Calzadilla who hired professional opera singers or pianists to perform in gallery situations; or Tino Seghal who hired University professors and students to conduct his speech based “situations”. In these performances the performers are hired not because of their emblematic identities but for their acknowledged expertise. Accordingly, this type of work has attracted less ethical controversy and ready acceptance by public galleries for its appeal and repeatability. “Critical attention tends to focus on the conceptual frame (which is more often than not instruction-based) and on the specific abilities of the performer or interpreter in question, whose skills are incorporated into the performance as a ready-made” (Bishop 2012: 223-4). Such performances offer less challenge to the economic structures, which also support it through the gallery system, instead opting to highlight the ambiguous inter-relationship between art, labour and commerce (Bishop 2012: 232). Citing the influence of the task-based work of the Judson Church choreographers, Bishop notes the similarity of this type of performance with the collaborative principles of dance and theatre, while still valorizing the individual artist.

Whatever the approach to delegated performance, its aesthetic effect hinges on a balance between the critical frame it establishes and the immediacy or spontaneity that the performers provide:

*Although the artist delegates power to the performer (entrusting them with agency while also affirming hierarchy), delegation is not just a one-way, downward gesture. In turn, the performers also delegate something to the artist: a guarantee of authenticity, through their proximity to everyday social reality, conventionally denied to the artist who deals merely in representations.* (Bishop 2012: 237)

In this situation, Bishops explains, authenticity is not a theoretically debased, ‘singular’ notion, but a highly directed, collective conception that puts individual authorship (or experience) into question. Despite the highly authored situation of the performance, control over the work is partially relinquished to the participants, who, in turn, offer unpredictability and the realism this unpredictability confers (Bishop 2012: 237). “Authenticity is invoked but then questioned and reformulated by the indexical presence of a particular social group, who are both individuated *and* metonymic, live *and* mediated, determined *and* autonomous” (Bishop 2012: 237).

My project intersects with aspects of the delegated performance about which Bishop writes. In many respects the dancers have been free to pursue their own imaginative and physical inclinations, without reference to what my body might be doing. As a group we have been connected through conceptual considerations rather than kinaesthetic
ones. Despite this, the time spent working together in the studio certainly created a collective, implicit agreement about how the group functioned (as discussed in Chapter Four). But it would be possible to claim that the dancers were incorporated into the work as “ready-mades”; that is as dancing identities who moved without reference to my physical or kinaesthetic preferences, but instead, from their own. This was also premised on the fact that all of the dancers were experienced professionals with their own interests and lineages. Certainly they were engaging with the structural, ethical and philosophical parameters of the project as I had established it, and as such it was always clear that this was ‘my project’. But I never made any attempt to adjust, suggest or influence how they should approach the MWD (what they could or should do) and by extension how they approached the performance. In a sense, we as dancers were involved as hybrids: an amalgam between improvising performers (improvisation always assumes that each dancer will create their own movement) and “experts” (dancing experts, ready-mades whose presence and actions are being conceptually framed by the concerns of an individual artist – but who have the potential, of course, to transgress or transcend that frame).

We formed into a collective because of the shared experiences of participating in the MWD and because of discussions which happened at the end of each studio session. In these informal discussions points of understanding were aired, assessed, contested or agreed upon (just as for the witness/audience following our performance). It was this process of moving together without an obligatory reference to each other’s dancing, coupled with the discursive reflexivity which established the implicit ‘rules’ for how we functioned as a group. For example, we rarely used voice during our studio sessions, not because this wasn’t possible, but because it somehow did not seem appropriate in our situation (where in others it might have). Influenced by having our eyes closed, we settled upon certain registers of engagement. But when our eyes were open we still understood the studio sessions as an opportunity to inhabit states we otherwise might not. An example of this was that we all spent significant amounts of time involved in the smallest detail of ‘noticing’ – waving a hand in front of one’s eyes, lying without moving and noticing one’s breathing and so on. The emphasis was on private experimentation and so we developed a respectful distance, not wishing to ‘invade’ if someone was ‘caught up’ in a particular state. Certain idiosyncratic refrains (states, energetic or rhythmic qualities) were returned to again and again by each of us (Jason moving within an ‘atmosphere’ of extreme quietude for long periods of time, for example). I ‘picked up on’ other’s refrains, feeling them and acknowledging them as features of our shared environment without explicitly trying to respond to or assess them. Despite this they must have influenced me.

Just as the dancers can be seen as delegated experts, the performance event also involved ‘delegating’ the audience members with the role of witness and instructed on how to play their role. The witnesses were not
chosen because of their ‘expertise’ (as witnesses) but were invited as interested participants. The combined presence and actions of both dancers and witnesses created a “collective body” through which the performance was enacted. The individual choices and inclinations of each individual, whether mover or witness/audience, were always available to be seen as part of the wider whole, referenced against what else was happening. It was the collective presence of everyone in the room, which consequently determined how all participants responded, and then understood the event. In this sense we became a kind of social group, physically matrixed in space and time, but also reflexively determined through conversation. Authorial agency was “delegated” to all participants despite being set within the conceptual parameters I established. The context did not highlight specificities of identity, nor did it point to implicit connections between art making, consumption and labour. This performance was billed as ‘therapeutic’ in origin and, therefore, as engaging participants in a processual situation involving active, ethical questions about ‘care’ and ‘watching’. This involvement was returned to us as dancers (to influence how we responded), and to me as the artists/researcher, in the determination of what the event was to become.

**Liminality and Ritual Performance**

But how might this event be understood as a contribution to the field of performance in the widest possible sense theatrically speaking? A series of indistinct ‘edges’, or of the sometimes overlapping spaces between things, seem to best define this event; between performance and non-performance, between weak and strong presence, between presence and absence, between performers and witness/audience, between certainty and experiment, between form and indeterminacy, between value and evaluation, between judgment and non-judgment. In the context of theatre and performance, this sense of being between given structures and institutions, and of the transitions across intermediary (social) thresholds, the anthropological writing of Victor Turner provides some clarifying conceptual rigour. Turner’s writing about theatre was aimed at illuminating the ways in which ‘aesthetic’ performance, that is modern forms of performance, might derive their origins in ritual enactment. Performance, believed Turner, might be an agency for social change in which “…individual subjects may become the object of their own awareness, action is evaluative of social systems, and through ‘collective reflexivity’ society is imminent” (StJohn 2008: 7). Turner’s ideas were notably taken up by Richard Schechner in the field of performance studies (StJohn 2008: 2). Drawing on the earlier anthropological work of Arnold Van Gennep, Turner utilizes Van Gennep’s distinction between the processual phases of a *rite de passage* found in tribal or agrarian societies - separation, transition and incorporation – to discuss ritual’s relevance to theatre and performance. The specific rites differ according to the culture, but Van Gennep determined that the triadic schema is usually consistent across societies (Turner 1982: 24-28). The separation stage
delineates sacred space in which ritual initiands spend time apart from secular society and its activity, in ritual preparation for the impending change (to their social status or to the culture’s response to seasonal/cyclic changes such as in agriculture or from war to peace, plague to health etc.). The next phase, of transition, involves the ritual subjects passing through a period of “ambiguity”, held in “social limbo which has few (though sometimes these are the most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane or cultural states” (Turner 1982: 24). The final stage involves a symbolic enactment of incorporation: incorporation back into society in ways which acknowledge the enhanced status of the initiand, or which acknowledge the ritual preparation for cultural or cyclic change faced by the entire tribe or society.

In separation, a degree of symbolic ‘detachment’ of the initiands attempts to abolish their previous social status. For example, novices may lose their names, be required to wear no clothes, avoid certain foods, disregard personal appearance and so on. Then in the transition stage, participants are stripped of their sense of identity, and are “pushed as far toward uniformity, structural invisibility and anonymity as possible” (Turner 1982: 26). By way of compensation they are free to act outside of societal expectations, behave outrageously, ignore rights and responsibilities, as well as engaging in rites, myth dance, song, instruction and so on. The transition or “liminal” stage is associated with the abandonment to the fantastical, the grotesque, or the free, manifested through the unexpected combinations of familiar behaviours, representations, and actions. In “antistructural liminality” the familiar becomes unfamiliar, while the everyday takes on the appearance of the bizarre, and offering the potential for “alternative models for living” to manifest (StJohn 2008: 5). The ritual incorporation back into society represents return to stability, but potentially also of renewal, through a reconfiguration of the social order that the ritual process might create. By throwing the initiands into the oblivion of ‘not knowing’, the social order is rendered temporarily chaotic, and thereby allowing for the subsequent influx and reordering of what is known and valued about the world. Thus ritual enactment and performance functions as a conduit of social reflexivity to reinforce but also to facilitate the reorientation of cultural values (Turner 1982: 78). Turner defines ritual as “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects” (Turner 1982: 79). The formality or the “rules” frame the ritual process. But the ritual process may transcend this frame, such that “the “flow” of action and interaction within that frame may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances” (Turner 1982: 79). Through ritual there is an experiential realization for participants that social interactions are framed by the sequence of ritual transitions, movements and changes. An affiliated realization is that the transitions, movements and changes are not merely
Symbolically marked by the ritual but are also affected by it (Turner 1982: 78).

For there is undoubtable transformative capacity in a well-performed ritual, implying an ingress of power into the initial situation; and "performing well" implies co-involvement of the majority of its performers in a self-transcending flow of ritual events. The power may be drawn from the persons of the drama, but drawn from their human depths, not entirely from their cognitive, “indicative” hold on cultural skills. (Turner 1982: 79-80)

Ritual differs from ceremony in that ceremony indicates and maintains a secular status quo, while ritual has the capacity to turn this on its head. Liminality is therefore an essential part of ritual, the ‘magical’ or ‘religious’ core, which offers insight and transformation, with the “floating worlds” that ritual can create acting as “necessary sources of resolution (or redress)” (StJohn 2008: 4). Pre-industrial societies maintain a strict, sacred relationship to ritual, and while disorder within the liminal situation of the ritual is encouraged, and participation is obligatory, the limits of this frame are restricted and absolute. Ritual is the expression of a belief system in which participation and enactment are foundations for the spiritual maintenance of environmental conditions beneficial for survival. Tribal/agrarian societies cannot afford for things to 'go off the rails' for too long: the sacred duty (to keep the society safe and well) is merged with profane playfulness (the method by which beneficial conditions are achieved) but within a specific range of tolerance (Turner 1982: 32). Whether in total or representative participation, the ‘work’ of ritual - any associated sacrifice as well as it’s playful abandon - is an earnest obligation for the entire community.

Yet while Turner links theatre and performance with ritual enactment, he does not see ‘aesthetic’ performance as ritual per se. Employing the term ‘liminal’ for ritual, he uses the term ‘liminoid’ to better describe ritual’s modern-day descendants - theatre, art and other cultural practices. The liminoid resembles the liminal, without being identical to it; it engages practices which break the bounds of normality, eliciting playful innovations. Thus the rise of the modern, vocational artist provides the technical innovation and novelty once associated with the playful, ritual activation of the whole community. Despite the diminishing value given to play in complex societies, it finds a place within art practices. Here ‘play’ has associations with creativity but also with the ‘play of meanings’ in which it is possible to reverse the hierarchical orderings of values and social statuses (Turner 1982: 85). Art today is generally secular, not religious, but its orientation may still be towards the preternatural, invisible circulation of powers beyond rational understanding.

**The Performance Event as Contemporary Ritual**

Based on Turner’s assessment, calling a contemporary art practice a
'ritual' can only ever be metaphorical. It is on this basis that I find certain similarities existing between the ways that Turner sets out the ritual process and my PhD event. The delineation of a tripartite structure, comparable to ritual's structure of separation, transition and incorporation, can be clearly traced. Firstly, the private practice of the MWD, practiced over several years, functioned as a period of separation for the dancers; we were movers in a process that was facilitated by the participation of witnesses (a role we, in turn, also undertook). As dancers we did not distance ourselves from society as such, but from our previous experiences and lineages of dancing. It may be impossible to refute the bodily inscription of previous dance training, choreographic embodiment and performance (Dumas 1988). Separation from these inscriptions was not immediately possible or even necessary. But the MWD offered a space for the slow, processual emergence of a personally differentiated approach to embodiment and thus towards the improvisation of movement. “Separation” was metaphorically aligned with a therapeutic ethos, enacted in the MWD, and inflected with ethical and aesthetic dimensions. The practice was experimental. “Transition” was evident in the enactment of the ‘score’ with the dancers moving, initially with eyes closed, then with eyes open before the witnessing presence of an audience. This encounter contained the sense of “liminoid” uncertainty as well as the possibility for reversal or renewal. Finally, the third stage of “incorporation” was marked by the seated circle of all participants who verbally reflected on the nature of what happened. This discussion and listening was partly from the personal perspective of individuals but also created a shared identification and understanding about urgent or sustained questions or observations. As such the dancers’ improvisations, its variable traces, were incorporated into an accumulating and developing narrative of the event’s unfolding, as determined by the group talking and listening to each other. Each evening’s iterations prompted new, as well as continuing, threads of discussion and insight or differentiation was accumulated because of the repetition of the score.

