PERFORMER AS MEDIUM:
CONNECTING PAST AND PRESENT IN IMPROVISATION

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Abstract

This research explores performer as medium, and more broadly, performance as a practice connecting past already lived experience, and the present. It is centred in the experience of my solo performance practice that is philosophically concerned with the ontology of the everyday and the ordinary.

An experiential approach allows the creative and performance practice to be sustained, while strategically adopting phenomenological, autobiographic, and ethnographic stances to interrupt, problematize and inform the creative work. By cycling practice and reflection, I foster an emergent approach, allowing for unfolding a degree of plasticity and adaption.

I examine cultural and geographic aspects of human being, and their embodied manifestation asking how particularities of place(s) and communities are implicated in creative practice. This research is further informed by an on-going survey of practitioners, artists and writers.

The research explores the body, its senses, perception and capacity for embodied recollection. It investigates the intelligence and innate forms of knowing of the body and how this is drawn upon in performance. Embodied knowing, capacity for associating, connecting and relating, along with kinaesthetic memory are important elements of this research.

Key questions include how and what memories within body are kindled and collide with those cultivated by the performance space? Can we ever separate past and present in our embodied selves, and what does that mean in terms of future selves? How do body and place mutually imprint?

My experience correlates with the notion of body as a multi-layered entity – a repository of memories of lived experiences and ancestral history that reside dormant within a cellular and biological perspective, and can inform at a behavioural level. This *re-membered* history has considerable potential and capacity to shape and influence one's self. Drawing these to consciousness and embodiment in performance has been one of the practical outcomes. I consider the idea of shadowed or hidden selves, and reconnecting to parts of the self that are hidden, lost or denied.

I examine my own performative state and notions of mediumship, forms of trance and transformative dance. The notion of mediumship within my performance practice parallels the concept of body as conduit between past and present. Imprints, impressions of past experience, and their
expression or capacity to provoke possibilities, approximate to a sense I have of my performance as channelling memories within and without the body. There is also a sense of surrendering to these newly recognised imprints within the body, much as one can within an abandoned building, accepting its patina of time present, through layers of textures on its walls.

The performance work *moths are calling* (presented at Space 876 VCA, 2014) is structured to consider the space(s) it inhabits, with the work constructed in accordance with each space’s architectural essence and boundaries. Working with provocations of things assembled in the space, my collaborators (musician – Ria Soemardjo; lighting designer – Paula van Beek; installation artist – Tamara Kirby) and I engaged in creative relationship and dialogue with the space itself. Within this assemblage there is a multifaceted side to the exploration of mediumship, where qualities brought into the space were not just spatial arrangements, but the way space is revealed as well.
Declaration

I, Janette Hoe, declare that the MFA (Dance) exegesis entitled PERFORMER AS MEDIUM: CONNECTING PAST AND PRESENT IN IMPROVISATION only comprises my original work. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text of all materials used. This exegesis is 20,017 words in length, exclusive of figures, tables, bibliography and appendices.

Signature:

30th June 2016
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The capacity of performer to be conduit for memories connecting past and present, as in many shamanic practices, is at the centre of this research. Drawing on somatic practices and discourses including therapeutic approaches, and traditional trance dance, I explore the body’s capacities for knowing and remembering and the notion of *mediumship* and *being medium*.

Traditional practices including shamanistic traditions often place the shaman as an intermediary connecting a spiritual world and everyday community life. Arguably a 21st century rendition of a Shakespearean classic is a complex example of mediumship. We are not just connecting through the text with Shakespeare and his time, but in the immediacy of our experience of the play the actor(s) are themselves mediums and conduits. The word medium also suggests the material through which one expresses or communicates. It has implications of something *other* and acting through it, and can involve processes of transformation.

There are many contemporary practices where the notion of mediumship may apply. In this study I consider forms of butoh that derived from post World War II artists Tatsumi Hijikata and Kazuo Ohno, and the practices of contemporaries such as Lena Ang, Tony Yap and Yumi Umiumare – all of whom have been influential on my work in various ways.

The body is an extraordinary instrument that can accumulate knowledge of all kinds – skilful capacities, experiences of trauma and accidents, information and imagery that appear to reside within our physiological form and mental faculties. This accumulation of knowledge can be seen as an imprinting of the world on us. Part of this seems to occur involuntarily or without us being aware. In my practice I seek ways to be alert, open and conscious of these memories and *imprints* or traces of past experiences.
The notion of being medium implies the action of transmission through one's materiality. For example in a certain situation I might feel something evoked or stimulated within me and my energy, emotion and attention shift – a process that I might attribute to my perception of a connection to an other. For some communities this is a sign of spirit and in shamanic traditions can refer to the presence of ancestors. Spirit is a term that is widely used even in everyday life but has various meanings. We might use it in the sense of recognising some liveliness, essence or spirit in someone. In this paper I use the term where I can be clear of its context such as my deep and profound experience of recollection of my father that I refer to as a spiritual sensing in performing *Occupy/Preoccupy* (in chapter 3).

Because all experience is located any consideration of mediumship or the re-membering body cannot escape dealing with being's situation and place. Place is something sensed, physically interacted with and to which I have emotional connections. In my practice my somatic sensing and perception of place becomes a conversation that is about my interaction with and relatedness to a place. In some situations this might be called my sense of belonging or my perception of the homeness of the place.

As a solo improviser, I am aware of the tension between premeditated performance and those states of heightened awareness and attention to the moment that are associated with improvisation. In my practice and unfolded in this writing, I grapple with the question of live-ness and in the moment-ness through a process which I call internal choreography. This is introduced in chapter 2 and developed further through the paper.

In this study, I adopt an experiential approach in which the creative and performance practice is sustained, while strategically adopting phenomenological, autobiographic, and ethnographic stances to interrupt, problematize and inform the creative work. This bricolleur approach to methods has a characteristically emergent implication, allowing for unfolding, a degree of plasticity and adaption that is further and continuously informed by an on-going survey of relevant practitioners and literature. Description, analogy, and metaphoric comparisons are close reflective tools rather than a means of capturing the moment as it was exactly at the time of performance. Conscious of the elusiveness associated with experience video and photo documentation were used as tools for recollection and are represented through the text and in the Appendix 2.

The connection and continuity of my creative practice and everyday life is implicit to this study. My practice is rhizome like – a matrix that draws on a fabric of embodied memories in the context of everyday being and life. This is reflected in the writing/documentation, where the personal and autobiographic become both theme and method and writing is at times metaphoric rather than explanatory.
As a short preface to the paper’s main chapters I offer a brief personal history. I hope these insights into my formative years and cultural environments give useful contextual information, and equip the reader with a framework to engage with my practice and the perspectives that are being offered in this paper.

The paper then takes the following form. Firstly (Performance Practice and Methodology), I consider aspects of the field of shamanistic practices and contemporary practices deriving from butoh. I outline my practice and the processes underpinning this inquiry. In chapter 2 (Body and Memory), I explore several perspectives on body, its somatic sensibility, forms of knowing and capacity for bodily remembering upon which my practice is centred. I consider the notions of mediumship and reflect on the processes of moths are calling (moths…). This is followed by Space and Place and the Located Performer where the notions of place and located-ness are introduced. Insights arising from the research are presented in the final chapter, Concluding Thoughts, and I briefly reflect on questions arising.

Key concepts of the investigation e.g. medium and attunement are italicized/bold in order to outline their importance in the paper. They are also listed and given explanation in a glossary of terms in Appendix 1.

**Personal history**

The core threads of my research can be traced to my formative years growing up in Malaysia. My cultural lineage has exposed me to energy systems, beliefs and practices such as traditional Chinese medicine, tai chi and animism. As a physically active child, my explorations relied heavily on the tangible and kinaesthetic experiences of my physicality. Broadly speaking these interests stimulated and extended my inquiry to my relationship with my immediate environment/surroundings, and to notions of spirit and trance, which have in adulthood dovetailed into my artistic life.

An aspect of spatial and design awareness became important from my work as graphic designer. Interest in the dynamics of objects within a two dimensional perspective translates into three dimensionality of spaces in performance making. Design as an aesthetic discipline has always interested me, and this extends to costume/textile design (with a fascination of textures) and architecture/interior design. These interests inform my choice of collaborators.
I came to dance through improvisation, beginning as training and performing with a local hybrid-butoh dance theatre company¹ in Kuala Lumpur. The group, known for its site-specific, stylized and visually evocative productions, offered a platform to bridge my visual design sensibilities with performance. In Melbourne I regularly trained in hybrid and Japanese inspired butoh and trance-based movement practices. In keeping my practice buoyant over the last two decades, embodiment-centred influences and collaborative engagements with various artists from other disciplines have fed the core of my interest in somatic practices.

Today as a solo improviser, my approach to work is intuitive, taking into account any of the external or internal stimuli to open pathways for movement. Within this framework emerges and grows into consciousness an idea or a theme from which I explore. In processes of gathering, embodying (movement) and refining the ideas, themes find aesthetic form and manifestation.

