

Dark Park: visceral experiments with narrative in dance theatre

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Abstract

This practice-led MA project in performance focuses on the use of narrative elements within dance theatre. Following the work of Pina Bausch and Lloyd Newson it investigates processes for integrating narrative with the abstract properties of dance. Whilst Bausch and Newson have approached narrative from divergent perspectives, both have utilised it in ways that embrace ambiguity, encouraging interpretation but refusing definitive meaning. This project expands these perspectives to further explore this space between specificity and ambiguity. It suggests a story through movement and physicality and investigates the ability of narrative to connect directly to the emotional core of the spectator.

Dark Park is a character based solo performance that follows three threads of research investigation: wild dog/becoming animal; simple technologies of shadow and illusion; and a combined personal, political and fictive narrative. These threads have been pursued for the rich and visceral narrative possibilities they offer. They support the cultivation of a studio practice that investigates the unveiling of story, whilst reinforcing the overall aim to renegotiate narrative territory for dance.

As well as Bausch and Newson, the performance draws inspiration from Deleuze and Guattari's text 'Becoming Wolf' (in *A Thousand Plateaus*), together with artists Christian Boltanski, Joseph Beuys and authors Justine Larbalestier, Eva Hornung and Angela Carter. The performance is supplemented by this research paper which discusses the artistic context, process of development and performance of the work. It includes creative writing, images and video documentation.

Master by Research Declaration (by creative project)

“I, Kelly Alexander, declare that the Master by Research exegesis entitled *Dark Park: visceral experiments with narrative in dance theatre*, is at least 12,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work”.

Signature:

Date:

Acknowledgements

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Marking Territory: Prologue

Dark Park: Visceral Experiments with Narrative in Dance Theatre, is a practice-led MA research project in performance, born out of a long held fascination with narrative in dance. As a choreographer and performer I revere the extra-linguistic power of dance and applaud the innovation of movement for movement's sake. I am also captivated, however, by narrative's ability to communicate specifically and meaningfully to dance audiences. The act of combining the two forms, I believe, holds expansive possibilities in the creation of new, dynamic and poignant performance. This project sought to explore and hone these possibilities through rigorous visceral experimentation and utilisation of other narrative forms in the creation of new dance theatre work *Dark Park*.

The value of narrative in dance has been negated and embraced by choreographers throughout history, from the influential ballets of Tchaikovsky (*Swan Lake* 1876, *Sleeping Beauty* 1889 and *the Nutcracker* 1892), to Rudolf Laban's early 'dance play' *Die Gaukelei* (1923), Ausdruckstanz (expression dance) pioneer Mary Wigman's *Schwingende Landschaft* (1929) and later to the 1940's/50's rise of American expressionism that dominated the world of modern dance in the great dance dramas of Martha Graham and Jose Limon (Huxley 1994, 162). In 1955, in what was part revolt against the then mainstream story telling of Graham and Limon, Merce Cunningham famously stated that: 'The body shooting into space is not an idea of man's freedom, but is the body shooting into space'. His abstract works asserted a belief in the innate value of pure movement (Jowitt 1994a, 2). Here modern dance was performed in neutrality, simply as itself, serving no ends but the abstracted aesthetic.

Conversely, also in the 1950's George Balanchine denied the existence of the abstract form. He argued that not only can the body never be neutral but the placing of 'unaffected' bodies

on stage will always result in interpretation of meaning by the audience (Jowitt 1994a, 2). Both choreographers were purists however, united in their drive to explore the 'essence' of movement. Their work gave rise to the 'post-modern' shift of the 60's and early 70's in which narrative was deconstructed, and in America for some time, all but disappeared (Jowitt in Bremser 1999, 7).

The choreography of America's Judson Dance Theatre (prominent members included Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, Steve Paxton and Deborah Hay) in this period of American dance history featured 'exploration of everyday movement, the use of untrained performers, dances structured like tasks or ingenious games, objects used literally, process as a possible element of performance, absence of narrative or emotion [and an] avoidance of virtuosity and glamour to seduce an audience' (Jowitt in Bremser 1999, 7). Forty years later the work of Hay continues its influence through the development and advocacy of performance practices she terms 'playing awake', a set of techniques that seek to engage the dancer in multiple levels of consciousness at once (Hay 2011).¹

By the late 1970's, new developments in European contemporary dance saw the reconfiguration of the form proceeding by another path. Arising out of the dark struggle of Germany's *Ausdruckstanz*, Pina Bausch struck the dance world with her immense emotion and theatricality. Merging movement, speech and song in extensive spectacles, she was to make the term *Tanztheatre* (Dance Theatre) world famous. Her works mirrored post-

¹ Hay's work, through the teachings of her Australian protégé Ros Warby, proved useful to the making of *Dark Park*, and will be discussed later.

modernist concern with the 'rejection of illusion, [a] reconceptualisation of what constitutes dance and the imperative to make it aware of itself' (Carter 1998, 20), however her framework was theatrical and her use of montage and fragmentation of structure encouraged a multiplicity of interpretation. Bausch's work utilized narrative, but in a fragmented and collage like way, embodying 'subtexts that seem to be directly formulated from everyday experiences and then taken to extremes' (Canton 1994, 9).

The 1980's then saw a rekindled interest in emotion and narrative emerge together with a desire to harness the story telling power of dance. From the political climate at the time arose a need to express dissatisfaction with race and gender inequalities, to speak out against conservatism and a dire economic climate for the arts, and to express the terror of AIDS (Jowitt in Bremser 1999, 9). Australian Lloyd Newson founded London's DV8 in 1986 and the company gained immediate recognition for their high impact physicality, confrontational subject matter, and the use of the speaking dancer. From 1986 to 1990 DV8's works contained no specific storylines, linking material thematically rather than adhering to narrative structures. By 1992's *Strange Fish* however, Newson had begun scripting scenarios prior to the rehearsal process. 'I felt as if I couldn't go back into the studio without a well-planned, detailed storyline ... An outline made the process easier. I still used improvisation but was able to divide my ideas more clearly' (Newson in Giannachi & Luckhurst 1999, 109). Newson was first to coin the phrase 'physical theatre,' its origins in part owed to the work of Bausch.

I was introduced to the form of dance theatre whilst in tertiary study, working under choreographer and ex-Bausch company member Michael Whaites. Later I took up a secondment with Bausch's company Tanztheater Wuppertal, and this experience profoundly influenced my own work, which from the outset, has been very theatrical and collage like in

nature. In further developing my choreographic voice, my attention has been drawn repeatedly to the task of combining narrative with the abstract dancing form whilst utilising a multiplicity of performance vocabularies.

Today dance theatre has firmly established itself in Australia. Choreographers Kate Champion (Force Majeure), Gavin Webber (Splinter Group), Kate Denborough (Kage Physical Theatre), Michael Whaites (Link Dance Company), and independent South Australian choreographers Naida Chinner and the late Tanja Liedtke are peers with whom I share a commonality of vision. However, Europe continues to remain at the centre of dance theatre where, in the wake of Bausch, celebrated companies such as Alain Platel's Les Ballets C De La B, Newson's DV8 and Wim Vandekeybus' Ultima Vez, have given rise to a multitude of young companies utilising narrative within their multi disciplinary theatrical approach to dance. One such company, Belgium's The Peeping Tom Collective, presented *Le Salon* at the 2009 Melbourne Festival.

Le Salon held many striking similarities to my own work *Falling For Frank* (Alexander 2008). Being works of dance theatre, both drew from an array of disciplines, the dominant vocabulary being movement. Not so predictably, the works featured an actor, singer, and dancers of varying body types. Each performer inhabited a character and the gestural vocabulary and narrative line was very strong. Stylistically both works sat somewhere between naturalism and the surreal. Further, the staging for both works was a living room (establishing expectations of naturalism) and the choreographic language was dominated conceptually by falling, chosen in support of the theme of decline.

Founding members of The Peeping Tom Collective, Franck Chartier and Gabriela Carrizo, met when working for Les Ballets C De La B choreographer, Alain Platel. Though utilising narrative principles, the company claims to avoid using it in a direct way (Peeping Tom Collective 2004). In contrast it was my intention from the outset of making *Falling For Frank* that the work remain true to a clear story. Any intentional ambiguity in the work lay not in its relationship to narrative but more in its refusal to be didactic over the moral questions raised by its subject matter. An ambiguity was evident in the work however that was not intentional. Throughout the three years it took to produce *Falling For Frank*, I came to recognise what a challenging task it was to create cohesive story within the parameters of the rehearsal room, and how beneficial it would be to refine a set of working practices that serve this specific purpose in my work. It was out of these concerns that this research project, *Dark Park: Visceral experiments with narrative in dance theatre*, was born.

Marking Territory: Introduction

This creative research paper is intended to contextualise and give insight into the research, making, and performance of *Dark Park*. It is comprised of many voices, including theoretical reflections, samples of creative tasks, excerpts from studio journals, self interviews, images, quotes from other artists, and fictional texts. All have had significance in the life of this project. To allow for ease in differentiating between these voices, they have been footnoted and each assigned with specified formatting.

Self interviews, for example, can be found in 10 point font, indented and italicised. Self interview involves a process of question and answer in which the researcher is both the interviewer and the interviewee. It offers an alternative framework through which to engage in research questions, and has proven very useful to this project.²

² Further information on self interview and other research 'games' can be found at <http://www.everybodystoolbox.net/>

Studio journal excerpts are formatted in 10 point Constantia font, italicised and indented. They have been drawn from written reflections that took place alongside the making of the work.

My own creative writing has been italicised.

Creative tasks, that is, exercises, questions, improvisations, games and experiments which were explored in the process of creative inquiry, have been scribed in Abadi MT Condensed Light font.

Fictional texts and larger quotes written by other artists have been indented in 10 point font.

The different voices within the text have been positioned in a way that they may support, interrupt or juxtapose the main body of discussion. As such they seek to subvert a more traditional academic writing structure. They have been included in this way to reflect the manner in which they fed into the creative process, which was often chaotic and unpredictable.

The structure of the writing overall has been considered in a similar way, mirroring that of the performance, with specific notes on each scene interwoven within a wider discussion that takes form under the nine headings scribed during the show. An overview of that structure is detailed as follows:

Marking Territory: Prologue

Marking Territory: Introduction

Marking Territory: scene one

Howling Narrator: scene two

1 Innocence/ Naivety/ Unable to Identify Threat/ Prey

Snow White: scene three

2 Into the Woods

3 Tricked Deceived Entrapped

Holding and Stabbing: scene four

4 Straying from the Path

Narrator Chases Tail: scene five

5 Psychic Injury

Big Dog Saves Little Dog: scene six

Cats and Dogs: scene seven

Neglect Story: scene eight

6 Lost in the Desert

Tail Wagging: scene nine

Fence: scene ten

Narrator Mauled: scene eleven

7 Discovery

Snow White Cries: scene twelve

Sacred Coat: scene thirteen

8 Resurrection

Little Dance of Terror: scene fourteen

Loop to Standing: scene fifteen

9 Transformation: Conclusion

A description and time reference for each scene has also been included as an appendix to supplement the DVD of the performance, which has been submitted with this paper to act as an aide-memoire.

The research questions for the project read as follows:

- What is the nature of the space between specificity and ambiguity of narrative and meaning in dance?
- How might visceral and intuitive movement practices be developed as processes for unveiling narrative?
- How is meaning constructed through the layering of different mediums in dance theatre?

I began the work of *Dark Park* by questioning narrative's ability to communicate specifically and meaningfully to dance audiences. Newson had coined the phrase 'specific ambiguity', and I was interested in exploring the space around this idea within the territory of my own performance making.

There are no dictionaries for physical movement like there are for words, so I struggle to find what I've called "specific ambiguity"— this can hold the story together and at the same time allow individual audience members to have their own reading of what's happening.

(Newson in Giannachi 1999, 109)

Research into narratology formed some of the preliminary theoretical inquiry around these interests. 'The theory of narrative texts' (Vanhaesebrouck 2004), narratology is the study of the way narrative and narrative structure affects our perception. Specifically cognitive narratology's consideration of contextualisation in performance was relevant to this project.

Cognitive narratologists stress the importance of the context in which the spectator operates as

a watching entity ... during a performance, during a theatrical event, existing knowledge that has been acquired before the performance interferes with the information supplied on the spot. And exactly this interference creates meaning—in this logic, meaning is not the sole result of an author's, even a director's ambitions.

(Vanhaesebrouck 2004, 3)

Narratology helped to elucidate the complicit nature of meaning-making in dance performance. From the outset of this project I intended for *Dark Park* to be an original tale, and this engagement with original content meant I couldn't depend on the prior knowledge of the audience to guide their interpretation of the work or to fill in gaps in the narrative.³ In a play between specificity and ambiguity therefore, I housed this original content within a framework that referenced a more popular and easily identifiable structure. In this way considerations of fairy tale became incorporated into *Dark Park's* visceral narrative experiments.