The distinct stages of the event were marked by structural changes, with qualitative distinctions, and with an irreversible sequencing crucial to the proper workings of the event. Yet the ‘frame’, with attendant ‘rules’ for an improvised performance, was loose enough for the playful and the unexpected to emerge. Turner’s reference to the “play of meanings”, in which accepted hierarchies of value can be reconfigured, was also evident. *Performance* values were reconfigured in the sometimes unanticipated ways in which ordinary movement coexisted with the skilful, the poetic with the banal. Performance presence vacillated between strong, weak or even absent presence, undermining directive ‘command’ of the space by the performers. Thus any certainty about what outcomes would eventuate, or indications of how outcomes should be valued, were also put into question reflecting the therapeutic premise that it is impossible to predict how one person’s body will affectively react to another’s body: ethics attached to experiment as performance. In discerning their response to ethical, aesthetic and personal questions, all
participants, in the knowledge that no specific response was intended, were caught up in the fluctuations of immanence; what is happening now? What do I feel now? How do I respond now?

Turner discusses ritual as having a transformative capacity. The relationship for participants in this event to the transformative potential of ritual was, perhaps much more simply, to indicate that change potentially begins by asking questions; by provoking this questioning in all participants and allowing them to experiment with responses to these questions in an immediate and personal manner. In my personal experience of the event, this provocation, of being ‘held’ by various questions, was intensified because of the iterative repetition over the five days. My questions and considerations were ‘re-considered’ on each occasion, and with the contrasting insight that a fresh body-mind can bring to the same concerns.

There was a considerable range of experiences discussed by participants, whether performers or witness/audience (see appendix four). The discussion indicated richness of experimentation within the event and of reflexivity following it, and resulting from responses to, and combination of, the temporal span, the Watching Scores and the experimental ethos of the event. The structure of the event was very simple such that ‘exceeding’ its parameters was almost inevitable when improvisation was the substance of the performance. But to some degree any excess was also a factor of the atmospheric circulation of affective energy such that participants were ‘infected’ by playfulness, or redirected by changes in the vitality of the improvisation (or the witnessing). In this sense ritual’s orientation toward “invisible beings and power” (Turner 1982: 79) were evident in a subtle circulation and activation of energy. Multiple and changing congregations of performers and witness/audience created temporary dynamic relationships with “a subjective and inter-subjective flow”, and prompting shifting engagement according to the transitional presence of others.

“In ritual one lives through events, or through the alchemy of its framings and symbolings...” states Turner (Turner 1982: 86). If this event was truly a form of ritual, even if a metaphorical framing of this, then this “living through” something becomes significant; to be cognizant of the impact and effect of the event and not merely ‘receiving’ performance with habitualised expectation or as an act of passive consumption. As Jacques Rancière tells us, audiences are never really passive, always actively reconstituting what they see before them in their own imaginations (Rancière 2011: 17). But ritual actively involves people, sweeps them up and situates them amidst turmoil (however modest) and therefore implicates participants in the possible process of change, renewal and subsequent integration. The turmoil of this event may indeed have been modest, but as a form that may be used by myself and others in the future it was perhaps sustainably so. It was clear that all participants were initially uncertain about their roles, that they were
required to consider (question) their involvement, and that an aspect of this was the request to move or watch with a non-judgmental attitude. There was transformative potential in this situation, as much in taking up the challenge to engage without judgment, as in the reflexivity the situation provoked. The development of the event over the five days also meant there was an accumulation of experience for participants. We came and went from the event three times, incorporating it into our lives, however marginally. This, and the ontological demands of non-judgmental attending, meant there was sense of sustained consideration (of the event and its impact on us) beyond the everyday - a ‘living through’ something by becoming part of it.

Conclusion

Rancière (2011) also makes a case for the ‘emancipation’ of the audience from the assumed inferior position of ignorance in which they watch without understanding or agency. If the artist wishes to make an audience feel a particular way or understand a particular point, that is, to convey a deliberate message, then Rancière warns of didactic heavy-handedness where the artist or director is like a “schoolmaster”:

*What the spectator must see is what the director makes her see. What she must feel is the energy he communicates to her. To this identity of cause and effect, which is at the heart of stultifying logic, emancipation counter-poses their dissociation.* (Rancière 2011: 14)

While Rancière states that artists no longer aim to ‘transmit’ messages, they still assume that what they intend in the artwork will, and should, be perceived in the ways they conceive of it. This still leaves little room for the audience to make up their own minds or to refashion what is presented on their own terms. He asks for a third position where the ‘ignorant artist’, devoid of expectation for what the audience will receive, enables equal positions of engagement in mutual transmissions between artist and audience. If the ignorant artist establishes the conditions where ‘finding something out’ from performance is mutually experienced between spectator and artist, and without predetermined artistic intent, then the spectator is empowered to search for his/her own interpretation or meaning.

*It is not the transmission of the artist’s knowledge or inspiration to the spectator. It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between them, excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect.* (Rancière 2011: 15)

Perhaps it was up to each participant in the performance to assess whether this “third thing” came into being on this occasion. Certainly, the event did not belong to me, I did not own it, but merely facilitated it. I have struggled throughout this process, initially with a concern for my own choreographic identity. Where do I make my mark on this? Is this
even a ‘work’? But in leaving these concerns to one side, and in maintaining the intention of the MWD as much as possible, another kind of artistic discipline emerged. This was eventually much richer than simply making a work which bore my name because, rather than being self-gratifying, it was enriching and enabling for all concerned in a real, palpable sense. It enabled people, dancers and witness/audience, to discover things for themselves, and to an extent on their own terms, about how we might experiment as a group. Experimentation informed by ethical principles is a potential discipline, a practice. If we are to continue to expose ourselves to life’s potential then perhaps we must practice this. For us, as people and as improvisers, to realize more of life’s diversity and invite fresh experiences of it - for life to be open to us - we experiment with practices for liveliness, appropriate to all of life’s everyday permutations.
Chapter Seven: Conclusion

Introduction

In the preface to an issue of the journal *Writings on Dance*, Elizabeth Dempster comments that over the past (now) 40 years a number of body practices have crossed from the therapeutic into the artistic realm. The exploration of techniques such as Alexander, Feldenkrais, and Ideokinesis have generated responses from dance artists, that while diverse, have something in common. These practices promote “a keen curiosity about the multitudinous ways in which thinking, sensing, feeling, and moving manifest and shift in and out of focus as a person dances” (Dempster 1995/96). Dempster describes this curiosity as a research orientation committed to the “reformulation of the state and art of dance performance”. My project belongs within this field. The research-motivated practice of Authentic Movement, (what I have called the Mover Witness Dyad) has lead to an aesthetic and ethical orientation towards improvised performance influenced by its therapeutic origins. While this project began with personal questions, as it developed, a broader set of questions emerged that extended the range of the project’s relevance. In conclusion, before I discuss what the relevance of this project might be it is appropriate to first recapitulate; both the narrative of the project’s development as well as the research questions posed and/or evoked.

By starting this project with the creation of a performance (*the weight of the thing left its mark*) I was probing for questions, practices and contexts suitable to developing dance improvisation. This was a necessary methodological strategy appropriate to the Practice as Research paradigm. What emerged from this initial performance was confusion about the premise of the performance, but more clarity about what needed to be addressed in the doctoral research. I felt I needed to insert myself into the frame: to set aside my previous assumptions about improvisation, determine how best to facilitate curiosity within a shifting environment of affective exposure, and to allow this curiosity to build a performance. To begin with, I pursued the question of how to foster discernment and interest while I improvise as a way to develop and understand my improvisation practice. Understanding my own improvisation practice also related to how I engage with a context - a field or ‘scene’ that was experienced as primarily local but which has international connections and precedents. In undertaking my project I wanted to ‘test’ the assumptions that I have derived from my involvement these contexts. These questions led to a sustained practice of the MWD that fostered free association in movement. Over time this practice produced both personal insights, but also deep questioning around how to frame an appropriate performance. I did not want to gather the ‘contents’ of this practice into a choreographic form. This would be reductive: the antithesis of open improvisation premised on spontaneity and immediacy. But the therapeutic ethos intrinsic to the MWD of non-
judgmental attending by those watching also became important. How was I to preserve something of this ethos in performance? This question related both to facilitating the conditions for curiosity in improvisation for the dancers, as well as articulating a new sensibility for the audience through their re-signification as witnesses. It was also important to consider how the witness/audience could participate in the situation by enabling and supporting the dancers while at the same time ‘attending’ to their own experience and interests, and so actively collaborate in the creation of the event.

The Mover Witness Dyad and Developing a Personal Improvisation Practice

I have re-stated these questions to chart the development of this project given their prominence at the start of the project, at that stage acting as a means to question the assumptions of my own improvisation practice, and thus to develop it. Attempting to scrutinize these questions led to the MWD as a means to cultivate awareness of movement improvisation. This involved attentively following the abstract activation contours of my dancing: detailed moment-by-moment sensory observation of my own moving over extended periods of time. But did the extended practice of the MWD actually offer me this discernment? In terms of understanding my personal meeting of embodied imagination and interests with physical inclinations, rhythms, time and limitations, I would say, certainly. But it is less clear how to assess the impact of the extended practice of the MWD on my performance improvisation. It also became a less relevant concern. I did feel that the performance event in this project was a less open experience than that of my simply being with my collaborators in the studio. In this sense, the intimacy of the MWD did not fully translate into the performance event. Anecdotally however, the solo improvised performances I participated in when I was consistently practising the MWD, were lively and spontaneous - perhaps no less so than some previous performances but with more consistency and ease. After an approximately 10-minute solo, improvised performance on the bill of The Little Con, I remember a friend commenting that my performance seemed very different from usual (“more emotional”, as she termed it). Perhaps this reflected a greater capacity to meet the improvised situation with openness. But it is difficult to accurately say or even qualitatively represent. But difficult as this outcome is to evidence, it also became a much less relevant priority as the project progressed, and because of this I have not pursued it as thoroughly as I could have. Nor have I pursued the experiences of the other dancers. I am aware that they remain largely silent in this exegesis in stark contrast to the active contributions they made to the studio practice. But while the altered emphasis for the project has meant that I have not tried to describe the experience of the MWD in any detail, I can nevertheless reflect on certain more general aspects of what practising the MWD provided for me.
The MWD was a discipline, but a discipline of compassionate ‘allowing’. This is to say that everything that emerges, every action or gesture, has a rightful place in the experience. Nothing needs to be judgmentally excluded on the basis that it is ‘wrong’ in some sense (too slow, too clumsy, too banal, not what a dancer would do, and so on). In the past, such judgmental thoughts have emerged on occasion when I improvised. The longer I practiced the MWD the less inclined I was to react to such thoughts, even though they have never completely disappeared. However I became able to better recognise them for what they were – conditioned patterns of thought. By allowing any gesture, movement or state to present as a discipline (the discipline of not judging), there was a specific ontological objective to invite and allow any material that conversely allowed me to ‘let go’ of these conditioned patterns of thought. Of course, I rejected material constantly, but my decisions were not so strongly based on my previous expectations or on what (I thought) would be positively received by an audience. As a consequence I was more able to pursue whatever emerged in an open manner and for as long as I wished, in what Rosalind Crisp calls “a necessary process of positive discrimination towards movements of a lesser value” (Crisp 2009: 3). I could consider moving, not in the narrow sense of a negative affective response or conditioned preference (this is bad, avoid it), but without having to do anything at all. No reaction of any kind was required, thus relieving the (inner) audience’s demand that you must do something (preferably something captivating). The discipline of the MWD is “rooted in the cultivation of a compassionate and spacious inner witness, which enables us to meet the present with openness” (Avstreih 2014: 189). Similarly, I only needed to carefully notice what was taking place, through the cultivation of my own ‘inner witness’.51

Meeting the present moment with openness meant that awareness of choice was also more open; multiple possibilities became available because I was more often attending from a place of ease, security and interest. I followed whatever interested me. Or more accurately I practiced allowing interested engagement to spontaneously bubble up (as well as noticing the absence of this). Sometimes the effect was light and effervescent. At other times the feeling was dark and sluggish. But I was less inclined to avoid any particular state and more able to attend to whatever emerged without distraction. This open attitude toward the present moment facilitated emergence and spontaneity, and ultimately generated more awareness of my tendencies while improvising. It is a state of being that bears a striking resemblance to writings on Mindfulness as an embodied practice.52

51 Developing an ‘inner witness’ first requires the presence of an external witness. I must again acknowledge the contribution of my studio collaborators as they provided much support and thoughtful insight in this regard, thus assisting me to develop my inner witness.