Compelled to clarify my years of learning and refine my understanding of my somatic form and performativity, I craved a space from which to explore and identify more deeply the rhizomes that make up my practice, and create work that reflected my interest more directly. The program at Victoria University’s Solo Performance Residency offered the resources for these investigations to be explored, providing me permission to drop in and bring together my core interests in a more focused environment. The natural progression to foster my inquiries in greater depth has led me to the Post Graduate Diploma studies at the VCA and, to the MFA program thereafter.

Across the years of the MFA core elements and phases of the research e.g. solo and collaborative performances, training/workshops, presentations and fieldwork have fuelled my inquiry (see Fig1).

The work _moths…_ was first presented at Fort Delta gallery in Melbourne and five months later at Space 876, VCA as the live outcome of the research.

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¹ Taro Dance Theatre, founded by choreographer/performer Lena Ang in 1994.
2013 (MFA begins) | 9 | 3 | 5 | 3
2014 | 10 | 2 | 3 | 3
2015 | 9 | 0 | 1 | 3
2016 (ending Sep) | 3 | 1 | 1 | 0

In addition, regular yoga practice and intermittent butoh and BMC workshops during this period.

Fig1 Table of Research Activities: an overview of activities undertaken from start of MFA research to completion. A detailed chronological map of these activities is in Appendix 3.
Chapter 1:
Performance Practice and Methodology

In this chapter I discuss practices that involve forms of trance/ecstatic dance or heightened states of awareness, particularly those that have been influential to my practice. I consider some of the practical and historical underpinnings of the form known as butoh, and then outline my research approach and my methods. The research is an experiential form of inquiry grounded in my practice as performer and the methodology of this research reflects practice-led and practice-based approaches. Characteristics of these forms of inquiry include immersion in the practice, reflection and facilitating emergence of insights and understanding that inform both the practice and written reflection.

There is reliance on documentation as a means of tracing and revealing the practical and investigative journey. By examining comparable practices, I can as practitioner/researcher provide references and further differentiate my practice. Relevant examples are Gretel Taylor’s (PhD, Victoria University) investigation of the relationship between body and place via site-specific performance making processes, *Locating: Place and the Moving Body*, and Michelle Ferris’ (Master of Animateuring) inquiry on the dancing body balancing between the threshold of an internal world and the external environment, *Dancing the Threshold: Liminal Space and Subjectivity in Practice*.

In this research I have looked at and participated in practices in various settings, some of these familiar – part of my own cultural life – and some of these in related cultural settings further afield in Indonesia. This fieldwork has in its way been immersive and at the same time, further helped in its particularity and difference to bring insight and a degree of rigour to this research.
The personal and practice centred aspect of the research also brings an autobiographic element to the fore. My practice doesn’t speak for others but involves conversations with others. It is dialogic and of course involves interaction through collaboration and performance.

Because performance is inevitably located – occurs in a place – and is relational in that it is socially interactive, I am concerned to explore the social context and environment of my performance. In so doing I become more aware of what is important to me, and my colleagues, peers and audiences.

This has meant that part of my focus has been on what and how my practice evolves and led to a consideration of the beliefs and values that inform my work. I found it necessary to look historically as much as examine in the present. Through this process, I became aware of other aesthetic aspects of my work such as those reflected in my interest in costume/textiles, architecture and spatial design.

Performance practice

The breadth of activity in those creative and expressive areas where embodiment is foregrounded, and where the connection between people is explored, makes it difficult to accommodate all practices into neat categories like theatre, dance, dance theatre, performance installation, interactive performance, performance art, or community art. Perhaps this reflects the uneasy divide between art and purposeful, functional form. Performance diversity requires us to ask what are the framing values of particular practices so that we might better engage with them. The uncertainty of diversity makes it important to understand the terms or conditions in which viewer and performer interact in a particular event.

My discussion of particular practices takes place against the backdrop of a society that is well regulated. We are expected to behave in ways that are socially determined. Theatre audiences abide by premeditated rules of conduct – the dimming of lights marks the start of performance. This may differ in a shadow puppet performance in Indonesia for example, where children are seen and heard running in and out of a performance. Artistic and traditional practices often affirm and conform to the beliefs and values of the community, but some artists, including the founders of the butoh movement, Kazuo Ohno and Tatsumi Hijikata, attempted to break with tradition, questioning and setting aside prevailing ideologies. Contemporaries such as Seisaku, and the Western dance maker Jerome Bel articulate concern about the dangers of a trained and regulated artistic skilfulness. They recognise that learned and trained techniques and movement skills can contribute to habitual patterning. An aim in the contemporary performance practices of Umiumare and Yap, is to forget what has been learnt, forcing the performer to be somatically alert and in the moment.
Looking to explore the evil sides of everyday life, butoh as a tool probes dark aspects of human nature and attempts to shed our societal skin and as Hijikata reveals, take us further into an authentic core from which our more animalistic human behaviours arise.

[Butoh] is [...] often ugly, but it seems to understand that ugliness wakes up beauty. Meanwhile it is not a progressive art; instead it looks back and takes stock. Its direction is not upward and outward as in Western ballet, but more downward and dissolving.²

In many parts of Indonesia such as Bali and Yogyakarta for example, artistic expression is rooted in the everyday way of life without the profound distinction between life, art and community that is apparent in the West. Furthermore music, theatre and art are not separated but rather, they appear as integrated modalities within a performance. We now see these traditional values being revived in contemporary practice.

The act of attending to things, to peeling the layers and searching for essential selves parallels the (re)-emergence of phenomenology in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the early European founders Edmund Husserl’s challenge was to return to the things themselves. Mindful of the human tendency to make assumptions and fail to recognise bias, Husserl suggested we notice and then put aside our interpretations of things and stay actively and openly engaged with phenomena of interest. The subjective nature of our engagement in the world was recognised by many that followed, including Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, and it is the latter’s recognition of the centeredness of our experience in our bodies that has significance for many today.

Contemporary performance has undergone some significant changes, reflecting feminist and post modernist movements. The structure and content of late 20th century performance had broadened to include a wide range of non-narrative, abstract, and conceptual work. The improvisatory explosion of the Judson Church performance makers and extension of performance from theatrical settings into public spaces and the many collaborative and interdisciplinary connections between movement based artists, visual artists and designers spawned new forms, practices and contexts. In Japan and other Asian cultures, traditional forms like Noh theatre and Kabuki were tested and challenged by artists seeking to make and reassess their connections to country and places in particular. Further research might usefully seek to locate the practice

² Sondra Fraleigh, Butoh: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy (Great Britain: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 4.
in relation to other relevant practices. In the context and limits of this MFA writing this has been limited. In contemporary performance the notion of authenticity is one of many questions that percolated. Is the performer representing some other, playing a character or involved in the performance as herself? The live-ness of performance and the ways that performance might or might not be pre-meditated, along with the temporal and spatial boundaries of a performance, posed challenges that brought spectatorship, witnessing and participation of others up for question.

One of the underlying conditions of those emerging performative forms that is shared with trance and butoh is somatic alertness. The connection of past experience with the present moment is also implicated as habitual aspects of one's self are revealed, challenged or transformed. In so doing the performative emphasis can broaden from representation of the past, to an investigative project in the present.

Practice/context/purpose

Humans have a long history of embodied practices in which aspects of community life and collectively held beliefs are celebrated. The architectural relics of past civilizations were places of organised rituals, important rites of passage like the burials of Pharaohs in the extraordinary pyramids of Egypt, or great temples such as Borobudur in Indonesia, where faiths of particular kinds had places for believers to worship. Places such as these gave material frameworks for participants’ physical, thoughtful and spiritual activities. It seems that some rituals cemented relationships and structures of power, were opportunities for information to be passed on and regulated, and gave a sense of continuity and security. Today people come together in buildings that house religious activities, large venues like the Opera House in Sydney are created for performance events, open public spaces such as Federation Square in Melbourne serve as sites for all manner of events, giant stadiums accommodate spectacular music concerts and huge industrial workshop spaces are converted into multi purpose arts spaces like Carriageworks in Sydney. The regularity, participation and proliferation of public events suggest these are an intrinsic part of contemporary society giving a sense of belonging, empowerment, or enable expression of community aspirations and values. They foster a sense of community. In some we see a curious blend of aesthetic materials, purpose and function. Music and pageantry are part of sporting events and large performance extravaganzas and rock concerts fill tennis and football stadiums. Parks, gardens and natural sites are chosen as places for exhibitions, music making, installations and performances. People participate in ways that reflect their values and interests. Many of us seize the opportunity to be creative, tell stories, transform our selves, critique our selves and the world around us, sometimes rebelling against dominant narratives, forms and values and contributing to the shaping of communities.
Ohno and Hijikata in their reframing of performance fuelled an extraordinary diversity of somatically centred practices and research, including the festival attraction of Dairakudakan and *Body Weather* developments with Tess de Quincy. It is in the context of a terrible world conflict that these two artists were motivated to refine and redefine their identity. They illustrate the intertwining of context and practice. The rapid spread of these somatic practices also reflects on the situations and conditions arising in other places, including worlds of theatre/dance and performance in Australia.