Katia Canton argues in her book *The Fairy Tale Revisited* that it is precisely because of this appetite for meaning that fairy tales present themselves as the ideal narrative.

For a generation of folklorists, literary critics and Western structuralists inspired by Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* (English Translation, 1958) the folktale, and in particular the *Marchen*, or fairy tale, were not only seen as a type, but as a prototype for narratives in general ... the fairy tale is a document of human history that compares to the zone-rings of a very old tree trunk.

(Canton 1994, 75)

³ The exception to this could perhaps be found in *Snow White* (Scene 3), where the material is borrowed directly from the Disney movie.

In 1977 Bausch presented her version of Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard*⁴, a work which, importantly, marked the inauguration of Tanztheatre (Canton 1994, 108). As was to be the case with the vast body of Bausch's productions, in *Bluebeard* meaning was disarranged and factual narrative sacrificed in favour of an emotion driven non-logic. Canton argues that for Bausch and other important choreographers who have utilised fairy tale⁵ '... their experiments are not with the telling of the tale, but in experiments around how to narrate it. These choreographers benefit from the fact that fairy-tales are well known narrative frames and consequently play with them' (Canton 1994, 76).

On reflection this could also be the case for *Dark Park*, though the process of applying fairy tale to the work happened in a kind of back to front, retrospective fashion. Whilst researching my application for candidature I had read about other dance theatre makers working with narrative and had discovered an overall difficulty shared by these choreographers around devising story implicitly within the rehearsal process. Lloyd Newson's use of script offers one way a dance maker might address these difficulties, and I entered this project with a desire to uncover my own process for working with devising story that offered both time efficiency and a depth of inquiry.

Very quickly however, I encountered a tension between my desire to make decisions on story early on, from which to spring board my experiments into staging narrative, and a reluctance to close down possibilities so soon in the process. And so I began instead from what seemed an entirely different place, a place of pure physicality. I embarked on a series

⁴ First published by Barbin in Paris, January 1697.

⁵ Canton also discusses Arnie Zane's *Peter and the Wolf* (1985), Ralph Lemon's *Folktales* (1985), Kinematic's *The Snow Queen* (1986), *The Handless Maiden* (1987) and *Broken Hill* (1988) and Mark Morris' version of 'The Nutcracker' *The Hard Nut* (1991) (Canton 1994, 3).

of experiments that incorporated a Deborah Hay improvisational process I was introduced to by dance maker and performer Ros Warby. Here the performer is encouraged to bypass preconceived notions of dance techniques in order to allow the body to perform its own experience (Warby 2007). This process marked a shift away from a thinking logic, and I became interested in the idea of intuition as a critical process.

David Lynch, esteemed American surrealist filmmaker, says of intuition...

Life is filled with abstractions, and the only way we make heads or tails of it is through intuition.

Intuition is seeing the solution — seeing it, knowing it. It's emotion and intellect going together.

That's essential for the film maker.

(Lynch 2007, 45)

In dance as with film, and I believe, any art form, intuition plays an essential role in creativity. In making dance, there is a different kind of sense that emerges from the process of tossing disparate ingredients into the pot and stirring vigorously. Information, ideas, links ... surface from an embodied place, a felt place, a place very different to the thinking mind. It is often through engaging in processes that seek to bypass the rational mind that this other, gut knowing can be discovered. I continued to seek out and prioritise tasks that engaged the intuitive, and gradually the details of the narrative began to emerge in a much more unpredictable and visceral way.

TASK: Make notes on your fictional story. Create words or images on paper for you to create a map in the studio. Place this map at random, and then find movement links between them. Try abstract and literal, linear and round about.

Out of some these very early experiments in engaging intuition came the motif of 'dog', a simple detail that was to become pivotal to the expansion of the research territory. It was in the first instance a clue to what the narrative might contain and related to a young adult fiction novel I had read recently by Australian novelist Justine Larbalestier . In *Liar* (2009) the

young female protagonist is both dog and human and struggling with the light and dark of her instinctual nature. The concept of the flawed protagonist fit with the narrative territory I was interested in exploring.

The motif of dog also spoke to an intrigue I had as a solo performer around creating a sense of multiple presences in the performance space. Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari's text *A Thousand Plateaus* (1987) discusses the concept of 'becoming animal', and within that, existing on the inside, outside and edge of the pack. Engaging with this text on the studio floor, supported by other rich texts such as *Dog Boy* from South Australian novelist Eva Hornung, and the work of visual artist Joseph Beuys⁶, meant that the idea of creating multiple presences evolved to become the wolf pack. These physical investigations in turn inspired other doggy physicalities such as tail wagging, tail chasing, marking territory and howling, which then fed back into the narrative.

Narrative can be defined simply as 'a perceived sequence of non-randomly connected events' (Toolan in Govan et al. 2007, 55). It does not equate necessarily to the act of story telling, though the use of story is relevant to this project.

Q: Is there a difference between narrative and story?

A: Well as far as I understand it a narrative is simply a string of events, or thoughts, or happenings, which are deliberately associated somehow. So you could have an exhibition of paintings for example, where the narrative is around homelessness, and all the paintings relate to that theme and reveal different aspects of it, but don't tell a specific story. A narrative

⁶ Specifically Beuys' work *I like America and America likes me*, discussed in more detail on page 60.

*doesn't necessarily give a story. On the other hand, for me a story follows a string of events that are linked by cause and effect. That's how I've come to understand it.*⁷

Shadow also quickly identified itself as rich in narrative possibility and became another very significant research thread for this project, both literally and metaphorically. 'A metaphorical meaning is one in which the subject matter is referred to in a manner that does not literally describe it' (Govan et al. 2006, 88). In the small white space of studio E100, in which I substituted low lamps for overhead fluorescent bulbs, shadow was always present. It kept me company, my dark mirror. It offered possibilities to engage with a narrative around the darker, shadow elements of the psyche, whilst also suggesting a way to engage with illusion. It subsequently vied for a starring role in the performance.

The shadow is an illusion, it is really nothing — as soon as the light is turned off, it vanishes.

That deception, so fragile and ephemeral, appeals to me, poetically and as a way of making art that is itself fragile, not monumental.

(Christian Boltanski in Manonni 2004, 158)

Also addressing the processes of devising story for performance are theorists Govan, Nicholson and Normington in their book *Making a Performance: Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices* (2007). Specifically, their chapters *Adapting Fictional Stories* and *Autobiographical Performance* were useful to this project. 'Autobiographical narratives are spaces where an individual's private stories are offered up for consumption' (Govan et al. 2007, 59). As is plainly evident in the *Neglect Story* of scene eight, my own life experience provided much creative fodder from which to draw upon in the work's devising. In addition,

⁷ Extract from 'Self Interview 1', 6th February 2011, conducted in preparation for a showing of initial ideas for *Dark Park* at Lucy Guerin Inc.'s *First Run*. *First Run* is a bi-monthly evening for new dance works in progress.

the meta-story around the work, that is, the experience of making *Dark Park* and my relationship to it as a maker, is also unmistakable.

Through meta-story 'the mind of the creator is gradually revealed' (Fine & Speer 1992, 49). As is often the case when inhabiting the world of one's own work, the meta-story was not plainly evident to me until near to production. The experience of re-reading Clarissa Pinkola Estes' popular text *Women Who Run with the Wolves* (1992)⁸, and my attendance at a conference on fairy tale,⁹ combined to make it apparent that the evolving narrative of *Dark Park* reflected the story of a woman in the process of individuation. There is much that is autobiographical about this. Further more, this story was archetypal in nature.

Archetypes are patterns of behaviour, modes of functioning of the human psyche similar to the instincts, that follow a distinct goal, the meaning of which becomes more and more clear as they unfold in their actual expressions or images. Their goal is to bring to consciousness, and therefore to transform, what was previously unconscious or preconscious. This process of development and transformation Jung called the individuation process.

(McCurdy in Stein & Corbett 1999, 2)

The retrospective application of this archetypal structure (made reference to in the scribed headings within the performance) informed the work with a kind of logic through which to navigate the previously disparate scenes. Whilst it would be doing *Dark Park* a

⁸ A Jungian psychoanalyst, Estes examines the journey of women's relationship to their own wildish natures through the use of archetype.

⁹ The conference, entitled *Fairy Tales Re-imagined: from Werewolf to Forbidden Room* took place at Melbourne's ACMI Cinemas over the 10th –11th March 2011. It aligned with the launch of interactive documentary fairy tale web-site *Re-Enchantment* (referenced in this paper). The conference focused on the darker origins of the fairy tale and in doing so provided a counterpoint to *Dreams Come True: The Art of Disney's Classic Fairy Tales*, an exhibition which was also happening at ACMI at that time.

dis-service to attempt to forge a seamless connection between the scribed headings and the full breadth of the work's performative content¹⁰, they did endow the work with new possibilities for meaning, offering a link between the work's autobiographical narrative, its dog/wolf motif, the metaphor of shadow, and the connection to fairy tale. 'Asking the proper question is the central key to transformation — in fairy tales, and in individuation. The key question causes germination of consciousness' (Estes 1992, 48).

Q: And so, is it a story?

A: Ah, yes good question. I didn't really answer that did I? In past works that I've made, the full story hasn't really emerged until very close to the end, after the research has been done, after the images have been delved and the intuitive paths followed, the personal experiences of the people making the work embedded ... whatever processes we've used to generate material really. Then we can begin to understand what links there might be between them and the narrative starts to reveal itself. Once that happens I can get more specific with what else the narrative might need in order to become a story. With this work I kind of wanted to side step all that, to get to the story first and then play more with the processes of telling. But that hasn't really happened. So, it isn't a story yet, but I'm pretty sure it will be.¹¹

¹⁰ The subversion of the titles within the performance communicated this fact, the explicit reference to structure executed with a loose hand.

¹¹ Extract from 'Self Interview 1', 6th February 2011.



Fig. 1: *Marking Territory*,
video still, 2011

Marking Territory: scene one

Waiting outside. Heart racing, deep breaths. It's cold, even beneath the coat. Peering through the crack, lights fade to black, audience settles. Count to 5. I am the wolf woman. Door opens, far enough to curl my fingers around and push inside. It must be slammed. The sound echoes through the space, satisfyingly dramatic. My eyes adjust to the darkness and I bend to collect the wine. It's begun.

This opening night performance of *Dark Park* marked the culmination of almost two years of research. It had involved literally hundreds of hours alone in the space, planning, wondering, experimenting, despairing and occasionally rejoicing. The studio had become my territory. Dogs mark their territory by signposting it with their scent. As I passed behind the audience, unsettling them (*yes, I can't be trusted*), I ritualistically marked the parameters of the room. The audience sat within it, invited guests, outsiders, predators, prey. In the sound, traces of multiple selves, more than one of this pack, or perhaps two lone wolves ...

Howling Narrator: scene two

'He who cannot howl, will not find his pack' (Charles Simic in Estes 1992, 254).



Fig. 2: *Howling Narrator*, Belle Elsie-Lee, 2011

Q: So Kelly, we hear your newest work will be a solo about a girl who is also a wolf. Can you tell us a little about it?

*A: Sure. Well, its still very much evolving, but yes, I'm creating a piece about a girl/woman, about her experience in the world as a human being and her relationship to other humans around her. Within this woman is a wolfishness, or more accurately a wild doggishness, that maybe she was born with or it could be a combination of genetics and socialisation. Right now I'm exploring what her physicality might be, how the doggishness and humanness combine, whether at times she is more extremely human or dog, what this might look like and how it effects her in different situations and scenarios.*¹²

¹² Extract from 'Self Interview 1', 6th February 2011.

Estes tells the story of *La Loba* the wolf woman, the ancient who, having scoured the desert for wolf bones, pieces together a skeleton. Laying it by the fire, she sings its flesh into being.

And *La Loba* sings more and the wolf creature begins to breathe. And still *La Loba* sings so deeply that the floor of the desert shakes, and as she sings, the wolf opens its eyes, leaps up, and runs away down the canyon.

(Estes 1992, 24)

Archetypally *La Loba* represents the deep psyche. Her home is where thought and instinct merge (Estes 1992, 25–26). Jung called this the place of the collective unconscious, the home of the archetype. ‘... a deeper unconscious level is felt to exist. This deeper level manifests itself in universal archaic images expressed in dreams, religious beliefs, myths, and fairy tales’ (Jung in Aropa 2011).

Though at the time unaware of the story of *La Loba*, this opening scene was something of an initiation to perform ... A calling in of the creative powers, a freeing of the wolfish nature, the gut instincts, the otherworld, and also, the releasing of the cry of a nearly broken woman, a woman on the edge of society, sanity, reality, calling out from (or to) the world in between. With a weapon in her pocket, she is dangerous. She proposes a silent toast again and again and then drinks, but does not drink at all, and the wolf within her is released. She howls, howls, howls, releasing, invoking, becoming.