I also developed my ability to track bodily sensation and discern between sensations. This tracking was a constant, shifting attendance to general and specific ‘feelings’ in my body (sharp, pointed sensations such as pain, total feelings such as lethargy, and various other perceptual qualities). What did I feel and how might this be imaginatively embodied? I feel ‘lively’ in my shoulders so how can I manifest this? I feel dullness in the general carriage of my body. What state feels appropriate to this sensation? My hips are sore today so what does this allow me to do? And so on. This became an intimate game of shifting emphases; of ‘conversations’ between body parts and bodily states; of balancing the differential qualities and tones that different actions and gestures called for. It was not unlike finding harmonics (or dissonance) between different imaginative impulses and their bodily associations, where the subtle shift in one aspect completely changed the relationships between things. Details emerged in sharp focus such that the play of my fingers could seem hugely rewarding and last for a long time. It was also akin to the dynamic harmonising that Stern talks about between mother and infant but here it was between changing aspects of my physical imagination and my ‘inner witness’.53 This dialogue echoed the abstractness that Stern describes in imaginatively following the moment-to-moment dynamic contours of interpersonal relations. I rarely encountered specific emotional or symbolic content (or the autobiographical experiences this content sometimes brings into view) as is often discussed in the literature on Dance Movement Therapy.54 Sometimes emotional states emerged but I was never inclined to explore these as they related to autobiography, but rather, as ‘engines’ for movement or states with particular tonal qualities, or simply as something to be noticed/felt/allowed. Sometimes my noticing was directed towards how long something remained lively for me; noticing when I had ‘finished’ with a particular activity. Often I would have to wait to notice a change or a curious inclination to do something without reserve, a feeling that became increasingly recognisable over time. Indeed learning how to access a state of curiosity (or interest) was at the centre of this practice. When I moved from a point of interest one movement would sequence easily into the next, often in surprising ways.

I began to activate relationships within my body that surprised me because my attending became unhurried, expansive and open. I think of the practice as ‘listening and waiting’. ‘Listening’ is not meant literally, but in the way dance improvisers often use the term to describe the condition of noticing what is currently at play in their bodies and in the space. Waiting meant spending periods of time in ‘active stillness’

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53 The concept and development of an inner witness is described by Janet Adler who sees this development as part of the process of Authentic Movement. “The development of an inner witness is an excellent way of describing the development of consciousness” (Adler 2006: 25).

54 See Zoë Avstreih’s article for examples of the symbolic narratives that can emerge from the therapeutic practice of the MWD (Avstreih 2014).
(observing internal sensation or thoughts). By not trying to make something happen, something would inevitably happen. Theatre teacher Jacques Lecoq, whose methods were based on improvisation, says:

_We begin with silence, for the spoken word often forgets the roots from which it grew, and it is a good thing for students to begin placing themselves in the position of primal naïveté, a state of innocent curiosity. In any human relationship two major zones of silence emerge: before and after speech. Before, when no words have been spoken, one is in a state of modesty which allows words to be born out of silence; in this state strength comes from avoiding explanatory discourse. By taking these silent situations, and working on human nature, we can rediscover those moments when the words do not yet exist._ (Lecoq 2015: 27-28)

It might seem odd or even suspect to quote the methods of a form that is premised on speech and language. But I relate to Lecoq’s articulation of what waiting entails: of curiosity emerging from a pre-reflective source that (for me) equates ‘silence’ with ‘stillness’. By using Lecoq’s quote I am also acknowledging that there was an important component of the performance event that was very strongly related to speech and language. This component was the use of the watching scores and the discussions at the end of each evening, at which point ‘meaning’ was extracted from the predominantly pathetic engagement of the dancing and watching.

Through listening and waiting, I also became more able to notice when my engagement was creatively satisfying or not. Why did something feel satisfying? This is hard to say. Possibly satisfaction came from my unreserved connection to what I was doing: to enter into my body’s curiosity in a spontaneous, whole-hearted manner. At the middle point of this project, as I have noted, I stopped using the term Authentic Movement for the practice. The notion of authenticity was confusing to work with as well as conceptually problematic, conjuring up the essentialist idea that there exists a singular, ideal subjective position that the practice should reveal. The conceptual distinction between authentic and inauthentic was of no value and interrupted my capacity to associate freely and openly. By using one of the alternate names for the practice (the MWD) these impediments were removed for me. And yet, even though the imperative to achieve ‘authenticity’ had been removed, some movement states, in the moment of their enactment, still felt more honest

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55 This suspicion was vehemently stated by Steve Paxton in a letter he wrote to the dance journal Contact Quarterly. In response to _CQ’s_ call for writings on improvisation Paxton expresses this concern:

_You are requesting articles in language (that most civilizing, consciousness ‘raising’ medium, requiring so much formal effort), about a pre-lingual and probably largely unconscious arousal of manifested physical imagery which, by its nature, resists definition because whatever you claim it is, it is immediately not; definition (by definition) pinning down the immanent and turning it into available techniques and thus into history._ (Paxton 1987 (b): 68).
or genuine than others. As contradictory as this appears, the clarification required here relates not to the semantic differences between honesty and authenticity. The necessary clarification is between an essentialising ontological framework for the practice (is this truly authentic?) and simply allowing my body to fully and openly feel something (without attempting to judge its authenticity).

At the point in my process when I felt impelled to make decisions about how to create the performance, I realised that any movement content I might derive from this practice of discernment, was much less interesting than simply maintaining an ongoing practice of it. The practice itself, free from any instrumentalising task I might ascribe to it, existed as a much larger field of engagement. The ongoing situation and practice of allowing (free association in movement) seemed more valuable than any isolated movement or state picked out from this situation. Equally, an improvised performance as a vehicle for my own practice as it had developed through the MWD also seemed reductive. The practice of the MWD became an end in itself but one in which, for me, the experiences of witnessing also became increasingly important and significant for the research. Because of this, the value of the practice shifted from helping me develop my improvisation practice to an acknowledgment of what the mover/witness relational field itself suggested for performance. The value became the inhabitation of a responsive state of being while acknowledging the reciprocal charge generated by the involvement of other people (witnesses or other dancers). The MWD was inevitably altered in the transition from studio practice to public performance, particularly in a loss of intimacy and the shift of emphasis to the witness/audience experience. But ‘listening and waiting’ was an orientation that migrated well from the studio to the performance event, and this orientation applied equally to the dancers and the witness/audience. Despite the adherence by the dancers to a principle of internal free association (and which often seemed ‘detached’ from relationships in the room) the performance event became much less of an exploration of self and much more of a relational field involving the ontological and embodied attendance of all participants.

Reflections on the Performance Event

The MWD operates as a private space for pathic engagement, for dancing, that is indifferent to performance. Different to the demands of improvised performance (whether perceived as the adrenalizing impetus to ‘meet’ public expectation or as the improviser’s search for active and intentional composing), the MWD’s privacy is more akin to any embodied studio process (improvised or choreographic) that avoids public scrutiny, and that takes place on, as yet, scattered, unstructured terrain. If directed towards a choreographic outcome, the private “transsubjective” processes of the rehearsal allows the choreographer to decipher the dancer’s rehearsal experiments, “crystallising” them into a coherent intention and specific bodily manifestation. These specific manifestations
are what define the work (Louppe 2010: 181). “Hence, the patient work with the group...where through ‘reactions’ in the chemical sense of the word, from body to body, from consciousness to consciousness, questions and responses will be sent as so many furtive shimmerings from which a choreographer will draw in order, out of them, to distil the essence of the actions” (Louppe 2010: 181). This is the ‘safe space’ of the choreographic process. The MWD also requires the safe space of the mover-witness paradigm. But if, as in the MWD, the process requires no further distillation, requires nothing other than to maintain a responsive environment (that produces free association in movement), then the process is potentially an end in itself. As dancers we did not seek to find reactions between each other, only in concert with our witness (real or internalised). Thus, when moving together, our movement remained at the pre-crystallized stage and therefore necessitated a specific ‘situation’ to frame this as performance.

If the pathic sphere is related to the pre-reflective, this stage of the event was related to a more pre-choreographic state; the stage before conscious, considered decisions about composition get made. It was intended as an evocation of the ethos of the MWD but in holding to this a particular ‘situation’ was created that was performative but not overtly choreographic. This situation was closer to how Laurence Louppe characterizes the choreographies of Simone Forti by calling these “nothing more than situations and thus much closer to the structure of ‘performance’ than to choreography’ understood as the development in time and space of an intention and its matter/material” (Louppe 2010: 200). For example, Forti’s piece Over, under and around required a participant to enact a specific pathway over, under and around a partner and so engendering the work through the enactment of its ‘rules’ (or score). “Here the ‘idea’ is not in the formulation of the intention but in the possibilities of the space opened up by it” (Louppe 2010: 200). Hence the “possibilities of the space opened up” through an adherence to the structure and ethos of the MWD – its ‘rules’ or score - which the participants negotiated and enacted. Similarly to Forti’s piece, the ‘idea’ of this event was in support of a “pure aesthetics of the score” in order to render the event as a self-contained situation of experimenting with the experience of being “which no shadow of reference external to its own frame will disturb” (Louppe 2010: 200).

Contemporary dance, points out Louppe, has never required artistic homogeneity when it comes to the form of a work and has never imposed an historical, or even a single, frame of reference from which to interpret the work. “Works, languages, movements are appraised in so far as they question, enrich, unsettle: and to this end coherence, engagement, and a very great mastery of process are required” (Louppe 2010: 13). But for Louppe this is not question of arbitration, nor of communication, but of a free and open “attachment” by the viewer to the experience that the dancer is undergoing (Louppe 2010: 13). For me to frame the situation I established as performance provided an alternative, if not unprecedented,
model for what improvised performance can be. Yet the performance’s dimensions and aspirations echo Louppe’s call: “that we grant values the possibility of making art, that is, of engendering unknown values upon which our shallow provisional judgments would have no power of appraisal” (Louppe 2010: 14).

The performance offered an opportunity for, first, embodied involvement in, and then reflection on the conventional dialectical tensions - between witness and audience, audience and participant, maker and receiver, private and public, dancing and talking, pathetic and gnostic and so on - such that these oppositions might momentarily be disturbed or questioned. As discussed previously there is an affective connection between improvised dancing and ‘judgment’. A pathetic connection requires a complete connection to the moment – one cannot distance oneself if one is pathically involved – whereas the cognitive application of ‘judgment’ has a distancing impact. If the pathetic, pre-reflective, pre-choreographic dimension is the experiential substance of this event, then leaving judgment aside during the event became an ideal condition for participation. Equally, the discussions required bringing into awareness aspects of what this experiential substance entailed. Thus ‘interested involvement’, while suspending judgment, offered a specific relation to the work. Non-judgmentally discerning what is going on in the scattered terrain of the event was one aspect of participation; becoming genuinely interested in what is happening (as an affective response) was another (and to what extent this happened is difficult to accurately assess). Yet each participant was encouraged to act on their attractions – the activities, states or qualities to which they were attracted, and the manner in which they attended to these. It was the kind of experimenting with experience that both therapeutic and aesthetic situations facilitate. No doubt, many participants did make judgments about what they seeing and/or doing. But participants could be responsive to the atmospheric presence of the entire group, and the “ecstasies” that were brought forth from the atmosphere of the situation (to use Böhme’s term) as a form of embodied discernment and contemplation. Salient interests were then reflected upon as participants attempted to articulate the qualities or implications of their experiences. If participants were able to articulate aspects of the experience (and this was by no means certain), then the event created a situation where what amounted to new values or connections (for some) were rendered discernable and subsequently named.

To not distance ourselves is also to invite trust and intimacy. This promoted the sharing of experience and interaction between participants thus connecting or entangling witness/audience responses with dancer’s responses, but also witness/audience with other witness/audience members.56 This demands a very different level of engagement than is

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56 The transcripts of the discussions (appendix 4) show what I would claim as an intimate and open forum for discussion. The witness/audience also described thoughts and issues from their own points of view, without necessary reference to what the
expected in conventional performance where audiences watch, perceive, appreciate and assess as private experience. Alphonso Lingis writes about how trust is implicit in the experience of travel creating a bond between strangers:

*When we leave our home and community to dwell awhile in some remote place, it happens every day that we trust a stranger, someone with whom we have no kinship bonds, no common loyalty to a community or creed, no contractual obligations. We have no idea what he said, what are his family, clan, and village coordinates, the categories with which he represents for himself, society, nature, and the cosmos. We attach to someone whose words or whose movements we do not understand, whose reasons or motives we do not see. Our trust short-circuits across the space where we represent socially defined behaviors and makes contact with the real individual agent there – with you.* (Lingis 2004: ix)

It might be stretching the analogy too far to say that this practice was a form of travel or that this ‘travel bond’ was created between participants in the event, many of who had connections to myself or the other dancers. But it was not a group with strong connections to *one another* (many people were strangers to one another). Certainly though, there was a sense of inhabiting a strange situation and meandering through situations where the motivations and behaviours of the participants were not fully clear. This then encouraged a metaphorical “straining towards” (the dancers, other witness/audience) if any clarity was to be found. There was a matching sense of trust that we dancers would be kept safe while moving with our eyes closed. The discussions were also conducted with many participants having only sketchy knowledge of other people’s socially defined ‘positions’ (job, background, identity, dance experience and so on) other than as ‘dancers’ or ‘witness/audience’. There wasn’t sufficient time for ‘leaders’ or ‘influencers’ to emerge (as they no doubt would have) and so anyone who wanted to speak had to ‘trust’ that their perspective would be met with an open disposition. It was the ethics of the situation that came to the fore and an atmosphere of trust was a component of this. For some participants this meant experimenting with, or testing the social and spatial dynamics. But for others it was a question of how to manage the ethical requirements of care for the dancers: they did not want to put their own interests ahead of this responsibility to the dancers.