**Trance/being entranced**

The experience of dancing as one possessed, of being taken over by something other than one’s self seems to be part of many rituals. Becoming entranced is a state that takes many forms and degrees.

Abram observes that traditional shamans served as intermediaries between society and the wider ecological field.

> By his constant rituals, trances, ecstasies, and ‘journeys’, he ensures that the relation between human society and the larger society of beings is balanced and reciprocal, and that the village never takes more from the living land than it returns to it […] Every adult in the community is engaged in this process of listening and attuning to the presences that surround and influence daily life.

Today the role of performer could be seen in this context, as medium in bringing to the foreground the intricacies of our existence as humans and our connection to the places we inhabit. Ancestral imprints that collapse the demarcation of time, origin and physicality are brought into being performatively. The performer invites us to share and appreciate our connectivity to past and present, linking us to land and community. Trance dance has become a phenomenon in many dance practices. There are exponents within communities in Indonesia, for example those participating in Bantengan – the bull trance in East Java, and Sanghyang, a sacred Balinese dance, and in Melbourne practitioners include Tony Yap. The forms reflect local situations, beliefs and customs.

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2. Founder/director of Tony Yap Company, Yap is a choreographer/performer whose work is informed by Asian shamanistic trance dance.
Ecstatic or trance dance was and still is for some communities, a way of channelling divine power. The vessel of the body is *emptied* to allow for the spiritual entity whether god, deity, or an animistic force to be manifested – usually performed or more aptly presented to ward off evil or produce a counter charm to an epidemic or trauma in a village. In *Sanghyang* or god-inspired trance-dance in Bali – induced by incense smoke, singing and recitation or chanting of prayers – the personality and behavioural form of the dancer is transformed into a state of ecstasy, performing acrobatic feats that they would not be able to achieve in normal condition.5 In Taoist temples during special periods of the year such as the *Hungry Ghost Festival* in Penang – the possessed can be seen beating himself with a sharp sword with very little traces of blood and hardly any noticeable expression of pain on his face.

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5 Walter Spies and Beryl de Zoete, *Dance and Drama in Bali* (Singapore: Periplus Editions (HK) Ltd, 2002), 70.
The trance induced through a medium or shaman in a village may be to assist in a ritual of healing of land and body. However in the case of Bantengan, it was a means of preparation for battle invoking the aggressive and courageous characteristics of the bull in the psyche of an army. So trance involves, in these examples, transformation and required emptying the body vessel to give room or space for something other. Body is the material constant – a necessary medium of flesh for transformation to occur, manifesting different capacities and altered states of being.

In a tribal or cultural context, the person in a trance is often not conscious or at best semi-conscious of their surroundings and actions, needing helpers to watch over them – keeping them safe from harming themselves and causing any accidents to the onlookers. In the context of theatre, the performer seems to play both roles – as keeper and doer, oscillating between looking in from outside the body (an objective holding and caring of self) and looking from the inside out (the doer and active agent in the moment). As doer or active agent, being is a dynamic meshing of memory and somatic sensing that attempts to bypass the intellect and rational reflection. For some such as Putu Vijaya, this performative agency extends to a visceral bodily dialogue between performer, other performers and onlookers, blurring the keeper-doer roles.

**Forms of trance**

Other forms of trance dance can be found in parts of South East Asia such as the Indonesian Kuda Lumping or the more refined classical court dance, Srimpi of Central Java, and the dance-drama Mak Yong of Northern Malaysia. In contemporary culture, there is trance inducing music and dancing in nightclubs. There are other associations of trance such as being entranced while watching performance or falling into a state of rage, or deeply engaged in the disciplined rituals of making-up pre-performance, or the state of being slain by the spirit as practiced in some branches of Christian communities. In Western literature poets like Wordsworth were entranced by landscapes in which they wandered – a sort of entrancement that yielded much romantic poetry.

The forms of performance that manifested in two post war Japanese artists, Hijikata and Ohno, allowed these artists and the many that followed, to engage sensuously with their world. A heightened attention and curiosity made for a dynamic investigation of themselves and their lived environment. It was a practice that was grounded in the substance of body and sensory perception. It could be as basic as holding a rock and

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6 “Bantengan International Forum” (lecture, Malang, Indonesia, 30 August 2014).
sensing its rough texture and edges, weight and temperature, and letting the information be absorbed and inform the physiological forming of body. Such attention to sensing and perception reverberates and transforms body, allowing one to negotiate what it means to be in the moment, or empty the mind. Yumi Umiumare suggests introducing a restriction she calls disability, something that might inhibit habitual action that further heightens sensory alertness, and perception, forcing one to find creative ways to continue. The letting go of freedom to act as one pleases forces a curiosity and attentiveness to the cyclic nature of watching from within and without.

UMiumare is a Melbourne based Japanese butoh dancer, originally a member of Dairakudakan.
Exponents of butoh have different individual perspectives. Seisaku, who studied with Hijikata refers to butoh as a tool for exploring life. Sondra Fraleigh explains that the proponents of butoh aim to get back to origins, to turn back time, investigating basic terms of the human body and even more broadly, human being. Butoh, as Hijikata spoke of it, sought to break down engrained habits of body and excavate to reveal hidden or unrecognized patterns of a person. Butoh then is more reflective of an approach to performance that is concerned with the nature of human being. The dance of darkness, as it is popularly known, delves into our shadowed selves, or hidden memories as I see it, bringing invisible layers of our being into visibility.

Butoh is a practice that is inquisitive and rather than theorise who or what we are, it is experiential. It involves the practitioner in many strategies to make apparent or known those things that shape or inform the way we are. Like the oft used analogy of peeling away the layers of an onion, butoh proposes shedding accumulated layers of experiences in life to reveal the authentic self, or truth of one’s being, Seisaku notes that this is the origin, the root, the truth of who we are. It affords us the opportunity to recognise physiological and psychological aspects of our selves that are otherwise unnoticed.

The ‘place’ of trance

In the above examples of trance and ecstatic dance, it is apparent that it is not only the action of the dance and the ritual – its very location/place is equally important. Where we are born or live has repercussions on our behaviour, how we interact and construct our environment and how we relate to a certain place. In urban society, all that is built upon the land comes from the people of the land and thus, is reflective of a place and its cultural particularities. There is reciprocity between human being, place and environment. Within the scope of butoh, the land is alive in the body.

This is elaborated on in the chapters on body, memory and place where I discuss my own experiences of trance in place.

8 Sondra Fraleigh Horton, Butoh: Metamorphic Dance and Global Alchemy (Great Britain: University of Illinois Press, 2010), 4.
Influences on my personal practice

My first butoh experience as viewer grabbed me viscerally. Taken into another world by the performer, I was completely mesmerised by something more and perhaps deeper than the exquisite quality and intricacy of Lena Ang’s movement. I remember thinking how familiar this seemed to me and yet was not able to understand why. It felt like a homecoming.

Butoh has been and continues to be a major influence in my practice – beginning with training and performing in Ang’s company, Taro Dance Theatre in Kuala Lumpur, and extending to other similar forms of practices upon my return to Melbourne, including trance dance with Yap. A common thread that links these forms of expression is the presence of the ecstatic body. The words ecstatic and ecstasy, are defined by the Oxford Dictionary as

*an emotional or religious frenzy or trance-like state, originally one involving an experience of mystic self-transcendence.*

Two decades on the mysterious nature of possession and trance continues to be an intriguing aspect of my practice, and I suspect there are degrees of crossover to traditional trance as practiced in shamanistic communities.

My involvement in practices grounded in somatic awareness and improvisation such as those mentioned above with Yap and Ang has been expanded to include dwelling intermittently in the practice of Body-Mind Centering (BMC) with Alice Cummins, and butoh training with Umiumare. These all support and expand my exploration of the trance body. I do not see my practice as separate from everyday life, and my interests in spiritualism and healing modalities such as cranial sacral osteopathy, Chinese medicine and certain branches of psychology along with everyday activities such as running, yoga and chi gong all contribute to my practice.

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Yuri Nagaoka and Seisaku\textsuperscript{10} emphasised the intrinsic connections of place, ancestor and culture within my practice. The notion of carrying my ancestors with me runs parallel with the butoh notion of dancing with the dead. Hijikata underscores the potential for discovery of our hidden selves through the connections we might make with the dead.

\begin{quote}
Something is hiding in our subconscious, collected in our unconscious body, which will appear in each detail of our expression. Here we can rediscover time with an elasticity sent by the dead. We can find Butoh in the same way we can touch our hidden reality. Something can be born, can reappear living and dying in the moment. This cast-off skin is our land and home, which our body has forcibly ripped away.\textsuperscript{11}
\end{quote}

\section*{My methods}

As practitioner, my intention is not to replicate ancient trance rituals in performance but to explore the broader sense of \textit{mediumship} and the notion of trance. I am interested in the psycho-emotional aspects of being en-tranced in performance.