That long-drawn, wavering howl has, for all its fearful resonance, some inherent sadness in it, as if the beasts would love to be less beastly if only they knew how and never cease to mourn their own condition.

(Carter 1995, 112)

In creating this work, I would refer to the wolf woman as the narrator. That she was too much immersed in her own breakdown/transformation to communicate or comment upon the action was interesting. What did the presence of an incapacitated narrator say about *Dark Park*? 'Within a novel the narrator usually relates fiction from either within or outside the story; the influence of this role is key, for the story is told from their viewpoint' (Govan 2007, 91). From a maker's point of view she perhaps reflected my own relationship to the narrative experiment of the piece. I had begun with a strong intent to work within a story structure, but that intent had been eclipsed by the intuitive creation of a strong multiplicity of scenes, not born out of one story in particular, and which, for the majority of the process, were so disparate that any immediate narrative connection was elusive. Perhaps the howling woman could be more accurately described as a kind of gatekeeper, or clairvoyant seer, or host to this other world. In a state of becoming something other, her presence is indicative of things to come.

A more functional narrator role was evident in those moments (between scenes) in which the nine scribed headings were made reference to. In the way of the post modernists, these moments of referencing the headings implicated me the maker and performer in the experience of having agency over the work. They also drew attention to the nature of the research and to how the performance was, as it was happening, part of that research, making 'the medium of expression as much the subject of the drama as the story itself' (Innes in Govan et al. 2007, 98).

To begin with, the nine headings had finally arrived on my page one day, as if emerging intuitively from the murky depths of my psyche. In actual fact, they were first articulated in the work 1920's Russian formalist Vladimir Propp.

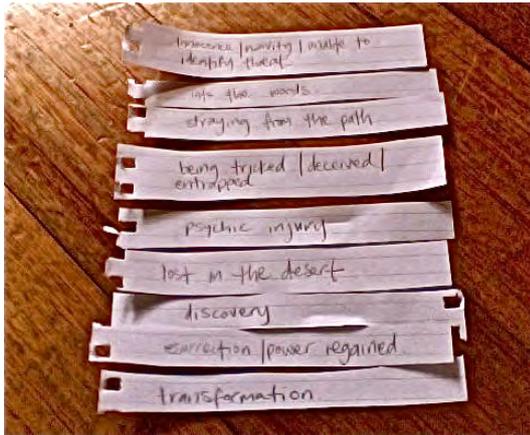


Fig. 3: *Decisions on Structure*, Kelly Alexander, 2011

1. innocence/ naivety/ unable to identify threat/ prey
2. into the woods
3. straying from the path/ temptation
4. tricked/ deceived/ entrapped
5. psychic injury
6. lost in the desert
7. discovery
8. resurrection/ power regained
9. transformation

The reference to the scribed headings was also an experimental device that encouraged the audiences' proclivity to 'sense make' through narrative, but then almost immediately subverted that invitation by switching the order of the headings, crossing them off without clarification, or skipping them altogether. Doing so had the aim of disorientating the audience, in turn creating a space in which to make visible this largely unconscious narrating process.

-CHIMES SOUND-

1 Innocence/Naivety/Unable to Identify Threat/Prey

Propp's analysis surmised that the fairy tale

begins with lack and ends with restitution, liberation, marriage or transformation. Between the beginning and the end, we find a series of events that are interconnected and constitute a stepwise process or movement. This is the common, basic structure, or morphology of the fairy tale as Propp describes it.

(McCurdy in Stein & Corbett 1999, 9)

The focus of Bausch's first work of Tanztheatre, *Bluebeard* is a tale of psychic naivety. 'The development of knowing, as in versions of "Bluebeard", "Rapunzel", "Devil's Midwife," and "Briar Rose" and others, begins with suffering' (Estes 1994, 264). To fulfill the arc of Propp's fairy tale structure and Jung's 'individuation plot', the girl necessarily begins in innocence, as prey. The predator is identified here as an external force, though the internal predator of the psyche, the one that talks her out of heeding her own instincts, is also present and equally as menacing.¹³ The innocent in *Dark Park* is represented in the first instance by a version of Walt Disney's *Snow White*.

***Snow White*: scene three**

Like wolf pups, women need a similar initiation, one which teaches that the inner and outer worlds are not always happy-go-lucky places. Many women do not even have the basic teaching about predators that a wolf mother gives her pups, such as: if it's threatening and bigger than you, flee; if it's weaker see what you can do; if it's sick, leave it alone; if it has quills, poison, fangs, or razor claws, back up and go in the other direction; if it smells nice but is wrapped around metal jaws, walk on by.

(Estes 1992, 44)

¹³ This is discussed in more detail in *Holding and Stabbing* p. 35.

In *Dark Park*, the character of *Snow White* epitomizes the naïve heroine. Un-mothered, on the edge of puberty and unaware of her blossoming 'feminine' power, she is cast out into the woods. It is from here that she embarks on the long and treacherous journey toward knowing. Disney's *Snow White*, the 1938 animation film from which the choreography and soundscape for this scene were borrowed, is the version of the tale that now dominates popular culture. Of course, 'Disney projects a sugary view of a woman's life, radically different from the mythical stories of pain and transcendence found in Grimms' and other traditional works' (Gould 2005, 25). Whilst *Dark Park* is itself a mythical story of pain and transcendence, it embraces this too-good-to-be-true heroine.



I Fig. 4a: *Snow White*, video still, 2011



Fig. 4b: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, film still, Disney 1938

*I am not only naivety I am Disney's Snow White. It's occurred to me that I carry a certain innocence in my performance anyway. I have almost always been cast in the role of the innocent. Perhaps it's my wide eyes.*¹⁴

The influence of filmmaker David Lynch is also at work in this scene. Like Julie Cruise, the songstress of his television series *Twin Peaks* (Lynch 1990), this *Snow White* embraces falseness, lip-syncing, and the 'exploration of real emotions through overtly staged or faked

¹⁴ Studio journal excerpt 14th March 2011.

performance'.¹⁵ She provides a stark contrast to the murky visceral underworld that is the remainder of the performance territory and her presence, easily identified, communicates to the audience that fairy tale is a key point of reference for this work. Importantly, *Snow White* also talks to the animals.

2 Into the Woods

In the performance, *Snow White* is banished into the woods by the woodcutter, urged to 'Go, go and never come back'.

*What is the woods exactly? A place where different laws operate. A place where you'll meet the unknown, where you cant see ahead clearly. Remember: if we can't be lost in the forest, we can't make discoveries.*¹⁶

'Leaving the safety of the known, of the civilised and entering into the unknown natural world, the wild world, where different laws operate' (Jazmina Cininas in Gibson 2011).

'Do not fear not knowing' (Estes 1992, 278).

The woods of *Dark Park* on the one hand represented the performance territory itself, this visceral place of upturned narrative. It describes entering this work as a performer, entering the journey of the experience of performing this intense and exposing 45 minute solo work.

¹⁵ Taken from a lecture by academic Saige Walton (2010) on David Lynch, given at Twin Peaks Marathon, an international conference/ seminar held at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Federation Square, Melbourne (25th November 2010).

¹⁶ Studio journal excerpt 3rd March 2011.

Similarly, entering the woods of this creative process was about heading into and embracing the unknown. There was a desire to discover new processes and pathways for creativity.

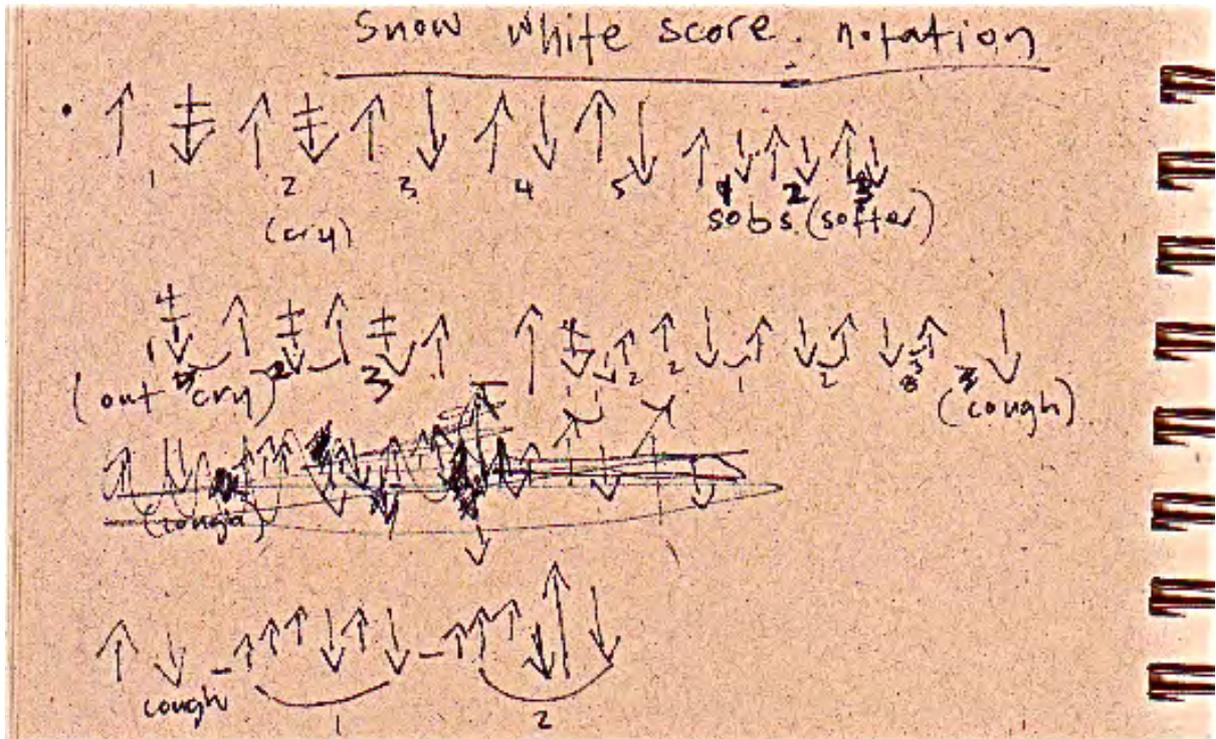


Fig. 5: *Snow White Cries notation*, Kelly Alexander, 2011

Initially I planned to devise story on the rehearsal floor through integrating movement explorations with creative writing tasks.

TASK: Consider the skeleton and the possibility that emotional memory is locked into the joints. Opening up the joints as you move, allow those memories to surface. Let those memories feed into story. Move from story to story. From this find one pose or move that interests you and, working with repetition, allow a mode, a landscape, a scenario, a character to develop from the inside out. Then ... consider what you might juxtapose this with.¹⁷

Once in the studio however, I found myself unwilling to make decisions on story, to narrow the possibilities so early in the process.

¹⁷ Exercise from 'Surviving Imaginations' workshop with Gabrielle Nankivell, 25th–29th May, 2009, Dancehouse, Melbourne.

Q: Interesting. And so could you tell us a little about your influences for this work and also what kind of things you've been getting up to in the studio?

A: Sure. Well basically I filmed myself freely improvising in the studio, attempting to maintain this 360 degree awareness Ros Warby talks about. For me it's a way to let my body take charge, but without becoming indulgent or falling into habit. These initial exercises were completely abstract. I was intentionally trying to avoid making meaning. Then I watched it back and allowed myself to interpret as an audience member might. To see if anything spoke to me, suggested meaning or evoked a feeling or a character. The only thing I could really make sense of was that there was a dog. And so I played with this dog physicality a little more, to see if it was wanting to go anywhere and if it was interesting to me. And the dog seemed to be looking down a well, and was distressed. I wondered what could be down there. Was the dog thirsty? Had it lost something? And it kind of evolved that there was a child in the well. I wasn't sure what the relationship between the dog and the child was exactly, like whether the child was a human or one of the dog's pups. But anyway, the dog was my first clue, a beginning. I struggled against it a little because myths about wolves, and more specifically werewolves, are big in popular culture right now as an aside to the whole vampire thing. But that's what came up, so I decided to work with it.¹⁸

The intuitive nature of this exercise appealed to me. It offered an inroad, a path into the woods of the creative process that tapped into my sub-conscious and inquired of it which stories it wanted to tell.

The idea is the whole thing. If you stay true to the idea, it tells you everything you need to know, really ... And it's weird, because when you veer off, you sort of *know* it. You know when you're doing something that is not correct because it *feels* incorrect. It says "*No, no, this isn't like the idea said it was.*" And when you're getting into the correct way, it feels correct. It's an intuition:

¹⁸ Extract from 'Self Interview 1', 6th February 2011.

You feel-think your way through. You start one place, and as you go, it gets more and more finely tuned. But all along it's the idea talking. At some point, it feels correct to you. And you hope it feels somewhat correct to others.

(Lynch 2007, 83)

Over the following months I began to acquire more intuitive processes for uncovering material.