In another sense, however, the event was set up without complete trust that it would actually ‘work’. Requiring the witness/audience to come three times was meant as a conceptual tactic to highlight the commitment of the witness, something I think it largely achieved. But it also stemmed
dancer’s themselves did (the dancer’s experience was not always central), thus further diminishing the distance between dancer and witness/audience.

57 I had the most knowledge of people’s backgrounds and of how they came to be invited to participate in the project. But most of this information was not shared with the other participants.
from a concern that perhaps there would not be sufficient commitment without this requirement – concern that the witness/audience members would not come three times in the same week if not so required. I was surprised by how much interest and energy were expressed by participants during the first discussion. It was only once I realised that the event would function as I’d hoped that I actually found some ‘trust’ in the process I had set up. Even so, the research would have benefitted from having been performed more than once, and to different witness/audiences.

It would also be stretching the ethical claim of this event that the sense of ‘safety’ in the performance matched the sense of safety that is a feature of either the MWD or the dance rehearsal process. As a public situation there was unquestionably a more heightened sense of social interaction and reduction in the intimacy the MWD fosters. As a dancer, and particularly on the first evening of the performance, I felt much more ‘exposed’ than I ever did practicing the MWD in the studio. Yet this heightened awareness of the presence of the witness/audience diminished over the three iterations. Furthermore, I felt very supported by the presence of the witness/audience; supported to maintain the aspirations of the event as I established them and supported to maintain my focus on freely associating as I moved. There was a sense of ontological and aesthetic affirmation that was a result of the witness/audience ‘signing on’ to the event on a particular basis (even if the implications were not immediately clear).

The most significant aspect to emerge from this performative situation, as I see it, was the re-signification of the audience as a group of witnesses who participated (or attempted to) on a particular ontological basis. As a consequence a ‘group situation’ was created that reflected both the MWD and the dance rehearsal and so encouraged the quality of engagement these contexts require. This led to a situation more attuned to privacy than most performance contexts, a situation based in a socio-somatic interface of intermingling bodies that creates the attention, responsiveness and spontaneity specific to the studio situation. The re-signification of audience as witness reflected the concept of ‘witness’ that stems from the MWD and contributing to the artistic dialogue – that is, the use and cultural engagement of the practice (usually under the name Authentic Movement) - involving other contemporary dance artists. The concept of the witness has other applications in other contexts which I have not been able to address in this project.58 How a witness might be variously constituted in different contexts, and what this might mean for

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58 The witness stands as a key conceptual figure in the study of trauma, for example, where testimony is fundamental. Susan Best writes about witnessing in relation to photography in the article ‘Witnessing and Untimely Images: Anne Ferran’s ‘Lost to Worlds’ (Best 2012). In this article she cites the work of Dori Laub and Shoshana Felman, whose work on testimony (in relation to the Holocaust) Best sees as being important to the development of a concept of witnessing relevant to the visual arts (Felman & Laub 1992).
performance, stands as a series of questions for future investigation: a future direction that this project has opened up.

The capacity to notice and experience change is as much a part of everyday life as it is a part of aesthetic experience. The role of traditional ritual was as the formal container through which life’s unruliness is directed towards (necessary) social and personal change. According to Victor Turner, in contemporary society art and performance have emerged as the progeny of ritual in the way they operate as carriers of liminal experience. While never facilitating the same specific ends as ritual, performance can be designed to offer access to reflexive experience that parallels ritual (while staying within the realm of individual rather than societal experience). Reflexivity is a feature of traditional rituals such that initiands have their worlds ‘turned upside down’ before their worlds are reconstituted but in a new way (Turner 1982: 24-28). Traditional ritual in today’s world often seems anachronistic, lacking the gravitas or relevance it once had. Rituals today are often equated more with ceremony: the latter, states Turner, are designed to reinforce the status quo rather than shake it up, and such that the capacity for disruption and change is held at bay (Turner 1982: 80-81). Yet the thresholds for change, which ritual traditionally acknowledged and incited, are still present in our lives. More often than not these are only brought to our awareness as moments of trauma; the job loss that determines I can no longer identify as ‘this person’ (such as the mid-level management consultant unable to find further work because he is over 50). But more widely thresholds are simply not recognised by us until after their effects (and affects) have disappeared and we think back. Reflexivity, if not elicited through a ritual practice, can still be elicited through privately oriented practices which touch on the liminal. These practices then offer revitalised ways to connect with, and then reflect on, the things which delineate changes in our lives. As much as this is true for individuals it is also still possible for groups if they self-identify as such: communities of interest such as the improvisation community, or the dance community. What practices alert its members to qualities and changes in the (aesthetic and philosophical) constitution of such communities? In this project I have attempted to disturb how participants might otherwise have responded to performance as a (potential) conduit to reflexivity and awareness.

Through bodily attending, which is always in relation to others, features of the event became discernable, and as a consequence, available to awareness. Böhme stresses the importance of forms of speech for rendering the aesthetic dimensions of experience (and art) as intelligible (Böhme 1993: 122). It was not until the discussion stage of the performance that a clearer understanding of what had happened for individuals emerged. It was through the collective reflection, however partial or hazy, that a collage of the whole was formed from scattered pieces. Reflecting about what had happened after the dancing had finished gave the event its purposive, gnostic ‘visibility’. The event came
into focus through reflecting on what had happened. At this point language became the predominant medium, providing a prominent place for language and speech in the event.

Mark Franko points out that “contemporary thought on dance is frequently split between a concept of dance-as-writing and a concept of dance as beyond the grasp of all language, especially written language” (Franko 2011: 322). The notion of dance-as-writing assumes the choreographic 'text' as a sustained identity independent of its performance. While this text is played out in time and space it nonetheless exists as something for the audience to 'read'. On the other hand, there is the view that dance is resistant to language and the processes of signification. This perspective sees the dancing and its performance as inseparable and intimately arising from the bodily subjectivities of the dancers who perform this dance (Franko 2011: 329). In a sense both of these conceptions were at play in this project. As discussed, the dancing and its witnessing were always intended to remain at the pre-choreographic stage and therefore not available to be 'read' as such. But there was also a further set of conditions that were designated by the invitation (appendix one), the notes for witness/audience (appendix two), the Watching Scores (appendix three), and the post-performance discussions (appendix four). In combination these written/spoken aspects constituted the ontological score for the event (while marginally denoting a temporal/physical score) that was intended to indicate to the witness/audience the conditions for participation.59 Even though the two different aspects (language-based and dancing) were interrelated, consideration of each happened at different times and in different ways. The exception was the Watching Scores, which were available during the dancing (although in order to read one of these the witness/audience had to momentarily disengage from the dancing). The language-based aspects, in combination with the dancing, jointly created the total conditions for the event. The event as a whole functioned as an ontological situation: an art paradigm for experimenting with experiences of movement, presence and being, which fluctuated between pathic engagement and gnostic reflection.

The potential of this project was not fully tested given that only one group of participants were involved. Experimenting with further iterations of the performance event is a further possibility and future direction emerging from this project. To frame dance performance according to the mover witness principle is firstly to invite participants into a specific process that seeks the liminal edge between things so as to bring into question the points of view of those present. After this, the participants then 'created the image' of the performance as determined by the (articated) points of view of all those present (not just the artists). This was a form of community building; within a context of

59 Writing about improvisation can establish the cultural conditions under which improvisation might best be understood, and on the terms the artists choose, as the journal Contact Quarterly has shown.
safety, a community of interest developed (or reconstituted itself), continually and flexibly assessing and re-assessing its interests, values and understandings. This reflects what happens in private rehearsal situations whether directed towards improvisation or choreography. Indeed it posits the performance as a flexible, impressionable situation. Thus, in this project, a dance process became a form of agency and reflexivity for a 'community of interest'. While this particular community of interest was drawn predominantly from my own contacts, it could equally apply to other demographics or communities. Perhaps most relevantly, the project offers something to enrich the (local) improvisation community or the wider contemporary dance sector, as a way to involve, provoke, destabilize and then assess what values are of most interest or importance, and as precipitated by the performance's experiential substance. The research offers possible new ways or conditions for making and understanding aesthetic judgments in dance improvisation. As such it presents a nuanced approach to dance research and dance improvisation with the possibility that ontological participation might actually be an agent for creative development of the field.
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Appendix One: Invitation

Invitation

This is an invitation to witness a performance research project on attention in dance improvisation and performance by Shaun McLeod (as part of his PhD project at Deakin University). Dancers Shaun McLeod, Peter Fraser, Olivia Millard, Jason Marchant and Sophia Cowen have been working with relationships between moving and witnessing and we would like to invite you to attend a 3-part event that has emerged from this investigation. We invite you to witness the movement unfolding before you: this is not a performance made for you to sit back and watch, but a shared time for moving and witnessing.

Event dates: Tuesday 11, Thursday 13 and Saturday 15 November from 6.45 – 8.00 pm.

Venue: The Oratory, Abbotsford Convent, 1 St Heliers Street, Melbourne.

Reply: shaun.mcleod@deakin.edu.au by Friday 31 October

Background

We began this project by practicing a Dance Movement Therapy modality called the ‘Mover/Witness Dyad’ (more commonly called Authentic Movement). This dyad is between a 'mover' (who moves with eyes closed for 30 minutes or so) and a 'witness' (who keeps the mover safe and who carefully watches what happens). The mover in the Mover/Witness Dyad moves with closed eyes according to impulse, interest, or even, at times, caught up in reverie. They move without regard for the external environment. The witness contains the experience - gives it structure and possibility - and in a non-judgmental manner reflects back to the mover something of the experience. This relationship between mover and witness is pivotal to what emerges for the mover, as they can be free to become 'passionately lost' in an embodied attending. The mover may not have full discernment of the overall event and so the witnesses' attentive participation gives tangibility, provides safety, and facilitates a meaningful encounter for both parties.

For this project the Mover/Witness Dyad has been scrutinized as a research methodology, and as a creative practice leading to a particular approach to improvised dance performance. The group dance practice that has emerged from our investigation is raw and un-composed, and is premised on the attentive presence of a group of 'witnesses'. As with the Mover/Witness Dyad, this new practice maintains the uninterrupted interiority of the mover as facilitated by the enabling presence of the witness. In turn, the particular attributes of this therapeutic practice will function as a paradigm for an improvised performance (set for November 2014, Melbourne), where the audience becomes analogous to a group of witnesses.
The Watching Scores

The witness/audience’s role will be to ‘contain’ the dancers (to keep them safe as they may have their eyes closed), and to discern what is happening. But the witness/audience will also be asked to ‘compose’ the event from their position of perceiving the whole. Each witness will be provided with ‘watching scores’; 52 cards, each one with a different statement or suggestion to focus perception, or to frame the improvised dancing. Witnesses are free to choose one when you want to, read it, and return it to the pack. The scores aim to reframe the role of audience into an active witness. How does being a witness reframe the role of the audience? Will the watching scores sufficiently galvanize your attention? Will each witness be able to create a personal and coherent aesthetic sensibility for the event? What kinds of transmissions between dancers and witnesses, or between the dancers themselves, will occur in this situation? Will this be performance or therapy? Questions abound.

The Commitment of the Witness

If questions rather than certainties excite your interest then please come along. The event is in three parts, on three different nights, and witness/audience members must commit to attending all three. This is a large commitment and if you cannot attend all three it would be better to say no thank you. There is a strictly limited capacity for this event.

If you do decide to participate, further information will be sent to you, including a Plain Language Statement and a consent form. Your participation would be greatly appreciated. There is no cost to attend.

Of course you will be free to withdraw at any time if you wish to do so.

Shaun McLeod is a dancer, choreographer, improviser and lecturer in dance at Deakin University (Melbourne). With a background in contemporary dance performance (Australian Dance Theatre, One Extra, Danceworks) Shaun is interested in improvisation as a performance medium and as a way of knowing. He has performed in Australia, USA, New Zealand and Korea and his work the weight of the thing left its mark was shown in Dance Massive 2011. He has presented at conferences in Australia and India, has published a chapter in Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry and the monograph Chamber: Dance Improvisation, Masculine Embodiment and Subjectivity. He is completing a PhD into the implications of attention in dance improvisation.
Appendix Two: Notes for the Witness/Audience

Notes for the Witness/Audience.
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this performance experiment. The following notes aim to give you some background, context and instructions for what you will see and participate in. 