My presence in particular places or sounds can trigger kinaesthetic and physiological resonance. My body is not only in constant dialogue with the immediate performance environment and situation, but in a process of connecting to and remembering things not visible to the eye. I am conscious of being in a different state. I am involuntarily, energetically and imaginatively in flux. Although I am bodily located in this moment, because of my recollecting, remembering, knowing body with its accumulation of experience, I am also elsewhere. A change of demeanour and imaginative world can be volitionally brought about in a costume or an object. For example the dress worn as a shroud in \textit{moths}…, became a second skin. It enabled a textural exploration and discovery affecting me dynamically, sensually, imaginatively and spatially. Cocooned within this layer, I experienced a process of metamorphosis.

\textsuperscript{10}"Butoh Masterclass with Seisaku and Yuri Nagaoka," (workshop, Brunswick East, 26–27 October 2015).

\textsuperscript{11}Fraleigh Horton, \textit{Butoh}, 64.
There is a process of not fixating on particular things, of letting go of particular thoughts. In this state I notice that other imagery may arise. At the beginning of this research I thought of this as a means by which shadowed imprints or memories came to light.

In practice I attempt to inhabit a state of attentiveness and vulnerability. Perhaps it correlates with the essence of butoh as Seisaku says, is about mystery and unease; it is sensing and perceiving the subtleties in body and keeping it alive at each moment. A strategy for cultivating attention is the idea of introducing a restriction. The provocation of the disability requires alertness and attention. Exercises that restrict freedom open me up
to the unexpected. The state of unease can reveal hidden truths, or shadowed memories. Paradoxically, wanting to be free often suggests wanting to be in a familiar place.

**Personal values and beliefs**

I intuit a connection with my ancestors. How this is is not necessarily clear to me. Perhaps this is unimportant right now. This intuition or belief nevertheless is part of my performative state. It is intrinsic to my sense of listening and attention as a performer. It is part of my attunement within my situation/moment. It is a framing aspect of my stance as practitioner irrespective of its empirical truth.

**Personal reflection on process and emergence**

My practice draws on my body’s remembering – its capacity to resonate with both its present context through a sensory and perceptive engagement (attunement) and connect/interlace past re-membered experience. The memories and body memories of a lived past are important. Being conscious and aware of past experiences is assisted by reflection.

I use cycles of practice and reflection, which seem to support the emergence of understanding. As reflected in the metaphor of the moth in the development of moths…, every stage of life has to emerge in its own time. From an egg on a leaf to a caterpillar, to pupa within the protective wrappings of a cocoon to adult moth in flight, the form of each stage is different yet until every stage of this alchemic phenomenon is complete, the moth cannot fully come into being. The process of making sense takes time. My practice involving physical journeying (eg. Melbourne to Penang), immersion in places, explorations that took the form of practice and performance, and reflection – often at a distance in time and space – continued over a period of several years. The process of making sense of place and its affects on myself has taken time and has an emergent quality. There is an intermediate phase of internalizing that allows for the workings of something else to take place. A map or visual schema detailing the phases of this research follows (see Appendix 3).
The collection of experiences needs to gestate within the body for meanings and links to become visible. As practitioner I am always in transition between states of perceptive alertness and reflection, with the possibility and choice of the next move being in constant cycle.

**Process of writing**

Words sometimes are not enough to fully express the intuitive knowing that resides in one’s being. Ideas take time to form or be articulated. They arise out of processes that resemble incubation. They are the rewards of long and layered conversations.\(^1\)\(^2\) I gave myself freedom to write. It was haphazard at times. I wrote descriptions of events, like my experience at trance festivals in Indonesia and Penang. In that sense it was documentary. It gave a personal account of my experience. It also enabled me to articulate and integrate ideas and perspectives of others that arose through my on-going survey of practices and literature. These gave reference points that supported the crystallisation of my own insights.

I have to be mindful that my telling is only partial and there will always be multiple perspectives and framing for my experience. There was an organic and evolving aspect to the writing process whereby I felt insights seemed to arise from within the process and insist on articulation. The core aspects of my practice – body, memory and place – have become coalescing points for the writing. The process of writing these informs the conclusions.

Given the sense that the practice is indeed the driver of this inquiry I think it is appropriate to provide the following description of my performative state as a reference and frame for the chapters that follow.

**Pre performance ritual**

In the course of this practice-led inquiry, I turned my attention to the condition of my performing being. I became aware of what that was and how

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it was experienced. Reflection has produced a loose description that bears some approximation to what I do. It enables me to understand the core aspects of mediumship and what I have come to call *attunement* in my practice.

It is not so much about doing as a process of yielding and letting go of all tendencies to do or will, and finding that state *before doing* – the more liminal state of opening up to possibility. Performance artist Marina Abramovic talks about being in a space where the mind is most open, and in a state of non-thinking, and vulnerability.\(^\text{13}\)

I bring my attention to my whole body rather than it ranging or being dispersed beyond me. I try to attend to my being in the moment. This generates questions and negotiations. I might take a very specific and local focus of a sensation or a holistic sensing. It is as if I feel a force or energy *opening* my body, or every cell of my body expands and reaches out to the surface of my skin, *letting in* information of a world beyond the edge of my soma. My bodily awareness extends to the very surface including the surface itself, a necessary condition to be, if I want to be *ready*. An activation occurs – a thoughtful initiation of *becoming* into a state of sensate awareness. Is this what it means to *let go*, or *be still* or to *empty* the body? In butoh, the analogy of peeling an onion skin by skin to reveal its core seems to correlate with this sense of letting go of the social everyday self – as Miranda Tufnell puts it,

...*giving up control of my ordinary everyday posture and movement* [...]\(^\text{14}\)

The pre-performance preparation is not about thinking, but rather about being in the in-between state of doing and not doing that I am allowing, and sustaining this sense of readiness to be present. It is not as if I am willing myself into some meditative state, but rather in-between that and in-between any act of doing that might come to happen. There is a letting go of the need for volitional organizing. The will to be ready is present, but it is the preparing to be ready that I am focusing on here. Ready for what and what that might be is not pre-determined. It is somehow *sensate awareness*.

Sensate awareness allows me to be ready for what is beyond the body and choose to respond accordingly, or not at all. However the responding is not part of that readiness. It is noticing the possibility of responding. It seems as soon as I respond I am already doing and have gone beyond


being ready. But is performance always about being ready, or sustaining that state of readiness and doing? I feel it is both. There is not a point where I tell myself I am ready and now I am doing. I am in constant negotiation of this layering of myself, between falling into a liminal place of sensate awareness and openness, and then through this opening, the possibilities may be enacted upon. Being connected to a possibility or several possibilities, born of that perception of the environment in which I am in or the world in which I am engaged. In other words, I am constantly moving with my doing but sustaining a sensate awareness – which is a paradox of doing and not doing. It is not a single state, where a very complex transition is constantly going on – engaging and at the same time, disengaging. I am concerned to allow for multiple kinds of connections. The readiness also places my mind in a state that allows it to openly receive information of my perception of my immediate environment.

It appears that a process of ideokinesis seems to take place. Sensing, feeling and imagining – or a combination of these three experiences is brought into focus. The awakening of this internal landscape is a process of focusing and activating one’s proprioception, activating one’s kinaesthetic sense; relating to stimuli, feeling one’s body and miniscule moving it. Elizabeth Behnke used to say of phenomenology of the body that one can do small acts. A pressure or an expansion, a breath, or a push under the foot – these gestures and the sensations involve attention being particularly directed. The inward bodily focusing often involves a kinaesthesia, the ability to sense moving, a part of the sensory apparatus we have. It involves, sometimes, being engaged with imaginative schemas of your memory of what your skeleton is like, equipped by our prior pictorial knowledge of the human anatomy. This process continues on and seamlessly flows into performative mode.

Dance therapist Jane Bacon has written extensively on the ways that one can direct attention in and through oneself. She defines the idea of mind/body, explaining that cognitive process does not occur solely in the brain but requires the body as an environment in activating this phenomenon. Take for example sports training in my teen years. I would imagine in somatic detail the process of propelling myself at the moment the starter gun fires to running past the finishing line. Working out the kinetic act anatomically, and imagining the body in the action one wanted to pursue, enabled the body to perform the task better. The capacity we have of knowing and understanding ourselves, involves a sense of tuning and attuning to ourselves – an acquired sensate reading skilfulness.

Chapter 2:

Body and Memory

In this chapter I explore some of the many complexities of memory and its housing in body. I look at particular memories that are emblazoned in us, and consider the notion of body memories contributing in much less obvious ways to our everyday perception and actions.