3 Tricked, Deceived, Entrapped

'I feel all dead inside. I'm backed up in a dark corner, and I don't know who's hitting me' Bradford Galt in *The Dark Corner* (Silver & Ward 1980, 4).

The darkness that fills the mirror or the past, which lurks in a dark corner or obscures a dark passage out of the oppressively dark city, is not merely the key adjective of so many film noir titles, but the obvious metaphor for the condition of the protagonist's mind.

(Silver & Ward 1980, 4)

Dark Park and the double-crossing, paranoid world of cinema's film noir bear notable resemblance. Noir's defining dark thematic content, and its cinematography, characterised by indirect lighting and 'twisted shadows' (Silver 1980, 5) are similarly key features of the *Dark Park* landscape. Stylistically the tone of film noir is also evident in considerations of the *Dark Park* costume and image design that resonate with the era of 1940's America. It was useful to draw this parallel with film noir to further inform the parameters of the *Dark Park* world, although a sense of this world was strong from the outset, long before I understood other specifics about what it was I was creating. It helped, in the long but necessary period of creative not knowing, that I was able to inhabit this place and be informed by it.



Fig. 6a: *The Dark Corner*, Hathaway, 1946

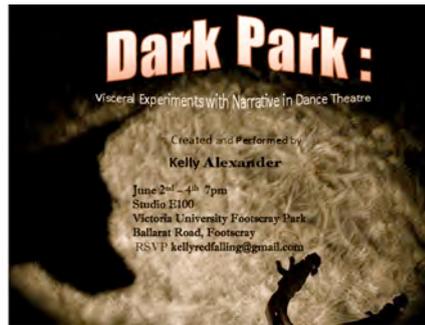


Fig. 6b: *Dark Park*, Kelly Alexander, 2011

Choreographer Meg Stuart of Belgian based company Damaged Goods speaks to this experience of creative habitation.

Each piece needs to have its own logic or meaning. You invite people into a fiction or set of circumstances so you have to honour that reality and care for it. Living a scenario, a specific fiction, whatever it is, whether it's articulated or not, identified or not — that's where it all starts for me ... This doesn't mean that you can always claim: "I know exactly where I am", but exchange your private truth for a collective agreement that prescribes a specific kind of behaviour. You fall into a script and you ride its waves.

(Stuart in Peeters 2010, 14)

Dark Park had a temperature. Cool. A climate. Windy. It was desolate, lonely. Creatures lived there in hunger. There was a struggle for survival. A desperate place. A place of half-light. Later I understood, the shadows there were autonomous, capable of support and deception. A place where I carried a weapon. Did the supernatural exist here? Yes. There was a very definite logic to this world. Also, the audience were there with me, visiting, observing, threatening, being threatened. They fit into this world. Their shadows told me they could exist there. But they were definitely just visiting. Aside from the wolf woman, myself, the shadows and the dogs, no one else lived there.

Holding and Stabbing: scene four

To confront a person with his shadow is to show him his own light. Once one has experienced a few times what it is like to stand judgmentally between the opposites, one begins to understand what is meant by the self. Anyone who perceives his shadow and his light simultaneously sees himself from two sides and thus gets in the middle.

Jung in Fisek 2011

The double-crossing shadow trio in *Holding and Stabbing* shared with film noir a proclivity for the melodramatic. In this scene, though it's not clear what all the killing is about, the reveal of a hidden murder weapon confirms that trickery and deceit are at play. Admittedly, with my penchant for the melodramatic, it was fun to explore the extremes of light and dark emotion, whilst so literally relating to the light and dark of my own shadow. This trio is housing extreme and conflicting emotions and it is a showdown till death.

In a single human being there are many other beings, all with their own values, motives and devices ... what shall we do with those inner beings who are quite mad and carry out destruction without thought? ... One entity in particular, the most deceitful and most powerful fugitive in the psyche, requires our immediate consciousness and containment — and that one is the natural predator ... When its cutting work is done, it leaves the woman deadened in feeling, feeling frail to advance her life; her ideas and dreams lay at her feet, drained of animation.

(Estes 1992, 35–36)



Fig. 7: *Holding and Stroking and Stabbing*, Belle Elsie-Lee, 2011

The lighting design for *Holding and Stabbing* — the angles of light and the placement of the body in the space — had the effect of producing two slightly different nuanced shadows. ‘I liked how the thin one was holding the fat one’s hand. Like at school, the cool kid looking after the geeky kid’ (Kate Hunter).¹⁹ There was a sense that each shadow had its own personality, and quite early it was evident one couldn’t be trusted. This added an element of surprise and fed easily into creating a dramatic interplay between them. The task of relating to them physically, beginning simply with facing the shadowed back wall and playing with shape and distance, soon became about creating an equality between the three of us, all able to initiate and reciprocate, give and take — in essence a trio. Moreover, I wanted to see if I could create the illusion that the shadows themselves were driving the action. This necessarily involved me being free to look away from them. There was an accuracy involved.

¹⁹ From second work in progress showing feedback discussion. Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Studio E100, 22nd May 2011.

TASK: Shadow your shadow.

Working with the shadows in this way supported an overall aim to create a sense of multiple presences in the space. The challenge intrigued me as a solo performer, creating a sense of pack when there was only ever one live body on stage. During the development process I had explored different possibilities for doing this. One of the very early explorations had included the recording of the sound of my own footsteps pacing the room, then looping and overlapping them so they appeared to grow in number. This idea was finally utilised in the opening scene of *Marking Territory* with the sound of an extra set of footsteps that entered the room with the narrator. In *Holding and Stabbing* two more entities are introduced, in the form of shadows, distinct from one another.²⁰

Narrator Chases Tail: scene five

TASK: 3rd Mind

One day, whilst facing indecision around the final edit and structure of this weighty lot of material (some 26 scenes in total) I tried a 3rd mind experiment. The third mind is a 'cut-up' technique associated with Beat Generation novelist William S. Burroughs. The fundamental premise of this method is the creation of new texts by cutting up at least two existing texts and recombining the fragments, at random. Hence the old texts are literally cut up and the new product is a new composite text. Burroughs recounts the discovery of the cut-ups:

²⁰ The shadow audience pack and the pack of dog shadows are then realised in the following scenes of *Neglect Story* and *Tailwagging*.

'In 1959 Brion Gysin said: "Writing is 50 years behind painting" and applied the montage technique to words on a page (1993:52). And so occurred the advent of the cut-up' (Robinson 2011, 1).

I wrote all the scenes down on separate pieces of paper, included some extra elements like 'illusion' and 'dogism', jumbled them together, drew them out all of a bag and performed them in that order. The process took four hours to complete. From it, 'dogism' became tail chasing. I had previously experimented with tail chasing, but the long periods of spinning had left me nauseated. Today, however, I performed the task whilst still in coat and heels. The costume brought a new quality, encumbering the movement in an interesting way. I found myself laughing out loud as I did it. The scene became narrator chases tail.

TASK: Creative Fodder. Images, newspaper headlines, words, statements, ideas and dreams. Must ignite imagination.

Distil.

- *Impossible task*
- *Run free*
- *The man in the moon*
- *Turn to dust*
- *Ask the right question*
- *The shocking truth of the killing room*
- *The pack (you can never be one wolf, but always 6 or 7)*
- *Reckless risk taking*
- *Death of a child*

- *Wait for someone to take off your coat. When nobody does, take it off yourself*
- *Liar, slut, bitch, killer*
- *A roaring*
- *Born with fur*
- *Encouraging a multiplicity of interpretation*
- *The lullaby/ crises speech*
- *Derailed, demolished, decapitated*
- *The lacquer of invisible prettiness*
- *Lose a finger*
- *Cold and starless*
- *Giving in to temptation*
- *We are all meat*
- *The interior stalker*
- *The hooded eyes of the watchful*
- *I am never cold*
- *We are all of us subject to the same laws of nature*
- *A little dance of terror*
- *The family illness*
- *No air in the lungs, no blood in the veins*
- *The longest fence on earth*
- *We are all made of broken glass*
- *She began to believe she had a chance*
- *He has an air of self imposed restraint, as if fighting a battle with himself when he would rather drop down on all fours*
- *What do I know that I wish I did not know?*
- *Your ancestry and cultural heritage*

- *A potential key stone species and tool to reserve some impacts of European colonisation on Australian flora and fauna.*
- *A spiritual totemic creature*
- *What the boy had seen was a charred human infant headless and gutted and blackening on the spit...I'm sorry, he whispered, I'm sorry*
- *Open the gate*
- *Coat/coat*
- *Loop/loupe*
- *Tale/tail*
- *Fall in love*
- *This is a melancholy, introspective region; a sunless, featureless landscape*
- *Family pack*
- *A key*
- *A continuous exile from redemption*
- *Initiation*
- *A broken heart can make you pine away until there's hardly anything left to bury*
- *Skin tight*
- *Ghost town*
- *Desolating emptiness*
- *The pill to keep the hair away*
- *A door in a wall that was previously blank*
- *Half breed*
- *[blank]*

TASK: Looping

The process of 'looping' (Ingvartsen 2010) is again a purely physical exercise which begins standing in stillness. The performer becomes present to the movement of the breath in the body. Gradually the awareness is isolated to one movement, which is then explored and accentuated through repeating it over and over again on a loop. No two loops are the same. The performer must stay alive to the subtle differences in each new loop, moving into that difference so the movement continuously changes and evolves. The idea is to allow the body to speak for itself, to take you where it wants to go. I began working with the task of looping, beginning on all fours, looping to standing, and then back again to all fours. I also experimented with facial looping. I hoped these exercises could provide material that suggested a kind of transformation, specifically from dog to human.²¹

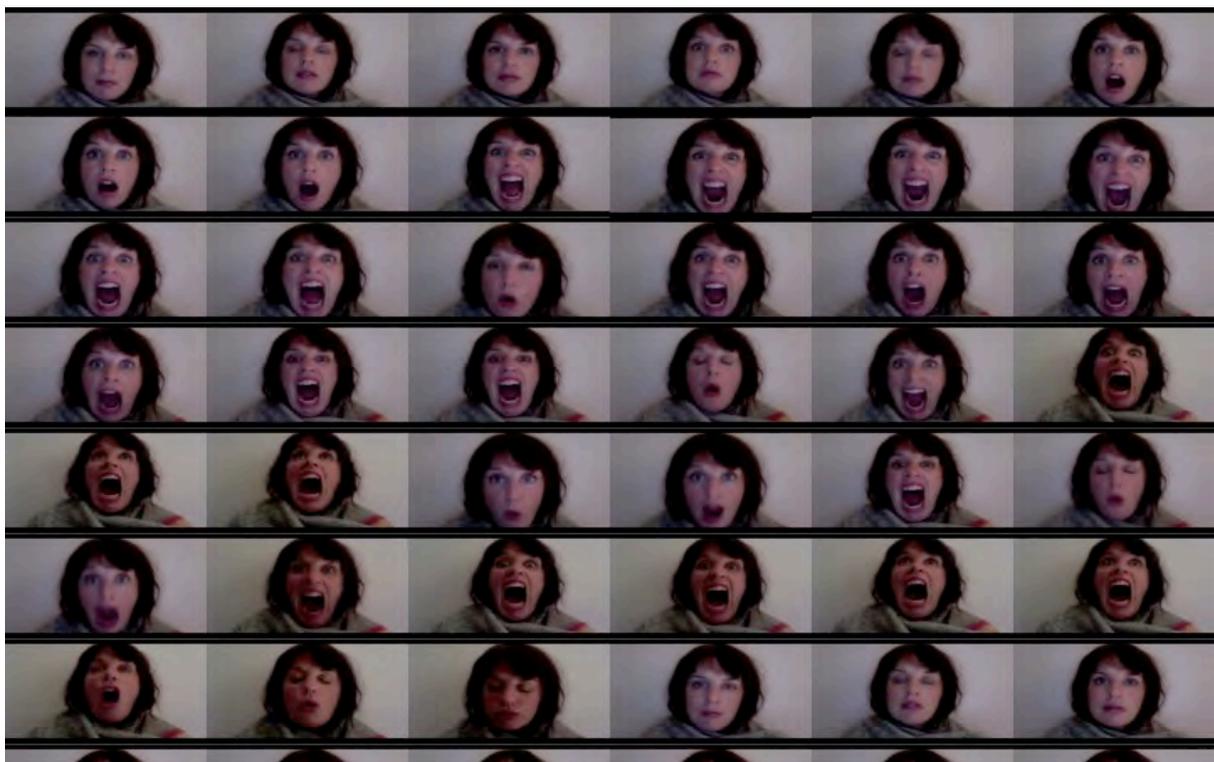


Fig. 8: *Facial Looping 1*, rehearsal footage video stills, 2011

²¹ Task sourced from Mette Ingvartsen (see footnote 22).