Shaun McLeod

Dates + Venue
Tuesday 11, Thursday 13 & Saturday 15 November. Please arrive at 6.45 for a 7 pm start.

The Sacred Heart Oratory (Room 1 on the attached map)
The Abbotsford Convent
1 St Helier St, Abbotsford.

Melways reference 44 G5. Parking is available on the north side of St Heliers street at a cost of $6 in coins (gold coins preferred, no ticket or receipt issued).

If you are in the convent grounds but cannot find the Sacred Heart Oratory please call Nick Walters on 0404 961 147.

A map is attached but here is the link also:
http://abbotsfordconvent.com.au/site/assets/uploaded/43b10c76-2014final_small.jpg

Background
My interest is in dance improvisation in performance. I have utilized the Mover/Witness Dyad (more commonly called Authentic Movement) as a way to better understand my, and the other dancers' motivations when improvising, and as a way to find productive conditions for us to improvise in. In trying to apply the parameters of the Mover/Witness Dyad to performance, we have encountered some interesting questions and tensions.

The dancers are Sophia Cowen, Peter Fraser, Jason Marchant, Shaun McLeod and Olivia Millard. During the performance, we will attempt to maintain the discipline of noticing and acting on internal impulses for movement. We are attempting to 'listen through our bodies' to notice an interface between our imaginations and our physical responses. We are not trying to direct our activities towards any external motivations (such as exploring space, composing as a group, meeting an audience's expectations), although these things do sometimes happen. The event will be changeable and fluid; at times there will be a lot happening and at other times very little. A little patience is sometimes helpful.

The experiment also tries to elicit a particular quality of attention from the participating witness/audience. This attention is based on the non-judgmental disposition of the witness who 'contains' the experience of the mover and gives this experience shape and quality from the outside. But the witnesses are also still an audience. Can an audience function like a group of witnesses? Can the relationship between (private) dancing and (public) witnessing actually
function as a performance? Does this event in any way reposition the contract between performer and audience? This is the experiment that we will all participate in during this event.

To assist the witness/audience in framing what they see as a coherent performance, I have written a series of ‘Watching Scores’. The commitment to attending the three performances is to mirror the commitment shown by the witness in the Mover/Witness Dyad to support the mover’s development. Hopefully, attending three performances, and utilizing the watching scores, will facilitate some sort of development for the witness/audience also.

**Event score**

Each performance will follow the following score. A bell will ring to signal the end of each section.

*Witness/audience enter the space while the dancers are standing in stillness with eyes closed (5 minutes).* Witness/audience are free to roam, sit, watch, or read some watching scores.

*Dancers move with eyes closed (10 minutes).* This is the practice of the Mover/Witness Dyad. Witness/audience can move around the space, sit, watch and read.

*Dancers move with eyes open or closed (10 minutes).* Dancers try to maintain the internal focus of their exploration as they begin to see the room. Witness/audience can move around the space, sit, watch and read.

*Dancers move with eyes open (10 minutes).* Dancers try to maintain the internal focus of their exploration as they are more focused on external phenomena. Witness/audience can move around the space, sit, watch and read.

*Dancers come to stillness again with eyes open (5 minutes).* This completes the score.

The 40-minute score will be followed by a brief opportunity for discussion or feedback and conducted sitting in a circle. The discussion is an important aspect of the Mover/Witness Dyad, highlighting the mutual exchange which occurs. Usually, the mover begins by characterizing their experience in some way – to articulate something about what they did, felt or noticed. This is followed by a response to what is seen by the witness.

**Watching Scores**

Printed as a pack of cards there are 52 scores, divided into 4 suits, and with two joker cards. The cards should be shuffled so that all suits are intermingled in the pack. Choose a card at your discretion. As there are three performances perhaps its better not to read too many in one performance, lest they become stale. The cards give some sense of the thinking that has gone into this project: 13 Artist Statements (whose ideas resonate with this project), 13 Statements Towards a Manifesto (describing the principles of engagement), 13 Reflections on the Mover/Witness Dyad (from our studio practice), and 13 Suggestions for Watching (to be followed or not). Please return the pack at the end of each performance (except after the last performance when you are welcome to keep them).
**Expectations of the Witness/Audience**

Your commitment is to support the experience of the mover and the other witness/audience members. Please do not talk during the performance.

When the dancers are moving with their eyes closed, please stop them if they are about to walk into walls of other people. You can do this by placing your hand on their shoulder. Accidents very rarely happen and moving with eyes closed is not dangerous for the dancers as we are so used to doing this.

No seating is provided, but you are welcome to sit or lie on the floor whenever you want. You can walk around the room and watch from different perspectives.
Appendix Three: Watching Scores

Watching Scores
Frames for perception

This pack of cards has 52 cards and two jokers. The 52 cards each have a different statement (or score) and they are divided into 4 ‘suits’: 13 Artist Statements (whose ideas resonate with this project), 13 Statements Towards a Manifesto (describing the principles of engagement), 13 Reflections on the Mover/Witness Dyad (from our studio practice), and 13 Suggestions for Watching (to be followed or not). The cards should be shuffled so that all suits are intermingled in the pack. At any time, randomly pick a card, read it, and then return this to the bottom of the pack. The statement or score can be used to provide context and stimulate perception of what is being done by the dancers. Choose another card at any time.

13 Artist Statements

An appreciation of the feeling of getting lost...of proceeding into the unknown... to reject the familiar, so rooted in our nervous system and minds, requires discipline.

Steve Paxton

Everyone in this room is in this fucking dance.

Miguel Gutierrez

You have to ask every time ‘what am I doing here?’ And you have to answer. You have to be present.

Dana Reitz

Improvisational performance values a certain quality of presence that the performer brings to the moment of performance. This is not a metaphysical construct but a pragmatic necessity. As the performer is in the process of creating a performance they have to attend to what is happening with a quality that is quite different to the performer who has knowledge of what is going to happen. Without this fundamental attention there is no performance.

Andrew Morrish

The French choreographer Jérôme Bel tells us (in a bar in Vienna) that with The Show Must Go On he wanted to make a work that was ‘not stronger than the public’. A piece that would sit with them but not dominate them. A beautiful, beautiful thought. An incredible generosity. But accepting a gift of this kind may not be easy for those raised in other times, in other frames of relation between artists and public.
In Paris at Théâtre de la Ville there are stage invasions. Interventions. Slow hand claps. Jerome says he got the message: ‘If you do not dominate this audience they will try to kill you’.

Tim Etchells

‘Listening’ is much more an animal state, you don’t know what features you’re going to find, there’s no interpretation yet, you’re letting things go through you...But when you’re ‘reading’ you’re making sense of things...Reading for me is a kind of compositional activity and listening is a much more sensory activity, so they’re kind of in dialogue with each other.

Lisa Nelson

In the beginning I called it ‘not dancing’. Later I realized that this was simply a necessary process of positive discrimination towards movements of a lesser value. Now anything is permitted, even ‘presentation’ if it comes along. Everything IS something.

Rosalind Crisp

Improvisation is a word for something that can’t keep a name; if it does stick around long enough to acquire a name, it has begun to move toward fixity. Improvisation tends in that direction.

Steve Paxton

You know what’s interesting about stillness and duration and meditation? In ‘real life’ its impossible for me to have any of this. The older I get the more activity and the more obligations I have. The pace is so fast. I’m literally running after myself. So I need to create these islands of time. Then I go through this transformation in the work; work transforms me, and then I use this experience in ‘real life’. Normally it’s the other way round: you do something, you get experience in life and then you use it for your performance. My work is basically a learning experience.

Marina Abramović

I am getting good at being a person whose body is a channel, a medium for emotional/psychic conflict, immediate temperature taking of the context and the corporealizing of imagination in real time.

Miguel Gutierrez

There’s something I call the dance state. It is a state of enchantment. As in chant. Or the French chanter, to sing. A kind of besonged. I have experienced it as a state of heightened awareness where one possibility after another presents itself like an unfolding path.

Simone Forti

Only when active artists willingly cease to be artists can they convert their abilities, like dollars into yen, into something the world can spend: play. Play as currency.

Allan Kaprow
My body is bored by answers.

Deborah Hay

13 Statements Towards a Manifesto

You are invited to witness without judgment.

Composition or choreography happens when you (the witness) activate your attention, and implicate yourself in this event.

Identity is fluid and changeable in this practice and is realized in the moment of its happening. It is not an unchanging ‘truth’ waiting to be revealed.

Life is boundless energy as it spreads across all things and all people.

Sincerity and trust are forms of exchange. What value should we give them?

Is this a performance?

Reflect on, or experience? Evaluate or value?

Allowing things to emerge can’t be rushed. It requires patience and time.

The witness-mover relationship in the Mover/Witness Dyad is likened to the mother-infant relationship. The relationship creates a connection of trust and intimacy, a safe place for the infant to experiment and develop.

When Deborah Hay says, “let your perception be the dance” does she mean for the mover or the witness?

‘Authentic Movement’, the original and most common name for the Mover/Witness Dyad, is a misnomer. After all, what is or isn’t authentic in what the dancers are doing?

The witness reflects back to the mover something of what is happening, so giving definition, importance and credibility to what happens. The witness ‘contains’ the mover. The presence of the witness is what makes this practice possible and only the witness will fully comprehend the fullness of the external event.

This practice is made possible by the quality of attention one gives to what unfolds. Attending is a kind of embodied poetics – an imaginative engagement with moving and being.

13 Reflections on the Mover/Witness Dyad Practice
The movers’ bodies are free to go where they will and they will leave traces. These traces are not mapped prior to setting out. They are eloquent squiggles in space and time. There are no fixed or adjacent points in a specific line of dots that needs to be joined. There is nowhere we have to get to. We are hunter-gatherers living off the land, not merchants moving their goods to the next town (and who forget to look out the window in their haste to get there).

How much does sight anchor us to our habits? Seeing an audience directs the dancer toward them, but moving with eyes closed alters this directional relationship for the dancer. Alternatively, does the witness always need to direct him/herself towards the dancer?

*There were moments of peaceful engagement where my fingers became sensitized and delicate. I was swimming through something...reaching, probing, uncertain, exploratory, directionless. There was also a period where I found some quietness lying on the floor and executing tiny rolls of my body. Each small shift of weight was rapturously appreciated, free from judgment.*

Mover/Witness Dyad Journal

*The thing that finally emerged was a tiny, husky voice. It had feeling behind it. It energized me and I became absorbed in playing with how this tiny voice 'filled me up' and what my movement became in response. It felt like a strange, dark creature.*

Mover/Witness Dyad Journal

*I realized today that the Mover/Witness Dyad creates the conditions which facilitate emergence, that is, letting things happen and keeping personal issues at bay. It is a practice of ‘getting (identity) out of the way’. The qualities that emerge, and which sweep you along, are often the most satisfying. But I’m no longer sure this is the same thing as ‘attention’. Attention is certainly part of it, but a particular understanding of attention. It isn’t a precise, directed, piercing quality. Sometimes it is about releasing a strong grip on attention, and facilitating a softer, cradling of attention; a cajoling, a prodding, a massaging of attention; a waxing and waning. I always seem to begin with a scanning of my body to notice any physical sensation or mood. This is certainly attentive. But perhaps it is about attending less in some instrumental way (“pay attention!!”), than in the way you might tend to animals, plants or children that have developmental processes which need supporting. Perhaps I could call this ‘attending’ rather than ‘attention’?*

Mover/Witness Dyad Journal

Why do we, as dancers, prepare (or warm up) before participating in the Mover/Witness Dyad? This almost seems counter to what the practice is about: that is, noticing and ‘being with’ what happens, what is there, in that moment. By preparing, are we gearing up for something specific? Warming up directs us to use our bodies in ways which are familiar
through the inscription of our training and of our bodily experiences. And yet, I want my body to be available to me.

Mover/Witness Dyad Journal

As dancers we are like experts reaching for the condition of the total beginner.

Today we noticed spatial formations and patterns emerged and disappeared between us. But these were not created from any deliberate intention or decision. They just appeared and we observed them (which we sometimes don’t). Is this like noticing your thoughts, but not being distracted by them, when you meditate?

Mover/Witness Dyad Journal

What does it mean to look at someone and expect something from them? Can we look at someone and not use this looking as a tool, as a probe, to extract something from him/her? Can we look without expectation?

The relationship between the dancers comes without obligation but with support. We are ‘in relation without obligation’. In dance terms this means there is no obligation to pick up on a motif - a gesture or action - which we then feel obligated to replicate or expand.

We talked about the difference between instrumental value and inherent value, that is between producing something (of value) and simply ‘being’. This practice brings up a conflict between these two values. There was something about children who are only exposed to instrumental values becoming high achievers but who only feel valued if they are producing something. Peter recalled a story told to him by a past work colleague: when she was a child she was given a doll. She placed the doll on the windowsill and said to it “I’m not going to give you a name until you’ve earned it”.