My practice involves me in intense states of re-collecting. Much of my re-membering is connected with re-embodying lived experience or events of the past. Sometimes my place or situation seems connected with what is remembered and I am aware of particular memories being stimulated by things around me. My recollecting involves my whole being in a sensory experience involving a somatic response. It is a process involving thought, imagery and ideas including metaphysical things that are less tangible. I am conscious of the difficulty in separating actual past events and the mythos in which they may be contextualized.

One way of considering my performance practice is as a process of uncovering hidden or shadowed memories and their manifestation in the performative body. In the following, I explore the role of a sensate self in recalling lived experiences, stimulating the imagination and generating improvisation material. I explore several notions of body, including that of a multi-layered entity, forms of body memory, body as medium and emotional and feeling states of being.
Body: a multi layered entity

The body as I conceptualize it, is not limited to the biological body and its traditionally recognized senses of sight, smell, taste, hearing and touch. I like to consider those proprioceptive capacities of kinaesthesia and balance and our abilities to feel pain and temperature. The body is also an entity that experiences emotions, feelings, has a history or lived past, and other aspects of being that relate us to the world and an ancestral lineage. There are various ways in seeing this multi-layered entity. Traditional modalities of healing such as traditional Chinese medicine and Indian Ayurvedic medicine, and more recent approaches such as cranial sacral therapy, BMC and Alexander Technique are some methods that regard the somatic body as more than physical matter. These views tend toward the physical body as a holistic intelligence, undivided from the mental mind. Labels such as subtle body or fluid body allude to notions of our bodies as more than flesh with non-material layers or dimensions including emotional, psychological, spiritual, biological and energetic such as the chakras in yogic practices and qi in martial arts traditions.

The body is variously understood, from many perspectives, and these can be culturally determined. In the developed world, feminist theory and perspectives reflecting on the imbalances in power between genders have contested dominant views of body. The constant debate on objectification of the female body is one example.

In many parts of the world, even in civilised societies, sexual assaults and female genital mutilation continue to disempower women and their rights/ownership of their own bodies. In some sexual assault cases, women are blamed or deemed responsible because of the way they dress. In several Asian cultures, young girls continue to be exploited as sex workers, sometimes by their own families. These denote significant on-going de-valuing of, and discrimination against women.

In the Western developed world, the body has long been fragmented into biological, emotional, somatic or felt components rather than its gestalt. This attitude is changing, partly attributable to feminist/post feminist movement and the scientific realisation of the interconnection of all aspects of body. We now appreciate that mental health has physical and emotion dimensions. But the perceptual fragmenting of body can easily occur in movement practices, where for example, an emphasis on the physical might cultivate particular body images of the dancer, might lead to objectification of the dancer, or even build an expectation of spectacle and we continue to see that in some traditions like ballet.
Forms of memory and re-membering

Humans have the capacity to accumulate and store experiences in their body over a lifetime. We see this in the marks and scars we carry and also in the behaviours we learn and adopt, sometimes without conscious effort as we learn from experience.

The notion of embodiment as I understand it is the experience of being. It is the identification of an abstract idea that is incorporated into a felt sense within the physical body. Embodied memory is the conceptualization of the body’s capacity to store memories beyond the brain. An example of this phenomenon exists in trauma survivors. Studies have shown that repressed memories retained in the body, such as incest, can be recalled through physical sensations. Tension in the body can be seen as unresolved issues that lie dormant in the cellular body. In workshops with Tony Yap, he uses methods developed by Polish actor and director Grotowski, where the focus is on unblocking somatic tension to bring the body back to a state of neutrality.

Brenda Downing collaborated with Alice Cummins, to explore the narrative of unresolved and silenced sexual trauma somatically in performance. Body memories as I see it are like shadows and may often remain undetected and hidden from the light of one’s awareness. Downing’s research method highlights the possibilities of physicalizing shadowed memories that are entrenched at a cellular level.

The manner in which we store also affects our recalling. The thought of speaking in public often brings up an unpleasant reaction in me. I feel a tightening of my neck muscles, rapid heartbeat and profusely sweaty palms. I may not understand the reasons behind this strong psychosomatic response, but the recognition that this is fear and maybe even anxiety, is detectable physically.

Forms of long-term memory can be categorised into two main types – explicit and implicit. Explicit memory is the intentional and conscious recollection of particular experiences, such as my recollection of crying as I walked to my audition for a placement at the Faculty of VCA and MCM. On the other hand implicit memory, which is an unconscious and experiential form of memory is often more a muscle memory and is not tied to visual recollection. An example of this is recalling how to ride a bike, where the memory of balancing to keep myself from falling off, is a bodily recollection of accumulated experience.

Our capacity to recall particularly explicit memory may become less intense and wane over time. Successive recollections may be modified, as we subconsciously fill in the blanks with imagined details of a memory and regard that as the truth of what took place at a given time. We may subconsciously store an event within our cellular bodies but it may not necessarily explicitly exist in our mental memory.

Traumatic events can unconsciously be imprinted onto us and linger. An instance of this is, my experience of being chased by a pack of dogs as a child affecting my sense of unease around dogs. As I age my fear seems to be assuaged or less intense. This childhood memory shifts in its nature – it was more pronounced in the days after the chase but now, I am less affected by the fear resulting in capacity to pat a dog after first assessing its demeanour from a distance. My capacity to be affected by a species that was a threat over me has shifted over time.

Merleau-Ponty notices the body’s capacity to develop its own knowledge out of its situation in the world. It can build the capacity to do things, like typing or playing the piano. What initially might have taken much attention and practice becomes an innate embodied skill. The knowing on how to do is all in the hand and doesn’t require a conscious focusing. We have an innate ability or deep embodied practical knowledge to do something – some might call this a procedural knowledge or capacity. Interestingly this habitual knowing, referred to by Fuchs as implicit memory, has been explored in cognitive psychology in the last three decades. Fuchs further discusses this as a layering of experiences that occur over periods of time, and is no longer retrievable as a singular lived event. All of this illustrates body’s capacity to know and remember both particularly/specifically, and also generally and involuntarily.

Our genetic information, DNA, is passed down from parents to offspring including physical attributes (genetic memory). We understand that an individual’s remembering body is a partial reincarnation of the DNA of its ancestry, but tend to accept that one’s behavioural characteristics on the other hand, are learned from parents, and immediate community and the line of ancestors before them. For example I notice patterns of behaviour in myself that are similar to my parents – such as the child-like nature of my father – but is my mother’s sometimes moody temperament that I also share biological or behavioural or both? The mechanisms of our re-membering bodies are clearly quite complex. Are these less tangible characteristics/personality developed over time as I imitate or assimilate their habits?

In the first instalment of moths…, it excited me to learn that Fort Delta gallery was an Asian grocery store in its previous life. I imagined the packets of dried food, bottles of sauces and condiments and the fresh kueh (Malaysian cakes) neatly displayed on its shelves. The history of the

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place stimulated my imagination and triggered my own memories. I had not made the link then, but these connections emerged as I reflected post Fort Delta. It motivated me and my collaborators to create an installation of dried food, and to serve kueh at the subsequent performance at the VCA site.

Memory can also function within the process of making sense (memory in reflection and sense making). For example after the Fort Delta performances I became aware of the line of matriarchal lineage that was embedded in the work. This came out of my reflection on the accumulation of things in the space, my memories of these very influential women in my life and my experience in the performance.
**Cultural memory**

Today’s world bears markings of a past in which my ancestors walked. Tangible traces such as old buildings, monuments, letters, photos, music, clothing and food are some examples; some are more recent than others. There are also intangible marks of cultural and social frameworks including codes of being with others, the rules and customs that have endured.

Could the traces of an environment experienced earlier in life, trigger my body to remember the past? I found place can evoke explicit memories. My strong attraction to historic Georgetown in Penang is reflected in my many visits. The town’s preservation of old architecture and charm of yesteryear – its smells, sounds, language and climate seem to take hold, immersing me and carrying me across time to the cultural setting of my ancestry. The place also rekindles my memories of growing up in Petaling Jaya, now a rapidly developing and modernizing city.

**Accessing memories: processes of re-collection**

I can experience what I call re-collecting moments, where past experience become conscious and exists in the present within me. Being in particular places can trigger this. Georgetown has motivated several instalments of improvised experiments. On one occasion, wearing my mother’s wedding *cheongsam*, I danced there on the streets at dawn; exposed to the triggers of culture and environment. Stimulated by the smells of the place, the warm humid climate and even the sounds of people speaking in various dialects gave me a sense of being someone else, which at times was influenced by the costume I wore. In this instance, the power of my imagination transported me into another world and time, both familiar and not so familiar. It conjured and projected a place that was at once in my body-mind and in my immediate (sensory) environment as I danced.