TASK: As if it already exists.²²

'As if it already exists' (Ingvartsen 2010) is an improvisation exercise that involves performing the work as if it has already been made. I began to do this twice a week. I experimented further by isolating components of story structure such as beginning, complication, climax, resolution, and performed these as if they already existed. The perplexing exercise of performing the complication as if it already existed held some interest, but with a tendency toward the melodramatic, performing the climax as if it already existed became a favourite. Combining this exercise with looping became an effective way to remember important discoveries.



Fig. 9: Looping the Climax As If It Already Exists, rehearsal footage video stills, 2010

*I like this idea of looping aspects of the narrative, without knowing the content yet. Looping the climax ... There seems to be beating of the ground, stabbing, rowing, also filling in of dirt involved.*²³

²² Task sourced from choreographic research workshop with Belgium based dance maker Mette Ingvartsen as part of Lucy Guerin Inc's *Hotbed* Program, March 25th – April 1st 2010. Lucy Guerin Inc. studios, West Melbourne.

²³ Excerpt from studio diary 13th April 2010.

4 Straying from the Path

Little Red Cap was sent out by her mother; but she did not get lost - she permitted herself to be tempted to stray away from a well known path, so what happened to Red Cap was to a large degree her own doing.

(Bettelheim 1975, 217)

The process of finding one's page again after injury, sickness, travel, heartbreak. To go away, and then come back, and try to remember, and be in the thing again. Finding the page again and again. This process of constantly disrupting oneself ...

The story of symbolic Self-curation/France and the Woolves:

Symbolic self-curation involves

a gathering of our experiences and actions about the chosen area of practice: our aims and expectations, the ways we engaged, how we've framed the practice challenge, our experiences of the engagement, and the outcomes from that engagement. A researcher might draw on field notes, the contents of a reflective practice journal or interview notes ... Symbolic self-curation involves finding unfamiliar ways to represent those experiences, actions and outcomes ... It is the core and difficult art of simply noticing what is there and what is not there, of realising that everything about this process 'counts'— the manner of the gathering, the objects gathered, the choice of text, the space or container chosen for the work, the content and tone of the dialogue and those with whom we have it, those who are not invited, the reflective processes we use, the form and outcomes of the exegesis. The witnessing self sits both inside and outside all that, simply noticing.

(Cherry 2008, 7)

At the time I read and was inspired by this article, a friend was conducting knitting workshops. I had knitted before, and found I was good at it. Perhaps knitting would become my self-curation project. What could I discover, through knitting, about my creative process?



Fig. 10: Knitting Wool
Mountain with
French/German Dog, Kelly
Alexander, 2010

In France, I went to the wool factory ... Bar Le Duc is famous for it's wool.²⁴ It was necessary to take a tour, with old folk, and one sensibly late younger woman. Because the tour was in French, the guide had written out a brief in English especially for me. I tried to pay attention. My reward for completing this grueling challenge was two bags full of wool off-cuts, cheap as chips, so large they were difficult to carry.

7th October 2010

Home. Opened bags. Chose red. Began knitting. Realised I couldn't remember how. Googled it. Knit stitched 20 stitches. A small scarf for the dog. Rudy arrived home. Began sorting the wool, looking for colours he liked. Knitting, watching him, I eventually asked him to stop, telling him I wanted to discover it for myself. Kept knitting. My wool.

8th October 2010

Knitting. Emptied contents of wool bags into a pile in the middle of the floor. Wool mountain. Took pictures and a short video of me knitting amongst it. Seemed to have decided to keep knitting the red until the ball is used. Have learnt purl stitch. Took 5 minutes to make a wool 'me' out of the shaggy pink. Am sitting with the colour and knitting, incorporating flaws.

9th October 2010

Rising early to knit and go over French verbs. Looking at the wool still covering the lounge room I

²⁴ A small renaissance village north east of Paris.

realise. There's no yellow. As a kid I would always add in yellow to an aquarelle drawing. Its absence is noticeable. With yellow this pile would be a happy pile of colour. Well, happier.

10th October 2010

The wool traveled to PAF²⁵ with me. I lay it out on a blanket in my room so I could transport it easily from room to room and not get it dirty. Each time I take it out of the bag (and I have taken to taking it all out each time I plan to work with it. I like the pile of it, the quantity of it, the colour of it) it unravels a little and I worry about it becoming one intimidating expanse of knot. I like other people to see me with the wool. Looks as if I'm a creative person, immersed in my art. In truth the stagnation of my days continues here at PAF.



Fig. 11: Wool Wolf on Table,
Kelly Alexander, 2010

11th October 2010

Took the wool with me (all of it) to the green studio. I try not to knit too much now. It's so addictive. Eats up the time I'm sure I should be doing something else. Tried to create a wolf figure. Made a wolf outline with brown wool and took a photo. Tried wrapping the wool into dense shapes,

²⁵ 'PAF is based in St Erme, 150km north-east of Paris, France, between Reims and Laon.

PAF (=PerformingArtsForum) is a place for the professional and not-yet professional practitioners and activists in the field of performing arts, visual art, literature, music, new media and internet, theory and cultural production, and scientists who seek to research and determine their own conditions of work' (Rietsema 2006). More information at <http://www.pa-f.net>

but it was difficult to make it hold. Gave up. Began knitting a beanie for Rudy. Cast on 3 times until my knit/purl was perfect.

14th October 2010

Felt sick, so didn't feel so guilty knitting all day. I knit and knit until 2am. My hand ached, and afterwards the intense focus was hard to shut down and I had trouble sleeping. I've been telling people 'I'm just spending time with the wool.' A nice way of pretending something creative is going on.

15th October 2010

I finished the green beanie today. The stitches are perfect, but the colour and shape aren't quite. Began a second one.

17th October 2010

Back in Bar Le Duc. A third of the way through Rudy's new beanie. Stitches aren't all perfect but I care less about this. So that I didn't give away that I'd been knitting for him, I looked up wool art on the net. I've decided I'll make a series of wolves in my self-curation, maybe using some of my other knitting bits to contribute to a stop animation film. Will particular wolves represent particular people in my career?

On the net there was a kid's craft site showing how to make pompoms. I remember making these as a child. I decided to try to make a pompom triangle. They are good wolves heads. The pompom process also gives a symmetry with colours that works perfectly for the wolf. I have begun to shape them by wrapping and threading the wool with the needle to make ears. I attempted to make a body, but it looks more like a poodle or a turtle. Perhaps a representation of myself these last years. The dog was funny today. For the first time tried to steal wool and carry it back to her nest. I told her off more seriously than I have ever spoken to her before. Rudy defended her. Guess I'm a little possessive over the wool. Really like those wolves heads though. Hmmm, Woolves ...²⁶

²⁶ Excerpt from studio journal.



Fig. 12: *Woolf and Girl Discuss Possibility*,
Kelly Alexander, 2011

Curation is a process, not a product. An alertness to deep assumptions about what counts as data can be confronting for both supervisor and researcher. We can begin to notice not only what we include, worry about or treasure, but what our gathering leaves out, what is absent, what has been ignored or deleted, what is rejected or disowned, what is overlooked, not valued or acknowledged.

(Emmett in Cherry 2008, 9)

True to the philosophy of self-curation, it is only with distance that I'm able to recognise the significance of the 'secondary' creative process occurring here. In the end I created two beanies, but then chose the first for the gift. Both were painstakingly flawless in their construction. The guilty fervour with which I knitted during these weeks, had a sense of obsession, avoidance, escape. There was something about the not having to do it, and the 'should be doing something elseness' that kept me there, working until the joints in my hands ached and I had to rest. Except that it didn't feel like work. And I remember that dance used to be this way.

5 Psychic Injury

Estes talks about loss of instinct as being injurious to a woman's psyche (Estes 1994, 231) and in part this is where idea for psychic injury was born. The evolving meta-story around the creation of this work, by no coincidence, follows relatively closely the stages of Propp's fairy tale/Jung's individuation.

During my first ten years of working as an independent performer and choreographer in the Australian dance community, I have experienced some difficulties. Staying strong in a creative identity in the face of mistakes, conflict, criticism, lack of recognition and support, is a test of belief in oneself. Recently these experiences combined with the advent of actual physical injury, and I reached a crisis point, feeling defeated by the enormity of making work. Somehow dance had stirred up a storm that had me questioning my faith in myself. I needed to find a safe cave to crawl into, to lick my wounds and reflect for a while. In truth part of my reasoning around creating a solo work within the supportive university environment had to do with this. The studio became my cave.

I dreamt last night that I was cutting off my fingers, particularly the middle left, but it was okay, it didn't hurt. I think I may have been doing it for fun ²⁷.

To cut off one's own finger willingly seemed to be a sadistic act. It spoke to me of self-sabotage. I Googled it ...

To dream that your fingers are injured or have been chopped off, denotes your anxieties about your ability to accomplish some demanding task or perform in some waking situation ... To

²⁷ Excerpt from studio journal 18th October 2010.

dream of your middle finger, denotes prudence, practicality, caution, responsibility, and hard work. Alternatively, the middle finger symbolizes the phallus or some insult.

(Dreammoods 2010)

Discovered in a random website, I decided the interpretation held significance. The dream became less about self-sabotage and more about anxieties around the making of this performance. It represented a need to integrate the challenges of my choreographic journey, something I understood I had to do in order to go deeper into the creative work. I decided to enact the dream.

The 'cutting off of finger' illusion would be performed by the narrator. It fit with a vision I had had from the outset of making this work, inspired whilst watching physical theatre/circus performance *Obludarium* the work of Prague born performance makers The Formum Brothers (2010).²⁸ Their use of illusion, combined with their opera singing wolf woman and wonderful sense for all things underworld, had ignited my imagination. The reference to illusion was to be integrated throughout *Dark Park*, in the guise of shadow play, a secret pocket containing a murder weapon and short white magician's gloves.



Fig.13: *Obludarium*, Formum Brothers, 2010

²⁸ I attended a performance of The Formam Brothers' *Obludarium* at the *Festival Renaissance* in Bar Le Duc, France, 2nd July 2010.

Big Dog Saves Little Dog: scene six



Fig. 14: *Big Dog and Little Dog*, Belle Elsie-Lee, 2011

The animal donor is a symbol that repeats in *Dark Park*. We see it first here in *Big Dog Saves Little Dog*, and then later in the dingo shadow of *Snow White Cries*.

We recall that it is the 'donor' who will give the magical means to overcome the enemy ... That the donor can be understood as the shadow is corroborated by the fact that in many fairy tales the donor has something in common with the hero. We may see in the donor the archetypal trickster, which is also a shadow figure. Half human and half animal, grotesque, funny or terrifying, but still extremely clever, the donor functions as a mediator between the conscious and the unconscious.

(McCurdy in Stein & Corbett 1999, 12)

TASK: Randomly select 'creative fodder' phrases then write creatively incorporating phrases in the text:

'a spiritual totemic creature', 'a little dance of terror', 'turn to dust', 'she began to believe she had a chance' ...

... *lifted my gaze to let the evening sun soak into me and sitting in front of me was a dog.*

Staring into my soul, down to my toes, into the earth and straight through the middle. I felt

my pores break out, sweating in a little dance of terror. I blinked, my eyes adjusting to the

light and she was gone, turned to dust or evaporated into the light. What had I been thinking

at that moment? I began to believe I had a chance.

Cats and Dogs: scene seven

The decision to create a section around Camille's track *Cats and Dogs* (2008)²⁹ came very early on. Rarely does it happen in my process that the music will dictate the choreography, but in this case the song's theme and looping structure fit so well that I decided it could be fun to make a dance to the music. Months of agony followed. Hours and hours spent exploring movement possibilities, setting steps, becoming dissatisfied and starting again. As it turned out, it wasn't until *Cats and Dogs* was informed by the *Neglect Story* that followed in the performance, that this scene finally took form. I copied the gestures and mannerisms of my body that occurred as I told the *Neglect Story*. I edited these into sections, numbered them, looped them, and experimented with the size of the gesture.

Cats and Dogs now began in a large way, voluminous and crowd pleasing, but then quickly deteriorated. The intention was to give the impression that I the performer was forgetting my material, so that it moved quickly into gesture, and then from gesture into text. The effect worked. On opening night my mum worried for me. Rather than forgetting however, what I

²⁹ Track 6 from the album *Music Hole* (Camille 2008).

felt as the performer was remembering, as though the story took me over and demanded to be told.

Neglect Story: scene eight

The *Neglect Story* was born out of this task of fast (garbage) talking, an exercise I sometimes employed to begin each day in the studio. It was a way to shed some of the distraction of the day and free up creative thought.

Garbage talking: Engage in an incessant stream of talking. Speak everything that comes to your mind. Fragments of conversations you've heard on the street. Snatches of film dialogues or stories, advertisements and slogans. A mental collection of images, voices, words. You can mix private experiences with fictional characters, play with volume and speed, but you can never stop speaking, you have to go on.

(Meg Stuart in Peeters 2010, 158)

Out of this, one morning, came the memory of Bonny. Bonny was a dog from my childhood we had adopted from an animal shelter. As I spoke it dawned on me that this was not a happy story. Bonny had been neglected. We had neglected her.