Mover/Witness Dyad Journal

This practice seems to hark back to the cut and thrust of growing up and of family life. Andre Green makes the point that kids grow up in situations where in the swirl of parental relationships, activities, expectations and desires most issues never get articulated or clarified. How often do kids get to ask, “What’s going on?” “What does this mean to me?” or “How do I feel about this?” And they are constantly being watched as well. When they are older, kids have to figure out what or how much was left unsaid by their parents. Perhaps authenticity, if there is such a thing, involves being in the grip of something about which you don’t have full understanding, and honestly noticing your responses. Perhaps it means being honest to the situation, like the family situation, in which you find yourself?

Mover/Witness Dyad Journal
This practice seems to offer the mover a heightened experience of the things that each person deems significant, in a way which doesn't happen in everyday life, and yet is a concentration of everyday life.

Taking time is so important for this practice. If we are not in a hurry, if we can forget about time, then thoughts, impulses and feelings that are not the result of some ultimatum, can bubble up. It's mysterious how forgetting about where this is leading can lead to a state of complete absorption.

**13 Suggestions for Watching**

What do you notice in your own body while watching?

Watch only one dancer exclusively for a while. Or walk beside one dancer for a while.

Watch by engaging your peripheral vision for a while.

Change your position in the room. Stand in the middle for a while.

Close your eyes and listen for a while.

Which is best: standing, sitting or lying down? Watch while lying down for a while.

Watch others watching.

What is the tone of your attention? Intense? Delicate? Absent? Can different qualities coexist?

How are the dancers 'composed' in the space?

What are the dancers interested in right now? What holds your interest at this moment?

Allow your attention to come and go, to wax and wane.

What distance between you and the dancers feels right? Play with shortening or lengthening this distance.

Watch for the urgency in the room. Or watch for the intimacy in the room. Watch for the absence of qualities.
**Appendix Four: Transcripts of the Post-performance Discussions**

**Performance 1: Tuesday 11 November (32 minutes)**

Peter: Space made a big difference...no longer a neutral space.

All dancers: confronted by the number of witnesses. Conflict between personal, intimate practice and being watched by so many.

Shaun: witnesses like a forest of people.

Sophia: concerned about whether witnesses were aware of need to protect dancers. She had her hand stood on.

Olivia: eyes closed like being on the edge of danger, not for herself, but towards witnesses ie were they aware that the dancers could suddenly move, fling an arm etc.

Peter: from inside its not an undivided attention at all. When there is one witness the attention is undivided, but with so many people watching there is never the sense for the dancer that everybody, or anybody is watching. Attention is divided.

Sophia: this makes it more like a performance than a practice.

Participant A: That happened for me from the point of view of being in the audience as well, all the rhetoric that we were fed coming in, the little bit that I know about the practice, was to do with the engagement, the participation, the exchange. But in this room there was this incredible force to assume this spectatorial distance and position, that at times I felt like I was really fighting to resist the desire to just go and stand in the distance position “entertain me”.

Sophia: why do you think that was?

Participant A: Just the sheer weight of bodies in the room assuming that position. It seemed to be the normal thing, this normal position that everybody took up. We lined the walls, we sat at the periphery and that just created this kind of force in the room.

Participant B: There were people standing on the periphery but there was constant movement and there was constant change, prompted by the cards and prompted by people moving around. There were moments when I was going ‘Who am I watching again?’ because it was fascinating to watch the movement of people through the room, not just the people dancing. And I even thought maybe you should have worn some sort of uniform so that you could stand out. As a witness, as an observer, who was watching, who was I observing? And at one point I found myself in
the middle of the piece and I don’t know if the 5 of you were circling around me. That felt like it was a tension, right, am I now part of the performance, am I part of the practice, can I move with you? But it was quite...I found it was very varied.

Sophia: I don’t think this was arbitrary. That came from when we doing it more traditionally as witnesses and movers and there was this nice blending of roles sometimes, and an interest in also watching the people watching, as well.

Participant C: I enjoyed that. It was a challenge for me because I’ve done this practice a lot and also where you can be an active witness, you know, where you can be as active as you want. But even when I’ve done that it’s been very much a case of stand to the side and hold a position of being separate from my partner and separate from the group. So I found it challenging and delightful to put myself in the middle and allow myself to witness 3-dimensionally and I had the sense that I could hold 5 people as well...like it wasn’t like I was watching 30 people where I was allowed to watch anyone I wanted or a group of 30 where I had to stick with somebody and it was just...I felt much more aware of my own kinaesthetic response to what you were doing, I wasn’t quite so locked into witnessing....and I felt much more my own impulses without it having to be “I’m being an active witness”. And I just loved this moment when the dance happened so close to me and I was able to follow this person, like in performance you never get that, you sit and its like whoosh. I had a sense of my own self 3-dimensionally because of what was happening around me and I had permission to move and not get stuck in that. Because we do, and think we...I haven’t been in a lot of rooms when I’m in the middle of it, I’m on the edge, you know, my positioning is still set up in an audience kind of way. Just delighting in who was I witnessing actually? There were so many dancers and at one point I got the card that said “Everyone in this room is in this fucking dance”.

Participant D: I felt like it was quite hard not to feel like I was interfering by taking a place which was involved. So the thing about standing on the back or on the wall wasn’t so much about being a spectator...and I’ve also done this work so I’ll just preface this...How can I be that witness who is just allowing when I’m so close and interfering with any sort of breath or sound or any sort of energetic minds that might be being made by the person. And as I was watching that, I was also feeling that...the thing of not being able to see you all...or even feel like you had a chance to be without audience. Like we just were...because we were allowed to move around and we came in and we came in with our clumpy shoes. All of those things were incredibly delicate and that we’d come in and made it not so delicate. I didn’t know... I started going, I can’t remember if I’m meant to be audience or respectful witness. And I actually got confused about my role and tried to think back about ...and then the cards...and I
sot of went with it. There was this constant letting go of my own contraction around my response toward what was going on.

Shaun: unclear for us as well, about your role and what stance you need to take. That’s why we asked people to come three times.

Participant E: I haven’t done any of this work and I had forgotten that I was meant to be a witness so I was completely an audience member. For me the distinction between dancer and audience, witness/observer, was not blurred at all. I was completely clearly aware of who the dancers were in the piece the whole time. Ok so there may have been events where audience members were standing in proximity to dancers or the dance moved in relation to a number of people who were standing around, but... and so an event occurred and I can read that as some sort of event where there was a participation or an overlay of dancer and audience member but those distinctions were there. So for example, I noted that all the dancers are in socks or bare feet whereas all the audience are clomping around in shoes, they were dressed a little bit differently...you know, there weren’t any audience or witnesses who were moving with the same kind of language or dexterity that was coming out of the bodies that I had identified as dancers. So that was distinct for me. I also felt, just in relation to the cards, and this could change the next time and the time after, that the environment itself was so rich and complex, particularly with all the religious iconography and stained glass etc., etc., that I really didn’t need to use the cards tonight. There was enough for me to watch in all the multiplicity of things that were happening, you know, there was an enormous amount of stimulation just coming into this environment.

Jason: That was my experience when I came into here yesterday. We had some people watching

Unidentified participant: I thought the card that said watch without judgment...is it possible to look and to view without preconceptions ...and so, and I must say, I saw events where the religious iconography and the performer or maybe the audience people were there and moving in some sort of relationship to each other.

Participant F: I have no real experience in this...and I struggled so hard to step way from trying to make sense of things and create narratives. Especially when there were relationships...trying to overlay it with something instead of that thing of stepping away and just witnessing. And I stood at the end, which is really different kind of perspective and you can look at it as a kind of performance. And look long-ways down, with people moving in a line kind of helped me...more of a looking at and an unusual perspective of a deep space. And I know Shaun and I kept on seeing Shaun do this thing of putting his hand on his head...which I know so well and it was very pleasurable to go “oh yeah, I know what’s going on” (everyone laughs)
Participant G: I think it was difficult to try and view without preconception or without an expectation. I think that was a bit of challenge. Because...(couldn’t hear this)

Participant H: It was interesting making conscious and unconscious efforts. In the space and with the cards and prompts...I could follow this card or discard it and this was obviously a conscious effort. But if I were to just aimlessly walk around the room and just allow things to happen without having any kind of consciousness. It was really interesting to play with that ...was I doing this because I wanted to do that or because of the prompts? Or everyone I watched in the space had something but I going to go back to the person I was watching beforehand.
When you guys were first starting out, with eyes closed and moving, that responsibility as a witness to look after the dancers...I don’t know ...you might walk into walls and stuff...if I saw anything I happenings I’d almost jump so I should be ready to help with that situation. But it was kind of unnecessary so I settled back in. And I didn’t know if me having that sharp energy would impact you guys...or whether I should enter that to protect the dancer more easily.

Jason: But whatever happens, whether it’s a sharp touch or a soft touch, are just things that I deal with in the practice. So the responsibility of whether I walk into walls can be attended to in many ways.

Participant H: It was interesting to see how you dealt with the touches.

Participant B: There was that potential for a collision between the two of you.
There was that responsibility for protecting that ended up being counterproductive. And I removed myself and observing how there were no collisions because you guys were handling it and you’ve been practicing together. And somehow the nervous system is picking up on things and it was OK.

Participant I: What was different for me that was different to other performance set-ups or arrangements was my attention to the audience, being part of an audience and my attention on the audience. I don’t think I hold that as a usual “lets watch a performance audience person”. I was very interested in that card that asks you to “watch other audience people watching” and being a part of that, so I’m watching a watcher and watching the doer. And it was just an interesting way to sit in it, I suppose. So feeling like I’m part of this big group, and that was hard, because I’d actually wanted it to be a private experience. And possibly that’s the nature of the practice is that it is private, it’s intimate, it’s one on one. So it was that kind of tension between...I felt the desire for the privacy of it...can everyone clear the space for me? (laughs)...but holding the entirety of the audience...I’m part of the mass here and sort of sitting in that.
Participant F: Do you want us to go away? (laughter)

Participant I: Yeah, next time can you just not come (laughs). Because it was really challenging to get to...you know how you were saying that it was difficult to relate it to the bigger mass...it was very hard as an audience...I don’t know if anyone else got there with anything but to feel that private...I’m with this person and I’m in that...there was always a sense of ‘other’.

Participant B: Did you try and look for that privacy in the experience?

Participant I: Yes because there was a beautiful card “look for the intimate moments” and about qualities...I spent quite a lot of time looking for those intimate things and they are there but it was quite subtle, I suppose.

Shaun: The difference for us was that we’ve been practicing this for quite a while so we’ve been practicing dealing with that situation of trying to hold onto that private moment for ourselves even in the face of having so many people here. But I guess for you as an audience, or as witnesses, I suppose that takes a bit of practice as well.

Participant D: I was curious about that...how you all found that...you know if you were to give it a scale or something, you know, how much were you able to stay in touch with, whatever it is that you were staying in touch with. You know, because to me it felt like there were so many of us in the room, so may energies and I wondered where you were dancing from? I felt like each of you were doing it differently.

Sophia: for me I reckon about 70% about 50% of the time. I was in 70% for myself, 50% of the time. And the rest of the time I was just on the edge.

Participant E: I was really curious about that too because a lot of what we’ve been talking about is people moving with their eyes closed but people were moving with their eyes open for a lot of the performance. So, I can understand when you’re moving with your eyes closed, you’re responding to internal sensation or things that arise. So a question for me is what are you doing when you’re moving with your eyes open. I might have read something about that but I can’t remember what I read, so I’d be interested in hearing about that. Are you still trying to hang onto that thing and what happens to that when you’re in a context like this? And how does the movement change when you’re moving with your eyes open? Because I felt it did; I felt a big shift in the movement when people opened their eyes, you know in terms of how the space was used.

Shaun: I really felt tonight that I could hang onto some of those interior impulses, that drive that is generated for me when you have your eyes
closed. I was quite strongly connected to it tonight. It doesn’t always happen that way in the presence of other people. But of course when you open your eyes there is a lot more to take in and...so for example you can use the room and you can travel in certain directions and move between people in a way that you can’t do when your eyes are closed. And imaginatively it is a little bit different...knowing that there are these people in the room...they do have impact.

Jason: I just try not to give, all the time, primacy to my sight. My sight is not...by the time I open my eyes and I’ve been through that 10 minutes period of eyes open or eyes closed, I’m almost exploring the balance sometimes...it can different sometimes, but mostly I’m exploring the balance between different sensory experience and not just giving my sight carte blanche to dictate perceptually where I can go and what I can do. I feel like having my eyes closed allows me to connect in with what I can hear and what I can smell, all these other things. But there’s a moment when I find myself drawn to something or someone through my sight and I don’t try to hold myself back from this.

Participant J: Can I ask with eye contact what’s been your experience so far because that quite a different thing when you actually engage visually with a performer or performers together?

Shaun: So you’re asking if it’s alright for you to make eye contact or for us to make eye contact with you?

Julia: it’s a very different experience isn’t it?

Shaun: Oh it can be an absolute demand when you make eye contact with a person. But we’ve been trying to practice not being obliged to respond to eye contact. So we can, but if we don’t feel like we want to then we don’t need to register it as something that comes as an obligation.