The process of sensing has the capacity to be evocative and can stimulate a string of memories and subsequent related thoughts. For example the smells that flood my senses as the airplane doors open upon touch down in Penang, are specific and particular to the place. They activate recollection, rapidly bringing to consciousness place, a time, imagery, thoughts and other associations. There is a sense of flow attached to this

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20 Traditional Chinese ladies’ dress.
 attentiveness, with many linkages occurring to the world that I am immediately experiencing. Oftentimes the connection has an emotional response – such as conjuring a longing for a past or a sense of being homesick. Imagination fed by the sensory, gives us a platform for what is possible so as to create meaning in the actual and thus create something beyond it.21

Embodied memory can be stimulated by touch, as is practiced in some forms of somatic healing modalities. My osteopath22 uses touch to investigate the condition of the body as a whole unit. This perspective of the body recognizes it as a multi-layered entity in which the body’s lived past, including remnants of past trauma, is locked in the biological tissue. A patient might relive the discomfort of a past experience as the therapist touches the body. During one treatment, I felt my body make a series of twitches, suggesting a release of tension as my osteopath held different parts of my anatomy. Direct touch is not the only way body recollects. Smells, tastes, sounds and movement can all stimulate memory. Listening to music may trigger a memory. Reading a diary can provoke memories of a person and the circumstances of a particular time. So memories are often quite explicit and we can appreciate and know the triggers that provoke them. Memories not only reflect our somatic experience but also involve us emotionally.

In the above, I have started to sketch the scope of my remembering. The notion of mediumship conjures the ways in which embodied memory is physicalized in dance improvisation – to make visible the invisible world through the sensing body and its connection to location. What does it mean to redefine the body as medium?

**Body as medium**

Whether in performance or ordinary everyday setting, what is perceived in the body is not independent of what is beyond. One has to exist in relation to the other. Sometimes these seemingly separate worlds are referred to as the internal and external landscape. The surface of my skin acts like a boundary, containing my organs, stretching over the structures of my skeleton and muscles and holds my shape as I move through the world. I sensately engage inwards or reach outwards into the world through this porous membrane, sensing the air and other surfaces it

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22 Seth Consedine uses a wide range of techniques from direct manipulative work to cranial techniques. Findings from his research illuminated the critical role of touch in the therapeutic relationship with patients by supporting and validating their experiences.
comes into contact with. A time-based bodily dialogue occurs in this experience. Our experiencing as Merleau-Ponty says, all resides in the body, pressing outwards and into the world, moving through the ether or space. We are touching and being touched at the same time. There is a sort of reciprocity about that. Walking on the road in bare feet, I feel the cold, rough surface of tarmac on my soles and the effort in the bones and muscles in my legs holding me in position. The road surface supports me and presses back into my feet. Sensate awareness gives rise to impulses from which I act.

As a solo improiser I have presented works that require minimal or no rehearsals. Performing is a moving meditation; a complex response of action and shifting states of my being that reflects my collaboration with a site (situation), and the relationship and conditions of my body and the elements around it. There are moments in which I have no recollection of what movements my body has created or the states in which I reside. My attention is very much in the immediacy of my dialogue with the place.

My usual process includes maintaining a fresh response to site – allowing the relationship of body to site to develop into a space in which authentic movement can emerge. Moreover, my interest in performance trance draws more focus on the preparation of my self, rather than the rehearsing of movement or spatial positioning and kinaesthesia of my body. The internal choreography relies heavily on being in the moment. At an outdoor public site of the Gallery of South Australia I move in response to my immediate environment, and the conditions arising in and of that place. I am in a constant state of flux. At times I interact with others, a performer (Yap) and viewers or people passing by. I sense the wind on my body and hear the water trickling nearby in a water feature. The extended duration of this particular performance allowed me time to immerse in the space and negotiate relationships to what was a complex environment of bystanders, performing colleague and the physical landscape.

Durational performances of up to 12 hours, such as performing with Domenico de Clario and other musicians in his ongoing instalments that go on from dusk till dawn has given me an appreciation of the depth of movement and states that are reliant on time. Fighting sleep as we perform throughout the night into day at Winter Solstice, it sometimes feels like I am en-tranced as movement takes me or images appear in my mind’s eye.

\[23\] Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology, 78.


\[25\] Collaboration with Domenico de Clario and other artists, "From the Opaque" series (durational performances, BMW Edge, Melbourne, June 2010, 2011 and 2010). See Appendix 2 for video link.
Some of my solo works are developed to specific themes, composed of short vignettes with specific scores or scenes. In such instances, rehearsals are required to build a structure in which improvisation within a loose timeline may occur. An example of this is Palimpsest, performed at the VCA as part of my post-grad mid year exam. However, structural concerns and thematic focus don’t replace the fundamental need to ensure I am in this process of somatic alertness and attention to my environment and the objects, sounds and people that are there.

Having outlined some of the concerns of immersion and interaction with the worlds within and without me, and how that can be understood as performer as medium, I now want to look at a particular piece of work. I hope this will inform how structure and improvised/performer as medium interact.

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26 Janette Hoe, “Palimpsest” (dance performance, VCA and MCM, Southbank, 29 May–1 June 2012).
moths are calling: mediumship, improvisation, collaboration and structure

Beginning with my interest in the spiritual and opening up to the myths and customs of cultural lineage, the work moths… drew very specifically from my relationship and sense of connectedness with my grandmother and father. It addresses the longing for what was once there and is no longer now, and how the memory of someone so dear occupies me. The recollection of sighting a white moth at a family reunion, stimulated thoughts and memories as this performance project developed.

Translating the theme of memories was a strong point of departure for me and my collaborators. The development of long scenes and working for extended periods, called for new ways of working and finding a common language between lighting designer, musician and installation artist. Developing the soundscape closely with Soemardjo involved discussions and sharing life stories to find links and common ground to build from. Our long friendship supported the process of inquiry. The process was fulfilling and allowed me to inhabit the work more holistically. At times I felt the music move me, and sometimes, Soemardjo’s mesmerising voice became a spirit taking me on a journey into a past. Found objects, such as a washing machine drum and rattling seeds, were musical instruments as well as objects that tell a story of a past. The tuning and playing of the sitér\textsuperscript{27} with chopsticks, transformed its timbre, generating another time and world, eerily reminiscent of 1950’s Chinese songs reverberating through an old broken radio.

Time based cues are not something I am used to working with. In moths…, there were quite a number of cues and structured transitions to consider. As improver, I usually adopt an internal choreographic approach, where the aim is to fully inhabit the dance – following what is going to come, rather than willing an outcome. My collaborators and I had to work out ways to not interrupt the flow of my being in this fluid state – to free my thinking mind, and allow me to remain somatically immersed as much as possible, and yet coordinate our performance contributions.

We looked to organise cue points through the work. One way was with the help of musical or sound cues, or Soemardjo taking a visual cue from me, as I approached a particular predetermined spatial position or movement phrase. Another way was by naming the different sections of the work. The latter provided an emotional and somatic stimulus, whilst acting as structural framework. Lighting and sound could signal the beginning of a scene, and meant I could feel my way in rather than think about it. For example, in developing the final scene, Dedication, feelings associated to the word such as gratitude, love and melancholia were conjured. Studio rehearsals based on this method, meant the movement

\textsuperscript{27} The sitér is a plucked string instrument used in Javanese gamelan.
score became second nature to an extent. The aim in performance, to avoid an automatic mode meant I was able to focus my awareness on other stimuli in keeping the dance alive in the moment. By the time the work was ready for performance, there was a framework of stimuli, organised chronologically. We came to consider the work in sections, each of which had its own stimuli that we called a score.

The prior incarnation of moths… at Fort Delta meant that what came to Art Block 687 already had some structure and form. We were keen to deepen sections of each score to encourage and reveal a flow of states, rather than choreographic expression. We pared down the scores, giving more time for movement and sound scores to unfold. We acknowledged the pauses and lingered long enough to listen to what is coming next – a sensation, a sound, or image. During rehearsals with Soemardjo, she reminded me to be completely with her and the soundscape in the space. I had to be mindful of my somatic sensing, and take my time in travelling from one state to the next. Feedback from the Fort Delta season suggested there could be more connection between dancer and musician. So at the VCA space my connection to the soundscape deepened, allowing for a
stronger sensing and responding to occur. This stance, generated a clearer sense of the changing relationship between Soemardjo and myself in the course of the performance – at times she seemed to be a person from my past.

The emotional journey of making work can be challenging. The feelings associated with memories become part of the internal choreography – the recalled past becomes choreographic tools in the present. I remember a time in training, right after the death of my father, when the despair was alive in my body as if every cell within me was filled with sadness and grief. At that moment in time, I felt the possibility within me to move in ways I would never have been able to previously. It was as if an intense force moved me. Recalling those times may not match that original intensity but when certain words are uttered, such as dedication, emotions fill me and memories manifest bodily. For me, this is self as medium at work.