Theorists Govan, Nicholson and Normington argue that the 'production of autobiography is a result of a reflection upon personal experience that is subjected to the filters of memory and personal editing' (Govan et al. 2007, 60). It was certainly interesting to me that as a result of developing this performance I had new perspective on this memory. This was combined with an awareness that the process of discovery had not been objective in its intent, but that I was preferencing material that was dark or ambiguous in nature. 'Narratives are not unbiased, but are loaded with ethical and moral signification' (Govan et al. 2007, 57). Inspired by recent personal experiments in veganism I wanted to politicise this work. I had been considering images around animal cruelty.

*Today you thought about images of cruelty. Does the cruelty happen to you as a person, or you as an animal, or is it you being cruel to an animal? Or perhaps it's some shadowy figure that isn't you, being cruel to an animal? Or is it the cruelty done to you that leads you to being cruel to an animal?*³⁰



Fig. 15: *Confessing*, video still, 2011

I also recognized a desire to negate my innocence somehow, to bring light and shade to this protagonist, and so the version I told of the *Neglect Story* emphasized my own agency in the neglect. It implicated me in a way that was truthful, but also manipulated.

'I'd call her "Bonny, Bonny" and she would swim over, and I'd quickly swim away from my friend, and Bonny would maul them under the water... a great trick of mine'.³¹

³⁰ Excerpt from studio journal 3rd February 2011.

³¹ Text from *Neglect Story*.

The confessional nature of the *Neglect Story* involved a very straight-forward and direct use of text. When imbedded into the performance, it became apparent that it risked being mistaken as an explication for the work as a whole. 'It's hard not to hear the words as kind of an explication for the images. Maybe it's just about being more aware of that relationship that you're building between the text and the images' (Jude Walton).³² This presented an interesting predicament for me. How to subvert the narrative power of this minor story, in order that it could support the more ephemeral whole? I experimented with its delivery. These experiments included oscillating the volume, drowning out my voice with a 'dog sniffing' sound effect, turning my back to the audience, and performing a secondary task that gradually took precedence as I spoke. Finally, the action of gradually deteriorating the *Cats and Dogs* choreography subdued the text's dominance.

Autobiographical text may trouble the binary opposition of truth and fiction through inhabiting a creative space in-between. This blends elements of both factual detail and fictional fantasy around the performer.

(Govan et al. 2007, 60)

Several members of the audience questioned me post-show as to the authenticity of this tale. They had had similar experiences with the family dogs of their childhoods and the story resonated with them. I wondered whether they would have experienced the same depth of resonance had I told them it was fiction? Interestingly too, in the audience each night sat my mother, who on most counts was guilty of (passive) mistreatment of this animal. Confronting

³² Transcribed from second work in progress showing feedback discussion. Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Studio E100, 22nd May 2011.

her with this story in my performance added a powerful degree of real risk and investment for me.

Rather than being passive spectators, audiences for autobiographical performance are drawn into a relationship with the performer due to the authentic nature of the material and the fact that the story is being told directly to them. Autobiographical performance acknowledges observers and places emphasis on sharing intimacies with witnesses.

(Govan et al. 2007, 61)

The audience pack became my witness.



Fig. 16a: *Audience Shadow Pack*, Belle Elsie-Lee, 2011



Fig. 16b: *Multiple Presences*, Belle Elsie-Lee, 2011

Tail Wagging: scene nine

tail/tale

'You've created a narrative that is not prescriptive. How do you approach it so that you don't over narratise it, but it still provides an interesting in?' (Margaret Trail).³³ The confessional nature of the *Neglect Story* sought to engage the viewer both as witness and confidante. It marked a subtle shift in their role as audience members, investing them with an inferred sense of agency. The *Neglect Story* implicated me in sadness and then in guilt. Vulnerable, I

³³ Transcribed from second work in progress showing feedback discussion. Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Studio E100, 22nd May 2011.

offered myself for judgement. 'The autobiographical element of the work is used as a device to encourage engagement as the audience's awareness of physical and emotional vulnerability in the performance is heightened' (Govan et al. 2007, 61). The following scene of *Tail Wagging* then, sought to heighten this sense of audience agency. A very real act of endurance, it was a plea for absolution. The audience were required to witness as I exhausted myself for them as a dog might, unable to mask a need for reassurance and forgiveness, for inclusion in the pack.

The endurance required for *Tail Wagging* demands of the audience that they are there with you in that physical moment. The audience begins and ends tail wagging with you.

(Jude Walton).³⁴

Also in *Tail Wagging* my shadows grew slowly from one, to two, to many, supporting the development of multiple presences. Laying myself down at the feet of the audience, the shadows of many desperate, dying, dead dogs lay around me. Further, as these two scenes transpired a shift in lighting state similarly cast shadows of the audience across the space. This added to a sense that the viewer was subtly implicated here. That they were, however passively, inside of, inhabiting and responsible in this world.

6 Lost in the Desert

The desert is a barren place, a site of difficult terrain. For fairy tale's Rapunzel the desert is the place in which the maiden and crone within must be assimilated. Thrust from the tower by her captor the witch, the hardship of wandering the desert quickens Rapunzel's transformation from adolescent to woman. In this barren land she gives birth to twins, before

³⁴ Transcribed from second work in progress showing feedback discussion. Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Studio E100, 22nd May 2011.

reuniting with her blinded prince and restoring his sight with her tears (Bettelheim 1985, 148–150). As opposed to entering the woods, where an external unknown must be encountered, the archetypal desert of *Dark Park* represents a questioning of internal faith. Becoming lost in this desert incites the journey inwards and allows for, if one is brave enough to see and not turn away, the discovery, confrontation and integration of the shadow self.

Creatively, being lost in the desert could be used to describe a time of barrenness, a period of low productivity, dead ends, a lack of inspiration or a time of great toil with little reward. Estes coins the phrase ‘suckling a dead litter’. ‘The dead litter is comprised of ideas, chores and demands that don’t work, have no life, and bring no life’ (Estes 1992, 279). Whilst in the desert one may be confronted with an endless barren horizon, in fact life awaits, out of sight, patiently waiting in the latent seed beneath the sand.

In the making of *Dark Park*, being lost in the desert represented the challenges of simply being in the studio alone day after day. It was a problem to be understood, confronted, worked through and integrated.

*I’m afraid it could be difficult to get anything constructive done today. I need to write. Then, I’ll work with this rolling task; a dog rolling in something. A scent, shit, whatever. Shit perhaps, befitting my mood.*³⁵

In the desert, task after task lay at my feet undeveloped. I devised strategies to pull myself through the barren aloneness. I danced with the ghost in the room and played with my shadows.

³⁵ Excerpt from studio journal 2nd February 2011

TASK: The body as swarm.

Philosophers Deleuze and Guattari's well known text *A Thousand Plateaus* provides an interesting site for an interplay between ideas of desert, becoming wolf, multiplicity and existence of the pack.

Franny recounts a dream: 'There is a desert. Again it wouldn't make any sense to say that I am *in* the desert. It's a panoramic vision of the desert, and it's not a tragic or uninhabited desert. It's only a desert because of its ochre colour and its blazing, shadowless sun. There is a teeming crowd in it, a swarm of bees, a rumble of soccer players, or a group of Tuareg ... I am at the edge of the crowd, at the periphery; but I belong to it, I am attached to it by one of my extremities, a hand or a foot. I know that the periphery is the only place I can be, that I would die if I let myself be drawn into the centre of the fray but just as certainly if I let go of the crowd. This is not an easy position to stay in, it is even very difficult to hold, for these beings are in constant motion and their movements are unpredictable and follow no rhythm. They swirl, go north, then suddenly east; none of the individuals in the crowd remains in the same place in relation to the others. So I too am in perpetual motion; all this demands a high level of tension, but it gives me a feeling of violent, almost vertiginous happiness.' A very good schizo dream. To be fully part of the crowd and at the same time completely removed from it: to be on the edge ...

(Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 29)

In the studio I created a spoken audio version of this text, and worked with it as a stimulus for improvisation. I was interested in this imagery, in how this place of tension at the edge of the pack, a place very difficult to maintain, might provoke movement. I began to overlay the movement with text of my own, listing moments in my life when I'd found myself inside,

outside and at the edge of the pack. These exercises are reflected in my considerations of audience, how I as a solo performer, a lone wolf, move between feelings of kinship and isolation in relation to this human audience. In contextualising this within the narrative's journey to individuation and transformation, the very human and complex challenge of how one relates to others is another aspect of the autobiographical component imbedded in this work. '... so often we start out in the desert. We feel disenfranchised, alienated, not connected to even a cactus clump. The ancients called the desert the place of divine revelation' (Estes 1992, 33).

Fence: scene ten

Fence linked thematically with ideas around 'entrapment' and also reflected the experience of confrontation with the shadow psyche. How many of us wouldn't first attempt to flee before turning to face such a terrifying predator?

I love the image of the dingo fence as being the longest in the world. Pictures in my mind of sitting behind a fence, the audience on the other side (the dingo side) or perhaps my level of humanness determining which side I'm on. Also brings to mind images of the alley way I saw in Ascot Vale yesterday, where it's impossible to see the end in either direction, or of the path at the beginning of the Labyrinth that seemed to go on forever without a turn.

-Perhaps the fence is signified by a projection across your face.

-Shadows of a fence.

-Self imposed fence, like the dove and the ceiling of the chapel at PAF.³⁶

An indigenous, desert inhabiting, pack animal, the plight of the dingo interested me. It was related to my desire to contextualise the wolf, wolfishness and werewolfishness, to draw

³⁶ Excerpt from studio journal 31st January 2011. ('PAF' refers to 'Performing Arts Forum'. See footnote 25.)



Fig. 17: *Fence*, film still, Kelly Alexander, 2011

them into the realm of my own experience of land and animal. Most known for hunting livestock and stealing human babies, Dingo's notoriety has it 'caught between an infamous pest animal, a spiritual totemic creature and a potential keystone species and tool to reserve some impacts of European colonization on Australian flora and fauna' (Purcell 2010, viii).

German visual and performance artist Joseph Beuys' 1974 work *I Like America and America Likes Me*, in which he spent three days in a cell with a coyote, spoke to similar issues I had found in the story of the dingo. Beuys' insistence in the everyday as art and the healing his social 'actions' had on wider society also supported my own belief that the sharing of personal story has wider political implication. Research around the dingo was thus driven by a desire to contextualise these political considerations of the *Neglect Story* into a broader cultural realm.

For Native Americans, the coyote had been a powerful god, with the power to move between the physical and the spiritual world. After the coming of European settlers, it was seen merely as a pest, to be exterminated. Beuys saw the debasement of the coyote as a symbol of the damage done by white men to the American continent and its native cultures. His action was an

attempt to heal some of those wounds. “You could say that a reckoning has to be made with the coyote, and only then can this trauma be lifted”, he said.

(Tate Modern 1998)



Fig. 18: Joseph Beuys, *Coyote, I like America and America Likes Me*, Tisdall 1974

With the aim of curtailing the killing of livestock by wild dogs in Australia, the dingo fence extends through the desert areas of Queensland and South Australia for over 5400 kilometres. It is the longest fence on earth (Purcell 2010, 3). In my imagination this desert fence combined with a film idea I had in mind to create of a dog's eye view of running through a dark forest. After exploring the (mostly fruitless) possibilities of creating a shadow fence in the performance space, I was drawn to Coburg cemetery one dark night.

At my feet was Yoshi, the trusty kelpie whom, in a Beuys-esque experiment, I had been spending time with throughout the creation of this work. Yoshi kept an eye out for menacing strangers as I worked. We traversed the outskirts of the cemetery's fence and I filmed as we walked, pausing from time to time, attempting to recreate the rhythms of a dog's eye view of the experience. Supervisor Margaret Trail had recounted the story of a friend who always

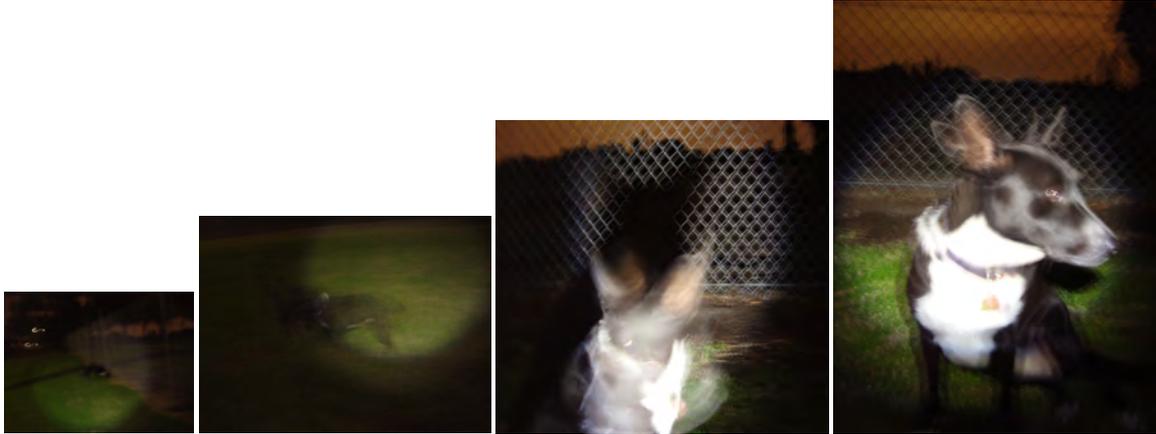


Fig.19: *Ghost Dog at Cemetery*, Kelly Alexander, 2011.

looks for, and finds, the hole in the fence. And so the edit of the fence footage became about searching for the hole, which in turn translated as a creature seeking escape. The dingo cut off from its native land.