Jason: We’re all human beings in the space so if you make eye contact with me...

Shaun: It’s a choice ...

Olivia: We’ve been practicing this for a very long time and over the time we were somehow able to meet each other’s eyes and allow it not to be full of meaning or obligation and maybe even smile at each other and that was just, you know, a gentle meeting. And I did feel tonight because that’s what I’m used to doing, it felt available to me in relation to all of you here even though I haven’t been practicing with you.

Peter: Yes, that’s was I wanted to say before in relation to what Jason was saying. I think because we’ve started with eyes shut we have a more proprioceptive way of relating to what we’re doing. And we have less, or we think we do anyway, less visual and personal deals happening. So
you're not deliberately picking up a motif. You know, you may well be picking up on something that someone else is doing and doing that deliberately but it's not quite the same as taking a motif and working with it. It feels different.

Participant B: I'm really curious about how much you've been keeping your individuality as dancers and movers during the practice and how much you've moved as a group?

Shaun: We've been very strongly trying to stay separate. But of course we've been practicing that together so inevitably there has been an overlap or a bleeding across that happens. But we certainly haven't pursued that consciously at all.

Performance 2: Thursday 13 November (26 minutes)

Shaun: I was really struggling at the beginning tonight with feeling like I had to perform and really working hard to avoid that and just let the impulses come authentically. But at the beginning I was finding that really hard tonight for some reason...much harder than last night. So that internal thing was actually quite hard to achieve but as we went on it got much easier...once I opened my eyes strangely enough. And I was also really conscious of what a social situation this is becoming...you know...it felt you all (audience) took a different licence in terms of how you watched and how you sat and how you were in the space so that was very different from last night. I was kind of really looking forward to seeing what happened.

Jason: Every time I do this something different emerges. It's usually just a question that comes to mind. Today was a question that I've had before. How long is an authentic impulse to do something? How long do I keep something going, at what point is it done and I'm ready to move on? That came up a few times today. Usually I know when it's over, and I become very aware of it in a way that I wasn't. Like that moment when the bells are ringing in the church tower and you realize you're counting the how many bells. That's the kind of distance in time that happens for me.

Sophia: I found tonight I was able to, when my eyes were closed, be in touch with some kind of internal interest. Yeah, still the act of opening my eyes in the room anyway, but especially with all these people, with all you people...it is just ...its great, I really like it, but it's so difficult to keep that thread internally. So you know, I was trying and most of the time I was there to some degree and I enjoy that task very much.

Olivia: I am often surprised, I suppose, by the familiar or something, that bodily ideas come up for me or interests or things for me to do or notice while I’m doing it. And I feel very interested in that and keep doing it but still every time I experience it, it feels like I’m just noticing it for the first time somehow. So I felt like I had a continual stream of bodily things
which came up for me but there was something else going on at the same time which was to do with the other people in the space. I felt like we’d all...or nearly everyone was here the other night...and we all know the terms or somehow we’ve agreed...tacitly on the terms. So that felt like something for me to play with while at the same time working through or figuring out enjoying what was going on bodily for me.

Peter: I felt like I was making a lot of decisions.

Participant J: I was really moved by everything tonight and by what familiarity does so what you were just saying about the terms being established. So the other night felt like, you know, when you said like trying something on. And it was difficult to get the intimacy that was implied by the dyad relationship. And I felt, gosh, how can we create that kind of intimacy with so many people...you know, not sure how that could function. But tonight, you know, because the space was known I felt immediately this sort of warmth and intimacy in the whole room and a sense that we could allow you do your thing and we would be intimately interested in everything and I could improvise this as a watcher and drop down into that. So I enjoyed it enormously tonight.

Participant E: When I was here on Tuesday I said that I felt that the distinction between the performer and audience was clear for me all the way through even though everyone was moving through the space. But because you asked us to take off our shoes off that made a big difference and I felt the start of the piece was much more blurred. And I took in the movement of the audience...I mean that sort of ceased when you started to move. The other things is just confirming what you (Olivia?) said at the beginning, that I gave myself a lot of choices to play with perspectives and how to view the work and I really played with looking at the space. But I am finding that I really like to look down the space...I enjoy that...of being at either end of the space. The short side of the space doesn’t interest me as much. I really enjoy that. I’d say that I had more like a gallery experience...of viewing art of being, you know, close to a thing, further away and I played a lot.

Participant C: I had an image the other night and again tonight of a Rodin exhibition I saw recently...of just coming into these figures but they’re kind of moving and also that familiarity of going back to an exhibition you’ve enjoyed and walking in tonight and just going “Oh it’s you, how lovely”, you know, whereas the other night it was like “OK (can’t hear next few words)” And tonight it’s like “Oh, here we are again” and I don’t know about the word intimacy for me but familiar...and privileged sharing...like going to someone’s house for lunch...it’s OK it’s nothing special...it’s very special but it’s special in it’s non-specialness. It’s very privileged to witness audience in that way, in this container.
Shaun: I suppose part of the experiment was just, you know, if we did this more than once then people would find new ways to be in it. And not really knowing how that would go. That’s part of the interest...

Participant C: And I had one question, have you as a group been on the floor together as a group, doing this score with or without witness...and/or witnesses.

Shaun: We’ve done it both ways. We’ve done it a lot without witnesses.

Participant C: So you’re familiar with the time framing and being on the floor together.

Olivia: very

Shaun: It’s really hard to do it without witnesses.

Participant C: I know; it makes the practice quite interesting research to do. And I just wondered about that, when you were saying you quite safe about this and I thought “Oh maybe you’ve done this without witnesses”

Shaun: A lot

Participant C: So you’re used to bumping into each other.

Shaun: That’s the thing, we so used to being together but we’re not used to being with you. And you’re probably not used to being with us.

Participant C: This number is new for you too?

Shaun: Totally

Participant C: So what do you normally practice with?

Shaun: about the same number as ourselves.

Peter: and in a very different space.

Participant H: About us taking off our shoes, how did that affect you guys tonight?

Shaun: I barely noticed you when you came in...I mean I did notice you, but it was really different. I mean I was actually really struck by you saying that last night Bryan, because it rang true...it was a bit of an oversight. The roles are different between watchers and doers but it was something yesterday...just the noise of people coming in was quite provocative or something.
Jason: this time you came in and you disappeared very quickly...in a minute.

Shaun: I couldn’t believe how quickly you all put your shoes and went to stillness and quietness. So it was almost like “where are you”?

Peter: And it also felt like people, in whatever role you’re in, behaved quite differently tonight.

Participant H: I felt like I certainly did tonight. I felt a lot more involved...like the time passed much quicker for me...and I felt like I was a lot more, not...involved is the wrong word but just grounded in the space with you. I don’t know if that’s because we also familiar with the space.

Peter: And also visually you looked a lot more like movers than watchers tonight.

Participant K: What if the witnesses joined in with you?

Sophia: Yes, I was thinking that. Did anyone feel that?

Several people: yeah (in chorus)

Shaun: I could feel that desire from people. People were holding themselves back to some degree...I don’t know, I just don’t know. We’ve got one more shot at this so I suppose if you want to do it, you’d better do it soon.

Participant I: There’s a real etiquette isn’t there, as a mover, there’s an etiquette about when you do and when you don’t. So it’s interesting...what would it take, what sort of permission do you need?

Participant D: But isn’t that the contract? I imagined that the contract is that we don’t move. So it’s not necessarily a permission but the rules were laid down.

Shaun: It kind of is, you know, you are witnesses and so you’re there to support us moving.

Participant C: But there is a an Authentic Movement practice where the witness moves also and so it’s a different contract

Shaun: that’s very true. We just haven’t been doing that.

Peter: It did seem that was happening at times, like people were doing that to some degree tonight. Sensing when it as alright to sort of dance...
Shaun: And because this is...I don’t know if this is viable and this is a sort of experiment and we’re figuring out the terms as we go along. I suppose if people take licence...I suppose I shouldn’t say this...

Participant D: But Shaun I had a lot of questions come up around what the question is that you’re involved with in having us here, because performatively, as soon as even that contract changes...we’ve got a whole other, you know, multiple layers and information coming into the space...and then, is it us being authentic in relation to you? You know, like, if we’re being influenced by your movement to move, I was curious about the group, tonight even, how much are you looking after each other as you dance, or what’s motivating you around the sound of someone else's steps. And just so many...to me the reason I sat down tonight was because there’s just so much information, if I am going to be in the contract of witness which is supporting you to move, that’s the only way I can hold all of those other things...that was for me. So that there’s just so much going on...

Sophia: You mean in the prompts (cards)?

Participant D: Well the prompts...I went to the prompts. But to me in the dyad thing you actually...as a witness you come as a holder of space and it comes with its own presence and its not just a watching but its got all this other...

Shaun: it’s active

Participant D: it’s very active. So actively being engaged with 5 people plus everyone else and in an effort to help them engage with themselves, just feels like a lot of information.

Shaun: In a way that was why it was feeling quite social tonight, because people were trying to figure out how to be in this room together.

Participant E: But you’ve also give us a liberty as an audience because we’re not in a configuration of sitting and watching a performance. We’re actually moving through a performance, therefore I had an experience of realizing, well I’ve actually been given an opportunity to view dance in a way that I never normally do. Like I can go up really close and watch it very closely, or I can lie down on the floor, or I can watch it peripherally. So as an audience member, because I’m here for the second time I want to make use of those choices.

Sophia: you’re both coming from such different places in the way you’re approaching this event.

Participant L: For me tonight I really noticed how full the scores were...like I only used two cards tonight, the other night I used three. And using two...
Shaun: that's very economical of you (laughter)

Participant L: Whether it was a paragraph or just one line, for me to look at that score and find something, or notice something, I could only focus on an individual. Whereas if let that score go, I saw you as a collective and I could see everyone. But as soon as it came back, for me to be able to think what is really, the score, allowing me to do and what can I find, I could only look at one person, may be two if they were close together.

Shaun: I think that’s great, I mean you’re making a very conscious decision about how you want to play it. That is part of what’s on offer...you can make lots of decisions.

Participant L: It’s interesting that Peter said he felt he was making lots of decisions and that’s what we’re doing too. Seeing the choices that we have available which are greater than the usual performance, aren’t they, because you enter, you sit down, you don’t move preferably, or cough or sneeze or anything. So this is just liberating observationally or interactionally...it’s just really beautifully sculptural.

Peter: It might sound precious but I wanted to take back what I was saying before that people were sort of sensing whether it’s alright to dance with...that isn’t what was happening I don’t think. People were aware of what it was to move among a number of people...which is different.

Participant F: I had a curious...a very different experience from the other night. And one of the cards that I pulled tonight was about being lost, consciously seeking being lost instead of the familiar. And so there was a kind of tension for me now being familiar...and looking forward to the familiar on Saturday night instead of being in the uncertainty of being in the unknown.

Shaun: You mean you quite enjoyed the unknown?

Participant F: No I enjoyed the familiar more, but when I pulled that card I did note "Oh, here’s where I am now". And the other...I found a lot of humour tonight...in the movement. But I also felt quite concerned for you (addresses Sophia).

Sophia: Oh, really? How come?

Participant F: which is not a feeling I have when I watch performers. And it was in whatever the movement was...it affected me and I kept my distance (laughter).

Participant M: I definitely noticed that sense of...for me it was a sort of absurd...absurdist movement. At one point I felt like I was watching a
Samuel Beckett play. Just towards the end it was really...it was definitely inter-relationship and a non-sequitur narrative.

Peter: Excuse me (addresses Matt Dobson) were you talking about feeling...not safety but feeling empathy?

Participant F: Yes, not a sense of unsafety but a kind of personal concern.

Participant L: Seeing as you asked for us not to talk is that also in relation to laughing in response to...? (laughter). Because I want to sometimes...because people’s facial expressions are so funny sometimes, it looks like they are talking to themselves, and I want to laugh but I hold it in because I’m like OK I’m not allowed to talk maybe I shouldn’t be laughing.

Shaun: I think it’s fine to laugh. But sometimes audiences laugh so that the performers can hear them...you know, it’s quite a deliberate thing and I don’t know if it’s about that but if it’s a natural thing for you to laugh, it’s fine.

Jason: At Cecil St we had some laughing and it was the first time I’ve experienced the laughing in this situation and it was just something different. I don’t know, we laugh...we’re serious, we laugh.

Participant L: I feel that’s in me still because I didn’t allow myself to let it out...

Shaun: I think that’s a two-way street because probably we experience that same apprehension as well about letting certain things out.

Participant C: When you practice do you sound; do you include sound at all? Do you find that’s not as available to you in this context?

Jason: There’s something normatively that we’ve decided that if we do make sound, but we’re not talking,...before we talked about it...I think that was just one of the understandings that kind of became a norm.

Participant D: So is there any layer in you as you’re out there, in wanting to be interesting to us?

Shaun: Well, I was struggling with that a little tonight. That word came up for me, yes.

Participant D: And given that you’re calling it performance...what is the issue with that?