**Connecting with the world**

Many aspects of our experience reflect organising and rationalising aspects of our being. Existentialist philosopher and feminist Simone De Beauvoir recognizes that

> …to be present in the world implies strictly that there exists a body which is at once a material thing in the world and a point of view towards the world. 

As a movement artist, I make choices about where and when I will perform. It seems essential in performance, to tune into, and be aware of the detailed sensations in my body, to establish my relationship to movement and the configuration of body parts, as well as locating my immediate surroundings. This orientation to organize and move through space instils a sense of placement and informs how I experience the world. Paradoxically, I can also seek to relax this organising tendency, to be less particularly focussed.

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In this mode of attending, I feel as if what is around my body, is magnified. I hear but not listen too intently, I see but my vision is wide and softened, I feel the air and temperature on my skin less locally and more holistically. As I move through my surroundings, I am dancing with it, or perhaps I am danced by my immediate environment. When my gaze meets the textures of things around me, I feel their qualities, as if I were touching them. Imagination and recollection of past experience enables vision to be somatically diversified. As I look at an old wall, I imaginatively feel its cold, rough and chalky surface. The peeling paint suggests a layering of time. This layering, in a sense, reflects the notion of the layered self and body – abounding in its accumulation of experiences and history. My imagination is activated, transforming my perspective of the immediate world; conjuring images of other places or worlds in a different time perhaps, and allowing other perspectives to form. In this state, I can acutely attend to things as phenomenologist Behnke suggests – we direct our attention locally and into ourselves if we necessarily choose to.29

My self-awareness is stimulated by the world around us. The traces I leave in the world as I dance reflect my being in the world.

States of being

Our bodily emotions sometimes aren't conscious choices. We don't choose to be depressed or cheerful and when we are, sometimes don't even notice it. These unconscious acting outs are not fixed. Indeed being is quite complex – and attempts to describe my self as in a singular mode and emotional states, tend to be oversimplification.

We may act in ways or adopt mannerisms that are similar to others – a family member, a friend that we hang out with often, or a partner we live with for instance. In that sense, we are not always completely ourselves. Sometimes we say I am not feeling myself today. We can be in different arousal modes – some personally positive and some less so. From a performance perspective, I question the characters and gestures that arise – are these behavioural traits a fusion of other and of self?

Sometimes we relive tender moments, re-enacting things that are personal to us, such as the time I lost my grandmother, and at times felt her presence in my room. I was myself, yet there was a shadow that brought out empathy and sympathetic recollection, as if another layer was projected onto my being. In her last stages of life, her character, as I knew her to be, transformed as if she were a different person. Her inhibitions were less guarded, and she acted out playful and child-like personalities. She danced and sang to me in the living room, dressed up in her favourite costume, mimicking a Chinese diva. My joy at seeing her freely performing was mixed with sadness, as I watched the grandmother that I knew fade away. These observations informed my solo performance, No Candles Please,

30 where I took on her mannerisms, such as her hands twirling gracefully against the awkwardness in which she held her torso in a Chinese dance, or her mischievous child-like grimace while doing something she didn't want other adults to see. I found myself dancing out these gestures and states, sensing the gamut of feelings attached to the experience, and conscious of a grotesqueness of some sort. Writing this brings back mixed feelings of sadness and joy and all that fits in between. I feel unsettled and my level of anxiety rising and yet, at the same time, the comfort of her humanness in my memory, holds me in a familiar and calm place. It seems, from the examples of recollecting my grandmother, that remembering can involve emotional and physiological aspects. It has affect, and experience indicates that this is often more multifaceted than a single emotion.

30 "No Candles Please," (dance performance presented at festivals in Melbourne and Indonesia, 2006).
Recent research suggests memories are mediators between sensation and emotional states, and that past experiences are encoded within the brain. Neural-immune researcher and writer, Esther Sternberg discusses the physiological responses and suggests that, somewhere in our brains, is a black box which seems to affect the output, or input, of emotional states. We are subjected to thousands of sensations everyday. Some may trigger a positive emotion, such as happiness, others a negative emotion, like sadness, or even no emotion at all. Palpitations can equally accompany a positive emotion such as love, or negative emotion such as fear. The link between sensory inputs and physiological outputs of emotions, is the charge that comes from the black box.31 There is no separating emotional and physiological experience.

The remembering self /body

As an Australian migrant, born and bred in Malaysia to first generation Chinese-Malaysian parents, my view of my self and the question of who am I, is often not without deliberation, my response nuanced in multiple layers. My multi-cultural identity is coloured by the various customs, traditions, values and ways of living I have been exposed to, adopted or assimilated into in my life. My lesser-known Indonesian ancestry is yet another layer I can choose to explore.

The Oxford Dictionary describes the word self as a person’s essential being that distinguishes them from others.32 The qualities of a person’s nature or personality that make them uniquely individual are complex and can shape our perception of ourselves, which in turn, may be very different to the perceptions others have of our selves.

Robert Weber describes a unitary system view of self, in which various aspects of a self are seen to coexist: a self that is concerned with her/his body and appearance, an empathizing self, an interpreting self, the connected self and evolving selves.33 Pamela Cooper refers to braided selves, a term that invites contemplation of the weaving together of multiple parts and subjectivities in the experience of self and other, and further, implies

32 Oxford English Dictionary Online,”self.”
an ongoingness. Braiding is a continual process, and as such supports dynamic and relational views of multiplicity of persons. No matter how we view this notion of our self, it would seem that our way of being in the world, at any point in time, is far from fixed.

There are times when I look into a mirror and feel a weird disconnection to the image staring back. The image that I receive back as me, is different to the felt embodied me. It seems the visual perception of me provokes or conjures thoughts, different to those that have crystallised over time within me.

My self in performance

In preparing for performance, I activate a performing self that is informed by acquired styles of deportment, gestures that I habitually make or use, postures, and actions that I have learned or use to function in everyday life. As outlined earlier (p.28-29 chapter 1) I operate in resonance with the space, place, time and people gathered. My performing identity reflects these values that in turn, inform my orientation, focus and the choices I make. Of course, there are aspects of me that I choose to keep private.

The commitment to attunement between who and what I am and my environment is mediated as indicated in moths… by thematic concerns, interests, and premeditated scores. However, it is important to note that the way these manifest is subjectively perceived. My audience will have individual viewpoints and perspective, as will my self, of the performative event.

Reflection: perceiving one’s self

Reflection, those moments of looking back, enables me to recognise and make sense of what has occurred. In the process of creating moths…, daily reflection on developments meant I could track changes. I engage a lot with my hands in performance, and wanted to push this further in a section of the

work that then grew into the scene called *Insect Dreaming*. Beginning as a series of hand dances, it evolved into what felt like live creatures, independent of the body, creating imagery that was almost puppet-like. Further into the development, as I embodied the gestures, I saw the emergence of a domestic scene in which the varied conditions of disparity between two *characters* played out. It became vocalised with the voice of a child in distress, morphing to the soft and eerie voice of a woman pacifying her, and transforming to yet another voice. This constant transformation of voices emerged from movement. This was an interesting metamorphosis in the work – as what emerged in my mind as insects, slowly transformed to what felt more like an interaction of humans in the reality of daily life, but sounding more like creatures. The voices and sounds coming out of my mouth, were not rational words nor always recognisable as my own, but sounds that expressed to me, deeply felt emotions. Sometimes, words are not necessary or insufficient, in conveying a feeling.

Similarly, when reading previous essays or looking through my visual journal, I often catch myself wondering if the documented thoughts and concepts, that seem unfamiliar at the time of reading, had actually arisen from me. It seems that from day to day, this sense of *me* differs, changes, evolves, and is constantly in a state of flux.

**Recognising and breaking habits**

There are times when I feel my body in a state of entrenchment. I am in a pattern, like riding a bike – I am acting automatically, I am less engaged. My challenge in performing, is recognising the *corpus habitual*, while asking the question, what else is possible. I want to find ways to maintain the state of attunement – that sensory alertness and openness of attention, that characterises improvisation practice. In work such as *moths*… that is repeatable, the challenge is in avoiding, as much as possible, habitual patterns occurring. Remaining a step behind movement, being curious of what is to come, and listening mindfully with the whole body, are some ways in which to dispel *automatic* movement.

BMC practice with Cummins, involving relocating the body within a room and tuning in to this new environment prior to moving, proved useful in interrupting patterning and removing blockages within my corporeal self. Prompts like *what does your body need at this moment* engage me, provoke me, to sense my materiality holistically, rather than thinking of what to move next. The power of touch of another, as experienced in these workshops, also brings to awareness tension that may hold my body in a habitual stance.