Narrator Mauled: scene eleven

Deleted Scenes: corridor, wool, 16 happinesses, seated phrase with howling dingoes, cut off finger illusion, rolling in happiness lost, backwards writing, hopeless public speaking, the sky is falling, facial looping, dog reads text about dog ...

TASK: Animalistic body parts

The narrator twitches with fear and her breath is irregular. The scent of blood will turn her own against her. She is maimed, one hand wrapped in gauze and soaked red. In the other she holds tight to the still full wine glass, which in moments is emptied, its blood red contents splattered violently. The narrator is devoured.

Initially it felt important to this scene that the narrator have a bloodied left hand, followed the earlier incidence in *Psychic Injury* in which she cut off her own finger. Though the finger illusion didn't make the final edit, the bloodied hand remained. It instead made reference to the werewolf legend, in which wolves are trapped and their paws taken as trophies, only to

later transform back into their original state of a human hand. Celebrated magic realism novelist Angela Carter offered some inspiration here.

There was a hunter once, near here, that trapped a wolf in a pit. This wolf had massacred sheep and goats; eaten up a mad old man who used to live by himself in a hut halfway up the mountain and sing to Jesus all day; pounced on a girl looking after the sheep, but she made such a commotion that men came with rifles and scared him away and tried to track him in the forest but he was cunning and easily gave them the slip. So this hunter dug a pit and put a duck in it, for bait, all alive-oh; and he covered the pit with straw smeared in wolf dung. Quack, quack! Went the duck and the wolf came slinking out of the forest, a big one, a heavy one, he weighed as much as a grown man and the straw gave way beneath him — into the pit he tumbled. The hunter jumped down after him, slit his throat, cut off all his paws for a trophy. And then no wolf at all lay in front of the hunter but the bloody trunk of a man, headless, footless, dying, dead.

(Carter 1979, 111)

The mauling death of the narrator signified the breaking down of the power of the shadow. As the psychic shadow of the desert is confronted, the predator becomes prey. In a narrative sense, the death of the narrator also acts as a metaphor for the actual 'illogic' of the narrative, and its interplay between specificity and ambiguity. In a sense it left no doubt that some chaotic, intuitive and unconscious forces were at work here. The audible breath of myself as performer had emerged — panting as a consequence of the action of tail wagging. Now the breath continued to move through the fear-stricken narrator and carried the performance beyond the territory of the desert to revisit a crying *Snow White*.

Snow White Cries: scene twelve



Fig. 20: *Les Ombres*, Boltanski, 1986

The simplicity of the little shadow dingo was inspired by visual artist Christian Boltanski's 1985 installation *Les Ombres* (Boltanski in Monnani 2004, 161–162). Her appearance symbolised a revisit from the 'donor', who in fairy tale holds the magical means to overcome the enemy. The dingo also represented something of a wolf mother, a wise, all knowing confidante, whose counsel and comfort allows the strength to go on. Like the forest animals who comfort *Snow White*, the little dingo witnessed as I shed the tears of innocence lost. When we have fallen, again and again and again, when we feel we can no longer go on, and do, there lies the dawn.



Fig. 21a: *Snow White Cries*, Belle Elsie-Lee, 2011



Fig. 21b: *Snow White (and the Seven Dwarfs) Cries*, film still, Disney, 1938

7 Discovery

We discussed the process of discovery, and the practice of following small details as they are discovered to get to know them and uncover further material. This process fits well with the name Dark Park. Seeking out material in the darkness, feeling it out, getting to know it. Gradually illuminating.³⁷

In the protagonist's passage from not knowing to knowing, a torch must be shone into the dark matter of the unconscious. Here she discovers the were-woman, the dog and the innocent girl, all elements of herself that must be confronted, befriended and eventually integrated if she is to complete the journey to transformation. It takes courage to look into the wreckage inflicted by the destructive force of the shadow.

What do you know that you wish you did not know? ... like reading your mother's diary.³⁸

The creative road. How to know if it's right to give up when the spark has dulled to an ember and you ran out of oxygen long ago? Choices made, the lure of dreams fulfilled, of the appearance of success, of parents being proud, of friends shaking their heads in wonder. How to know that happiness might not reside here? When to take a look and check for one's pelt when one never stops, or has been stopped so long that anything will do? How to breathe, find the life again?³⁹

³⁷ Excerpt from studio journal 5th March 2011, referring to a discussion with Melbourne dancer Luke Hickmott.

³⁸ Excerpt from studio journal 16th March 2011

³⁹ Excerpt from studio journal 12th May 2011.

Once the tears of the innocent have been shed, the donor imparts to the protagonist the necessary clues that will illuminate the path to discovery. In *Dark Park* the narrator/predator, having been mauled by her own, has left her pelt behind (all werewolves return to their human state in death). The girl/woman is thrown a life-line: the sacred coat.

Sacred Coat: scene thirteen

coat/coat

In the process of reclaiming a creative life, of reinstating creative instinct, of reinvigorating creative inspiration, it may be necessary to recognise that I, as Estes describes, have been walking too long without my pelt.

In hunting cultures, the pelt is equal to food as the most important product for survival ... To lose one's pelt is to lose one's protections, one's warmth, one's early warning system, one's instinctive sight. Psychologically, to be without one's pelt causes a woman to pursue what she thinks she should do, rather than what she truly wishes. It causes her to follow whoever and whatever impresses her as strongest — whether it is good for her or not ... She pulls back from taking the next step, from making the necessary descent and holding herself there long enough for something to happen.

(Estes 1994, 268)

After reading 'Women Who Run With The Wolves' today, the coat also became a skin. My skin. A seal skin. A skin I was trying to put back on'.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Excerpt from studio journal 2nd March 2011.

The action for this scene emerged directly from this passage from Eva Hornung's *Dog Boy*:

Once inside Marko's room, a curious ritual took place. Romoschka laid it on the ground in front of Marko. The little boy was beside himself with delight at the sight of the coat, but seemed hesitant to touch it. He seemed to regard it with something like reverence. The sacred coat. Romochka looked down at his hands, then began staring out the window. Marko crept, belly to the ground, over to the coat and gingerly lay a hand on it, staring at Romochka all the while. Marko stayed still, extended hand on the coat. He turned his face slowly, shut his eyes and stayed like that, face averted. I counted ten seconds in which both boys stayed absolutely still. Eventually Romochka turned and walked out of the room. He left. I could hear him clumping rather obviously down the stairs. Marko fell upon the coat in a whimpering frenzy. I called Anna Aleksandrovna and Dimity in to watch. Marko smelled the coat in deep breaths, then slowly slipped it on, then rolled about on the floor in it, then took it off, and lay down on it and went to sleep with part of the hood in his mouth.

(Hornung 2009, 221)

Task:

1. go to knees. hands on knees. hands slip from knees
2. belly on ground, crawl to coat
3. gingerly lay a hand on it, eyes open wide to audience
4. turn face away, eyes averted and closed. count 10 seconds
5. fall upon the coat in a silent whimpering frenzy
6. smell the coat (standing)
7. slowly slip it on
8. roll in it
9. take it off
10. fall asleep with the collar in your mouth

*For Mel the coat was very sad, the young girl losing her dog.*⁴¹

This scene of the *Sacred Coat* came at a moment in the performance not only when the narrative demanded a renewed sense of hope, but also when, as a performer, the opportunity to stand, take a breath, and look to the audience through steady eyes was necessary. In *Dark Park*, the final donning of the coat marks the dawn, the integration of the light and the dark aspects of the self, the dog and the girl. This integration signifies the rebirth of the power within. From here a sense of closure began to emerge. But first, the resurrection.

8 Resurrection/ Power Regained

... the process of individuation, which begins in a condition of suffering and neurotic decompensation, leads not only to restitution, but to progressive enlargement of the personality. For these reasons, Jung saw symptoms and neurosis as potentially positive conditions, since it is through them that the whole individuation process begins. From a mood, a depression, a painful state, the quest begins, and, once begun, it is directed not only backward to the repressed shadow, but also forward, bringing to light unknown and not yet experienced potentialities hiding in the unconscious. That is fairy tale's happy ending.

(McCurdy in Stein & Corbett 1999, 15)

'finding one's way to power again, and more so, to depth' (Estes 1994, 264).

⁴¹ Feedback from Melanie Hamilton after work in progress showing. Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Studio E100, 22nd May 2011. Interestingly it offers a different interpretation.

... as in the story of *La Loba*, the bones of the dead have been gathered and re-arranged. The self is sung back into being. In the archetypal narrative it's here that one last test remains. Where, after a brief lull has made a sense of resolution imminent, the story calls out, 'but no, not so fast ... that wouldn't make for a very interesting tale now would it!?'

Little Dance Of Terror: scene fourteen

'Breaking old patterns of ignorance by being able to behold a horror without looking away' (Estes 1992, 54). I am interested in terror. Facing the unknown, the imagined. When I came to explore the material for *Little Dance of Terror*, I was working from a combination of influences. Initially it was this scene from Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* that had left an embodied horror in me that I wanted to explore.

He started down the rough wooden steps. He ducked his head and then flicked the lighter and swung the flame over the darkness like an offering. Coldness and damp. An ungodly stench.

The boy clutched at his coat. He could see part of a stone wall. Clay floor. An old mattress darkly stained. He crouched and stepped down again and held out the light. Huddled against the back wall were people, male and female, all trying to hide, shielding their faces with their hands. On a mattress lay a man with his legs gone to the hip and the stumps of them blackened and burned. The smell was hideous. Jesus, he whispered.

Then one by one they turned and blinked in the pitiful light. Help us, they whispered. Please help us. Christ, he said. Oh Christ. He turned and grabbed the boy. Hurry, he said. Hurry.

He'd dropped the lighter. No time to look. He pushed the boy up the stairs. Help us, they called. Hurry.

A bearded face appeared blinking at the foot of the stairs. Please, he called. Please.

He shoved the boy through the hatch and sent him sprawling. He stood and got hold of the door and swung it over and let it slam down and he turned to grab the boy but the boy had gotten up and was doing his little dance of terror. For the love of God will you come on, he

hissed. But the boy was pointing out the window and when he looked he went cold all over.

Coming across the field toward the house were four bearded men and two women. He grabbed the boy by the hand. Christ, he said. Run. Run.

(McCarthy 2006, 117)

In the studio, I imagined I was the little boy watching the cannibals coming over the hill to eat me. Wanting to run, but being unable to from the fear, as if in a dream. I looked, I saw, I slowly gestured (point), I registered what I was seeing, I became terrified, I slowly descended to the ground. Putting this sequence on a loop, I explored cutting it at significant moments, before beginning again, re-enacting the point of terror again and again. The exercise became like a quietly evil groundhog day.

1. Look, see, point
2. Look, see, point, register
3. Look, see, point, register, begin terrified
4. See, point, register, begin terrified, grow terrified
5. Point, register, begin terrified, grow terrified, begin descent
6. Register, begin terrified, grow terrified, begin descent, continue descent
7. Grow terrified, begin descent, continue descent, floor

Something about volition. Like you're not in control. Like something is doing this to you. Like there's this external force. It's there throughout. It gives this sense of terror, terror of the woods, terror of the dream ... And I found it very disturbing at times. Shifting between these modes of innocence, these modes of unknowingness, to the abject.

(Jude Walton)⁴²

⁴² Transcribed feedback from work in progress showing discussion. Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Studio E100, 22nd May 2011.

Film maker David Lynch also connects with terror very well. The terrified look of character Laura Palmer in his film *Fire Walk With Me* (Lynch 1992) spoke to this scene.



Fig. 22: The Laura Palmer Terrified, film still, Lynch, 1992

Task: The Laura Palmer terrified.

The film *Black Swan* (Aronofsky 2010) inspired further possibilities for *A Little Dance Of Terror*.

Black Swan: I was affected by this movie. The story of a girl/woman's transformation into a swan.