Shaun: Well it’s not necessarily an issue. I think you can be authentically engaged in trying to be interesting. But it just hasn’t been a part of the
practice. You know, there's no need to do that when you're in the dyad and that has been a really strong basis for what we've been doing.

Participant D: Because I remember one of the card that came up with questions around how you warm up...and so where you begin, and the heat in the body...just in terms of your connectiveness and the intellect over the body...and I wondered if you'd played with that?

Shaun: We haven’t played with common things. So everyone has had a different relationship to it and we just happen to be in the same space at the same time.

Jason: I do ask the question “what is the warm up for this?” Even though we’re doing this gig...but the performance I’d do normally for a performance, a different type of performance would be pretty intensive. You know Tuesday I warmed up like I would for a regular performance. Today I didn't do...I did different things...I walked up and down the space for half an hour. But I’m still questioning what it is I actually need to do to be ready to go. Like there is a truth for me that what I’m doing is dancing here, it’s not going for coffee. So the Authentic Movement is coming from that world. So in that world, I warm up in a particular way.

Peter: to me that feels like it is a really central question (addressing Participant D), whether you are focusing on being interested or interesting. And how that is in this context.

Shaun: I think that's well summarized.

Sophia: Throughout the practice it’s always been to not feel obliged to be interesting and my understanding is that we're trying to keep that.

Shaun: let’s come back to the question of whether it’s performance on Saturday. Perhaps you can tell us?

Performance 3: Saturday 15 November (23 minutes)

Shaun: Should we just make this circle and have a quick discussion? So I guess we speak first and you speak after. Would one of the others like to begin...I feel like I’ve started every time?

Peter: Tonight after re-reading your scores I was trying particularly at the beginning to let you determine the choreography. And it felt to me last night as if I was making decisions, not exactly to show things, but to place myself so that the choreography would work, between the 5 movers. And tonight I was trying to use one of your scores of letting the mover [witness?] have sole responsibility for that.
Shaun: It felt much quieter tonight than previous nights...and much more settled. I didn’t feel like I had much to offer and I started thinking about, well, is it my responsibility to make this happen or can I just let that go. That was a tough one. So yeah, things came to a halt very quickly. Lots of things were initiated but they didn’t seem to run for very long for me. But you know, it was still pleasurable and I felt like I could see the room much more clearly tonight. I felt like I was seeing people in it much more openly. Just very different, every time it has been a very different experience.

Jason: I was...as each moment passed, I’m usually not a very sentimental person when it comes to performance, but as each moment passed I became very, very aware that this would be the last time that I’ll be doing this. And I was sort of struggling throughout, I think with, I knew that this was the last time. And that’s something that I’ve never had to deal with before in the two years or whatever it is that we’ve been doing this. That we wouldn’t have another time. Well we probably will have another time...but in this context. That was completely new.

Sophia: If I think about the first time when I felt, almost intruded upon, with so many people in the space. Actually this time I felt the gift of it and I felt a lot safer and cared for. And I felt in a cotton wool environment. Especially at the beginning with eyes closed which seems to be much easier still.

Olivia: Probably, similar to what everybody has said, really the three nights have been very different and I think a lot is to do with the conditions we’re in, but also our own personal states and how it changed knowing the same people or knowing this kind of relationship. And it’s changed over the 3 nights but I guess I feel wouldn’t it be nice to do it for another week. Or to do it again and again and again and see if something settles because it did feel really quite different for me as well tonight. Whether that’s because it was the 3rd night or because it’s Saturday or whether it would come, you know, to something.

Jason: It’s a real privilege, for me, to have 3 times with the same people. That doesn’t happen.

Shaun: It’s a gift...thank you very much.

Jason: I felt very supported.

Shaun: please feel free to say something.

Participant H: I don’t know if was because you felt more supported and familiar with this space and with us...or whether you too...risks is the wrong word, but like, when you had your eyes closed, I remember at one point, for about a minute or so there were 3 of you really close, and I just feeling like I had this responsibility. I felt very responsible a lot of the
time tonight. But then it felt easier to know when to jump in and I just kind of stayed close. But you guys also just resolved everything.

Olivia: At times I actually felt my proximity to people but I actually didn’t know whether it was one of the 5 of us or...so I don’t think I’m deliberately trying to challenge that. I wasn’t like “I’ll go closer and see what happens” so I guess I would always move back from that. I didn’t know whether that was clear or...

Jason: I definitely had an impulse to move with my eyes closed and I didn’t feel as though I would hurt myself, or hurt you guys.

Participant G: I just wanted to pick up on what Olivia was saying. I think our response, the audience, witness response, or even dancer’s response, to everything that happening here, the space...definitely depends on our personal state because I feel today that I was kind of dropping in and out of focus...”oh, it’s Saturday, oh my god “. (laughs) I guess it made me realize the importance of being present and, you know, I guess I wanted to see if the dancers too were present. But comparatively speaking, compared to the last two days I was actively watching everyone, like...I felt like what I was watching was zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom and I had those cards going on and on. Yeah, I was a lot more active on the past 2 days and I think again, Shaun, you said that it felt like there were pauses every now and then and I definitely had that feeling.

Shaun: yeah...so where were the cards for people tonight? Had you had enough of them or were you still reading them?

Participant C: No way. I had a huge problem not to gobble them.

Shaun: Like lollies.

Participant C: Yeah, there’s just some great material in there...um, helpful and just not helpful...and just like, “oh wow, really?” And just noticing when and why I wanted to have one....What I was going to say before was tonight, particularly tonight, what I noticed was the permission to move or be roving, like allowing myself to attend to my physicality, not just be sitting there going...like when you are on the computer you don’t notice if your foot’s gone to sleep or your back can be really hurting because you’re in this thing and I think that often when I attend like that and I end up sitting very, very still for a very, very long time I can disassociate from my body very well and at the same time not so it was it was really nice tonight to go “I need to move”. And in keeping alive to my own physical state, it made me notice a lot more where I was adding my attending, where I was adding my noticing, when had I left my own body. When my body asked that it needed something because of myself or what I was watching without having to be an active witness, or, you know, feel I wanted to join you or anything like that. To just be more alive to so much
more of myself as a viewer because I had permission to go beyond sitting in a chair.

Participant N: Tonight I picked a card right at the start that says “you are invited to witness without judgment” and that kind of just gave me something for the entire duration. So I think, like, the first night I came and I was going through a few cards and my attention was really on you guys, not so much the other people in the room. And I was using the cards to kind of feed what I was watching...the movers. And then last time I got a card that said “everyone in the room is in this fucking dance” and that made me watch everybody else in the room and I kind of wasn’t as interested in you guys. I was kind of watching people in the audience. And then tonight I found myself not really paying...I was paying a lot of attention just not really paying attention at all because I was trying to think about how I would watch something without judgment. Like it’s kind of impossible.

Shaun: Yes, I was going to ask if it was actually possible.

Participant N: Yeah, so I found that tonight was not actually about you guys, and not about the audience but about myself. And I found myself just trying to figure out whether maybe I could not have a judgment, whether that’s possible to do...and just trying to be with my own thoughts. So yeah, it’s just interesting.

Jason: Maybe it’s not a dyad, but a three...

Shaun: A triad

Participant F: I pulled a card, and I read it, and it says “I’m getting good at being a person whose body is a charm” [this was a misreading of the card which said “channel” not “charm”]. And that made me really think about that performative aspect. And then I re-read it and the card actually says “I’m getting good at being a person whose body is a channel” (laughter from others)...which didn’t help me as much. (more laughter) Going back to what you were saying, my comfort here, over the 3 nights, increased because my self-consciousness about being able to be looked at got less. Because I felt like I kind of ??? before and that made it much easier for me. Being a self-conscious person, it was much simpler to be here.

Participant N: Last night too I just laid down at the very end, in the last 5 minutes and I closed my eyes...like I kind of just wanted to know what it was like to close my eyes but still feel a lot of movement as well. The audience was still quite active and I was closing my eyes and I started feeling really, really self-conscious. I wonder if people are watching me now. Because that’s what I was doing sometimes, just watching other people. So it kind of made me feel a little empathy or something.
Participant E: I’ll just say a few things. I feel that the 3 events were really different. Just in relation to the cards, I’m not sure about the cards...I think I read in your notes that they’re a lens through which to view. But I feel there are so many lens available to me in this space and I think, you know, there’s enough for me to work on just coming in here. I sort of don’t really need the cards. I mean I can read them and take it or leave it. But I think I’ve explored...you know the first night I was in here it was the room that was very significant...because it was the first time I’ve been in the space. On the 2nd night I viewed from very different perspectives and tonight. And tonight...I did read a few of the cards tonight. I also feel, you know, speaking about watching or nor watching the audience, I felt the event that happened on Thursday night, there was a lot more movement from the audience, whereas tonight I felt the space was broken up in a different way. And I felt when I was watching at times a group of people moving who were occupying the centre of the space and a lot of people around the periphery. And that was very different. And, I mean, you know, a question that’s been running through my mind and that actually occurred to me on the first night that came back again tonight, and I did think of it on Thursday as well, is “what am I watching here?” because you spoke about choreography. So that means I have to think a lot about what I think choreography is, because I’m not sure that I’m watching choreography. I know I’m watching a practice and I know I’m watching people moving but I’m not sure...I mean depending on how I define choreography...if it occurs naturally or how I see down a perspective in the space, a series of events and the relationships between them and the bodies. But I’m not...I mean I did feel the other night...you know, I don’t feel as if I’m watching choreography. I feel as if I’m watching people moving. And so that’s a question for me in thinking about what I want to take away.

Shaun: Yeah, it is a big question for this event...it is a huge question.

Sophia: What’s the difference between watching choreography and what you’ve watched the last 3 nights?

Participant E: Well...I don’t know; I may not have the language to talk about it. But yesterday afternoon I went to actually watch a choreographer...show a work in progress and the experience was really different. I mean it was a different audience experience, but I think the construction was different. You know if I went back to see that again, I’d see the same movement...you know there’s a particular investigation. I mean I know there’s an investigation here so maybe my language isn’t specific enough to describe it, to articulate it...

Shaun: I take your point but what I don’t want to do right now is get into a...I don’t want to get defensive about this. I’m really interested to hear what you have to say because this is absolutely the line on which this is walking.
Participant E: Yes, yes, I can see that.

Shaun: And so it’s really interesting to hear how you see it.

Participant E: Well it’s just been a question in me, you know, am I watching choreography.

Participant O: In fact I have an opposite thought to that. And I was thinking that any work that has...and I use the word detachment, you know, it’s seeking a non-performance or a non-attractiveness. It’s not seeking to attract me. Nobody seems to be seeking to attract each other. Or get attached to anything or anybody, therefore detachment...has as much need in it as works of, you know, attachment and attractiveness. And perhaps they need as much hard work, craft, in the run up before and as much during the performances because between the first day and today there’s a world of difference. And one of the differences that everybody seems to be knowing in the crude language...using a crude word...everybody seems to be knowing their job. And obviously nobody was doing their job which was the joy and the light of this. And therefore what was my craft, as a witness? What did I, even in these two days, move to? [Arjun missed the 2nd performance] And what did you, you know? (addressing Shaun) The difference between the first and the 3rd day was enormous for me. In terms of craft and in terms of being and in terms of freedom...the amount of freedom you could all breathe in and experience. And that brought me to one of the cards which said “what’s going on here?” ...is a question we aren’t able to ask of survival in our families, you know. And that’s such a critical question, because I said, “oh, I can ask that here...now”. Not only can I ask this here, now, also I can just get up and change my position and find a way to get closer to it. And then I thought, you know, the performance itself feels like a question. The performance, the work itself, is the framing of a question. And therefore maybe the answer is maybe another performance. That itself was exciting to come to.

Participant I: The feedback was amazing fro me...you know, the feedback that viewing of the work gave to me was as powerful as, you know, in my yoga practice or... It was something that enlightened me about where I was today. And it was that question – “what is going on here?”. And it became very personal – “what is going on with me here?”. And so the reading of the cards became this other layer which I could pause to absorb something else. And I think by this evening the places I found myself in in which to read were such different places than I was at on the first two nights. I think it’s really educated me...which is a bizarre thing for me to consider, because I’ve been watching dance my entire life. But I just felt like, oh this is just such a different way for me to sit and absorb movement. And it felt much more like an absorption and a feedback loop, than all those other years of sitting in an audience and feeling a bit...I don’t know...needy, or (laughs)...or needed, I guess. Here it was about what do I need tonight, today and now. And it was very meditative. I think
I became altered. (laughter) Which I only do when I’m shopping. (laughter) So thank you, it was just such a beautiful experience for me.

Shaun: It’s probably a good time for me to thank all of you because it really wouldn’t have been possible, as an experiment, without your presence and commitment. So thank you so much, and I really hope you’re able to stay with us now and just have a glass of champagne, because it has been a very, very special kind of dynamic...a very special exchange, I feel. So please join us for a glass of bubbly...thank you. (all applaud)