She scratches herself in her sleep and black wings begin to grow through the marks. The scene

*where her legs bend backwards ...*⁴³

This one scene in particular in which, out of nowhere, the protagonist violently transforms into a swan, left a powerful impression. The scene is over in a moment but the glimpse of the body distorted as if possessed, was unforeseen and startling. It broke the rules of the film's otherwise realist world. As a viewer I was left feeling unsure as to what I'd just seen, but somehow knowing it at the same time. This sharp glimpse of horror sent my imagination into overdrive. It was that sharp intake of breath. Terrifying. I wanted to find a moment in *Dark Park* that utilised this idea of an unexpected or glimpsed terror.

⁴³ Excerpt from studio journal 2nd February 2011.

In the studio I played with capturing it. The idea was that my shadow, for a quick, brief moment, would move independently of me. It would occur out of the corner of the eye, just enough to have the audience sitting up in their seats again, disrupting. I began by filming the movement of my shadow only, keeping my actual body beyond the frame. I executed this with the *Little Dance of Terror* material. Then, as things happen, the 'glimpsed' shadow never came to fruition and '*Little Terror*' became a film. As it stood in the work, the film portrayed a kind of looking into the horror, and then a gradual disappearance of the horrified. In the film I dissolve into nothingness. In the following scene I rise again.

Loupe to Standing: scene fifteen

loupe/loop

Wide shoulders, long arms and she sleeps succinctly curled into a ball as if she were cradling her spine in her tail. Nothing about her is human except that she is *not* a wolf; it is as if the fur she thought she wore had melted into her skin and become part of it, although it does not exist. Like wild beasts, she lives without a future. She inhabits only the present tense, a fugue of the continuous, a world of sensual immediacy as without hope as it is without despair.

(Carter 1979, 119)

TASK: Take 15 minutes to loop from standing to all fours, then, 10 stages between two legged and four legged.

For a long time *Loupe to Standing* had me emerging from underneath the coat. Only once the coat was abandoned did it feel right. Just to be on the floor, in my skin, was what was required. The weapon (stake) in hand was kept, because the aesthetic was interesting,

because I felt like a kind of warrior, because the stake connected to the idea of killing the werewolf somehow (werewolf, the neglected, accumulated shadow).

Backtracking and looping are terms that describe an animal diving underground to escape, and then popping up behind the predator's back. This is the psychic maneuver which Bluebeard's wife effects in order to re-establish sovereignty over her own life again.

(Estes 1992, 55)

So here I am, naked, performing in front of my father. How do I keep this as modest as possible?

Tuck my tail. God, watched that back and tucking my tail more or less makes my arse disappear.

Have you earned this nakedness? Are you trying too hard? Does the scene really require it? Yes.⁴⁴

The action of 'loouping' out of the floor embraced a sense of renewal. In this moment, the performance almost complete, I was relieved at having made it through the radically wide and challenging terrain of creating and performing this solo work. The process marked a step towards integrating the good, the bad and the mediocre of this life as a dance artist. 'To understand the predator is to become a mature animal who is not vulnerable out of naiveté, inexperience or foolishness' (Estes 1992, 42). I had arrived at this final stage, injured but triumphant, performer and maker, creature and human, dog and woman, dark and light.

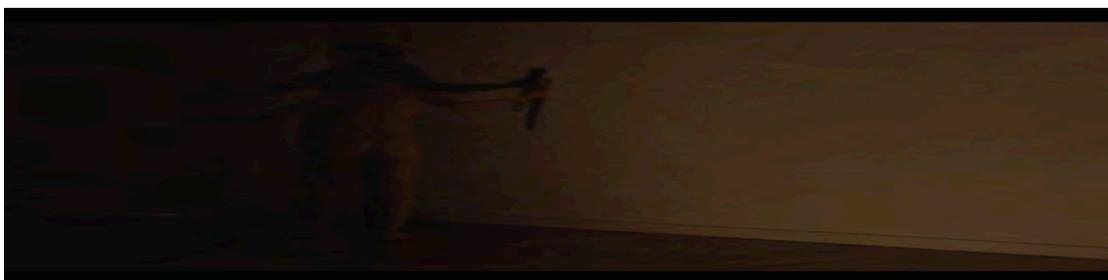


Fig. 23: *Woman with Weapon, Exits*, video still, 2011

⁴⁴ Excerpt from studio journal 1st June 2011.

9 Transformation: Conclusion

Dark Park grew out of an intention to develop processes for working with narrative within dance and to examine the space(s) between specificity and ambiguity in dance theatre. The aim was to explore this territory through the creation of a new dance theatre work, the material for which would be uncovered through a series of visceral experiments that incorporated writing, movement, story, memories, logic and intuition.

The creation and performance of *Dark Park* thus reflected a rich studio practice. The territory of this practice incorporated (though was not limited to) the development and execution of tasks that focused on expanding the narrative ground through intuitive process and decision making (3rd mind, as if it already exists, looping, 'playing awake', garbage talking). It utilised autobiography as a source of narrative and communicative tool, merging personal histories with the fictions of fairy tale, werewolf legend and archetype. It explored the transference of fictional texts to performance and utilised well-known stories and structure to house abstract content. It explored the communicative properties of different performance vocabularies, including that of performer endurance, and questioned how audiences might empathise, feel responsibility for, and make a personal investment in, the events of the performance as they unfold. It incorporated ideas around multiplicity, both in the performance vocabulary (including movement, text, shadow/illusion, sound, lip-syncing, film) and of the solo performer, utilising these performance languages to create a sense of multiple presences.

Q: Did you forge the narrative out of previously disparate material? Are there really gaps? Is that where the ambiguity lies?

A: Well yes. I countered the ambiguous nature of the material by embedding it within an explicit structure. That structure was archetypal and so on some level familiar to audiences, which made the communication of meaning easier. One thing about this that was interesting for me was that once I decided on this structure (which, with its beginning, middle and end, is linear in nature), for quite a while I kind of forgot that previously the structure hadn't been there. Retrospectively I had found elements in the scenes to justify the overall narrative. On reflection I see that it has always been that way, to some degree, in my work. There's always an application of narrative logic to material that has usually been initiated from an intuitive place. So on one level it could be a forging, but it could also be evidence of the very tangible value of intuition. You know, it's a wonderful part of the creative process, that place where you're creating things or following a path, but you're not really sure why, logically. But then later, something will happen and a link will pop up that connects two separate elements, and all of a sudden there's a sense about them and meaning starts to emerge. What was ambiguous begins to slide into specificity.⁴⁵

The scribed headings were to some degree subverted by a changing in their order, or by skipping them, or by crossing off many at a time so as to obscure which heading belonged to which scene. They were self-reflexive in that they cultivated, brought awareness to, and then interrupted what is often an unconscious sense-making process of seeking out narrative logic. At the same time the subversion of the titles encouraged more of an intuitive encounter with the murkier depths of this emotionally driven material.

What's going on is that we have all these narrative divergences, from what we're seeing and what I'm hearing. The nine fairy tale list was in that way like a springboard for fantasies.

(Kate Hunter)⁴⁶

⁴⁵ Extract from 'Self Interview 2'.

⁴⁶ Transcribed feedback from second work in progress showing discussion. Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Studio E100, 22nd May 2011.

Q: Interesting. So how do you think the show would have read without the titles as a guide?

A: Well, it's funny, in one way they acted as a guide, in another they kind of provoked questions, like 'I challenge you, the audience to find "Psychic Injury" in this scene about a neglected dog?' Or, 'How is a scene of the narrator chasing their tail connected to "Straying from the Path?"' I had my own answers to these questions, but I liked that they had the possibility to provoke.

At the very minimum, I hoped the titles would be just one of a multiplicity of means through which to enter and gain meaning from the work. Of course, meaning would still have existed without them.

Narrative is the gaps. You make meaning in the gaps. When you watch something like this that is a montage, the process of creating meaning becomes a narrative in itself.

(Holly Cooper)⁴⁷

Dark Park sees innocence transformed to maturity, the child of *Snow White* metamorphosised to a woman with a weapon.

While in modern society a woman's loss of innocence is often ignored, in the underground forest a woman who has lived through the demise of her innocence is seen as someone special, in part because she has been hurt, but more so because she has gone on, because she is working hard to understand, to peel back the layers of her perceptions and her defences and see what lies underneath. In that world, her loss of innocence is treated as a rite of passage. That she can now see more clearly is applauded. That she has endured and continues to learn gives her both status and honour.

(Estes 1994, 396)

⁴⁷ Transcribed from second work in progress showing feedback discussion. Victoria University Footscray Park Campus, Studio E100, 22nd May 2011.

I discovered in my dance making that there is always a narrative logic at work, a thinking logic or an intuitive logic, or both, at different times, coming from inside and outside. Part of what makes *Dark Park* different to my previous work is that I didn't feel the need to demonstrate the logic within the scenes themselves. After making decisions on structure I didn't go back through the work and try to imbed it with signs that would help to frame the audience's viewing. The scribed headings did that for me. They freed up the material, so that it could exist in its own strangeness, and its levels of ambiguity actually made it malleable to the structure.

'All fairy tales, in the end, are about transformation' (Gibson 2011).

In turn the structure connected the audience to this quite specific meta-story, the story of transformation. Transformation of the work and the transformation of myself as a person, performer and maker.

-CHIMES SOUND-

END

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Appendix A: Visual Notes for DVD

(with DVD chapter, time code, scene description and sound credits)

DVD Credits

Video: Cobie Orger
Lighting Design: Suze Smith with Kelly Alexander
Sound and Lighting Operation: Suze Smith
Original Sound Composition: Tom Sullivan
Film: Kelly Alexander

Marking Territory: Chapter One (00.00)

I enter through the door from outside in darkness and pass behind the audience. I mark the outskirts of the space with the soles of my feet.

Sound: *Footsteps*, Kelly Alexander 2010

Howling Narrator: Chapter Two (01.51)

I stand in a black coat and heels as the narrator, glass of wine in hand. I propose a silent toast, then howl.

Titles 1: Chapter Three (06.50)

I turn over the first page of the titles, cross off 'Prologue', then sound the chimes.

Snow White: Chapter Four (07.37)

The *Snow White* dance in which I pick flowers, talk to a bird, run into the woods and cry.

Sound: Extract from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* film, Disney, 1938

Holding and Stabbing: Chapter Five (10.42)

A trio for myself and two shadows in which we support and then stab one another.

Sound: *Dunlop Part 1*, Tom Sullivan 2011

Titles 2: Chapter Six (14.50)

I cross off '*Innocence, Naivety, Unable to Identify Threat*', tick '*Into the Woods*' and change the order of '*Straying from the Path*' and '*Tricked, Deceived, Entrapped*'.

Narrator Chases Tail: Chapter Six cont. (16.16)

I chase my tail (as the narrator), gnashing my teeth and spinning in circles.

Titles 3: Chapter Seven (17.10)

I turn over the page of the titles.

Big Dog Saves Little Dog: Chapter Eight (17.37)

A shadow puppet skit in which a cat and a little dog fight. Big dog saves the day.

Cats and Dogs: Chapter Nine (19.52)

A cabaret-esque dance where I forget the choreography.

Sound: 'Cats and Dogs' from *Music Hole*, Camille 2008

Neglect Story: Chapter Ten (22.00)

I tell a childhood story of a neglected dog. The audience shadows are cast across the back wall.

Sound: *Sniffing*, Tom Sullivan and Kelly Alexander, 2011

Tail Wagging: Chapter Eleven (25.22)

I wag my tail, moving slowly from the back wall to lay myself at the feet of the audience. My shadows build in number.

Sound: *Grey Matters*, Tom Sullivan 2011 (continues through the following two scenes)

Fence: Chapter Twelve (29.00)

Short film, searching for the hole in a fence.

Narrator Mauled: Chapter Thirteen (31.02)

Holding a glass of wine in a bloodied hand, the narrator is overcome. The wine is spilt.

Titles 4: Chapter Fourteen (31.43)

Skipping over '*Psychic Injury*', I cross off '*Lost in the Desert*'.

Snow White Cries: Chapter Fifteen (32.37)

I make my way to the small dingo shadow, crossing the front of the stage with empty wine glass in hand. Once at the dingo I convulse into crying.

Sound: Extract from *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* film, Disney 1938

Scared Coat: Chapter Sixteen (34.40)

I move to the black coat, play with it, put it on, take it off and fall asleep with it in my mouth.

Sound: Looped extract from 'Mobyette Democratie', *Meta Meta*, Zenzile 2006

Little Dance Of Terror: Chapter Seventeen (37.07)

Short Film. My shadow points and slowly sinks to the ground.

Sound: *Dance of Terror*, Tom Sullivan 2011

Loupe to Standing: Chapter Eighteen (39.10)

Naked with stake in hand, I move from lying on the floor, to the door.

Sound: 'Winter Child' from *Music Hole*, Camille 2008

Titles 5: Chapter Nineteen (42.57)

I cross off '*Discovery/Resurrection*' and place an asterisk next to '*Transformation*' (all unseen). I sound the chimes and take a bow.

END