Taking things for granted, being accepting of the state of affairs, reflects a (sometimes unconscious) distancing, or lack of consciousness. We are
not mindfully aware, as we might be. As a performative body, I am interested in attending to detail, to the micro view, and this can enlarge to macro proportions. This shifting of views, can be a step in my engagement, and facilitate perception and possible change.
Chapter 3:
Space, Place and the Located Performer

Place and my location are particularly important to me as performer. The previous chapter explored the nature of body and memory. In this chapter, I take a relational view of body and place. I explore the notions of place, the particularities of one's spatial environment, the ways place speaks to us, and the reciprocity of self and one's environment. In doing so, I hope to give a sense of the complex relationship I have to these elements in my practice and to open out more of an understanding of my approach.

Space and place

Place is also about space. Space is a more abstract term on its own and we might understand it as a 3-dimensional voluminous entity. We talk about internal space, outer space, personal space, space to move in, and appreciate that as we particularise space, and give it detail, then we are building a picture of something specific. A space takes its own identity. It might be populated, have certain geography and topographical features. The abstract space becomes a particular place; perhaps it is a place we know, or a foreign less known place. According to geographer, Yi-Fu Tuan

[1]he ideas 'space' and 'place' require each other for definition.
Place is where we are located. Space is all around us, but space invites us to explore, and seems to suggest freedom. As performer, I am drawn to dancing in spaces that invite me to respond, and that have characteristics and qualities with which I can engage, unlike the black box theatre that tries to be void. I seek places with qualities/conditions that activate my sensing body, give it context and stimulate dialogue.

Places can be documented, facsimiles made to scale, places are mapped, and photographed. We imagine places. We can explore places physically, or examine them indirectly, through the expertise of others – cartographers, storytellers, geographers, and cinematographers. Places feature in our lives. We inhabit so many places and have infinitely complex experiences of places, traces of which accumulate and reside in our bodies and memories. Past experiences are often recollected as we revisit particular known places. Places trigger imagery and feelings. We are always in relationship to place.

In my work processes, the structures of a place can influence how pieces are framed, both for viewers and for performers. Every view of place is different – not only from the aspect of our spatial viewpoint, but because as individuals we see differently. A place stimulates responses in me and offers possibilities. I can enter into a conversation with a place, and as I enact possibilities, my perspective of the place shifts. In the staged performance *moths*..., the division of rooms of the VCA site inspired context for situational narratives and spatio-memory experiences – such as the tiled enclosure that became the site for kitchen and other domestic scenes. My collaborators and I were interested in the capacity of the place, and the objects we brought to it, to stimulate memories in our audience. The Tea Room and the Food Shrine were spaces to activate the senses and perceptions of all audience members, and prepare them to journey into another world. The intention to bring the audience into a space where they can firstly settle is reflective of rituals such as the Bantengan trance ceremony I participated in Indonesia where we were invited to gather with incense in hand to pay respects to the spirit of the bull (see Fig2). In *moths*... it involved sensing and feeling, arriving in the body as much as taking in the visuals and sound provided in these spaces. We found that as one remains somatically alert, the experience of space and a particular place is continually unfolding and in flux.

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Emotional experience of place

When I am unfamiliar with a place I can be roused, my senses heightened and acutely focused to seek out and recognize where I am. In so doing, I become more familiar with the place, and relieve the tension that can come with unfamiliarity, or not knowing. Unfamiliarity may bring a feeling of disconnectedness. This can be useful to me as performer as it prompts me to connect and stabilise myself, to become located and be grounded. Paradoxically, in order to locate myself, sometimes I need to be lost in a place.
This idea of being dislocated in order to ground and locate myself then is a conscious strategy, one that involves dis-location. It has its parallels with practices used by other artists, including butoh performer Yumi Umiumare, who introduces what she calls a disability, as a way to crack open what is not yet known (see chapter 1, p.22).

Where I am located or placed and my emotional experience in that place, are intertwined. When places seem unfamiliar, new, or appear changed from my last visit, I feel a sense of dislocation that is accompanied by the lingering resonance of experience in the past in which I was more, or differently located. David Abram talks about the effects of returning to the urban landscape of America from Nepal, and finding the acuteness of his bodily senses, as they had been in Nepal, were dulled. He was drawn to intense smells, such as wood fires and rubbish dumps, that served to remind his body of its immersion in an enveloping medium, and rekindle a host of body memories from his year in rural Asia.36

Abram’s experience highlights the capacity of places to be both memorable and evoke memories. Some places seem to be nourishing and supportive of our wellbeing.

**Familiar places**

Familiarity can be reflected in the patterns of our actions and we associate this with a sense of ordinary everyday-ness. What is ordinary for me is not necessarily the same for someone else. In moths . . ., domestic objects, like kitchen pots and pans were used to try and create some common/familiar experience.

During one of my trips to Penang, I co-created a piece with Malaysian dancer Aida Redza. The performance took place on a stairway, in a renovated heritage building. Dancing on unlevelled unfamiliar ground required a degree of deftness in our negotiation of the steps. The nature of the space kept us alert and impacted on our sense of freedom to move, affecting movement quality. There was considerable use of hand gestures in that piece. Although Aida spread out her limbs, there was a perceptible sense of containment present.

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If places can be unfamiliar, what does it mean to know a place? The intimate sense of home is, perhaps, the earliest memory one can have of place, and arguably one of the most familiar. Home can mean the building or structure in which one has grown up, or looking further afield, it can conjure the hometown of birth. Home, the physical structure, provides the container for our family. It can reflect our sense of security, relationships and levels of comfort. The physical building of house sits in a wider space, a neighbourhood, a field, a city or a rural landscape and has particular context. I have my subjective experiences of home. Home is a place that is subjectively known and recollected.

Places then, bring to mind lived experiences and feelings. We have particular memories of them, connecting our present to our past, memories that can vividly resonate in our bodies. We begin to know places through the sensory experience of them. When I am in a place, my process of sensory recognition of it is mediated by my body’s accumulated experience and knowledge. My engagement and recollection of places
implicitly reflects details of culture, customs, community, climate, buildings, landscape and geography. Place meets us with its culture, topography, geography, social and many other characteristics and we cannot remain unaffected or totally detached. We can know a place by the way its inhabitants have given it particular forms, buildings, roads, and structures and these contribute shapes, textures, plains and edges that make up and give definition to the place.

Such existing (remembered) and emerging knowledge of place informs what I do, and how I interact in the present experiencing of a place, whether it be a new place or one revisited. Places are the context of being, and I am always embodying my place wherever I am. It is how we locate ourselves and situate our sense of belonging and identity.

‘Place’ is generally conceived as being ‘space’ imbued with meaning.37

A place might be on a body of a human, or a tree, a rock or exist in a landscape, or marine environment or where one stands. When a place feels incredibly familiar, we might use the expression I feel at home, or when we miss a place we might say, there’s no place like home. Perhaps, familiarity is about at home-ness.

Home-ness is an aspect of moths… where the place-ment of family and domesticity were intrinsic to the developing idea. Each installation was a response to the place it resided in. Making ourselves feel at home meant that we collectively re-imagined aspects of our experience of home – home-ness – into the performance scores and design of the spaces of the place.

Home and homecoming conjure a sense of safety or security. However is home really about a place? What do the terms at home with myself and home is where the heart is mean? Perhaps the home in these familiar phrases alludes, not to the place or places I have inhabited or lived in, but is more to do with a feeling of safety within myself. If so, it may be more an embodiment – a spirited or soulful state of being. Novelist, Pico Iyer states that, it is not the physical construction of home that we carry with us, but everything we embody within us, that constitutes home. And that movement is a privilege but ultimately holds meaning only if you have a home to return to, which is not the place you go back to sleep.

but it's the place where you stand.\textsuperscript{38}

**In-between places**

Being in transit, between places, can be disorientating. For example when I travel on a train and fall asleep, on waking up I can sometimes feel very unsettled. With that disorientation comes a dread and paranoia of missing my stop. Not until I settle into knowing that all is well, and that my stop has not arrived, am I able to relax into the journey.

At risk of digressing I will consider the notion of **in-between-ness** a little further. Being in-between highlights differences, raises questions and initiates negotiations regarding perceptions of my identity. How do the roots from my past reconcile with my present life? How do I contend and negotiate the in-between-ness of a diasporic identity? How do I reconnect and understand my history, with no physical objects from the past as evidence? How do I filter my choices? These questions are tacitly held in my body and manifest in my practice.

Practice has a way of dealing with such predicaments. It is in the moving and sensing that experiences are understood on another level – perceptions evolve. In BMC workshops Cummins often says, *movement precedes learning*. For people predisposed to tactile learning, such as myself, sometimes it is not enough to read about something. It has to be felt, experienced and digested to be understood. Merleau-Ponty points this out:

\[
\text{…the body as sensible and the body as sentient – just as there is between the thing perceived and the perceiving, the flesh of the world and the body's flesh. We exist […] at the intersection of these various reversibilities.}^{39}\]

In performance, personal stories are embodied, shared and reciprocated. The multi faceted body distils, assembles and interprets its varied


experiences and memories, to stimulate and ignite meaning into the space, into other (witnessing) bodies, into places and potentially, in a broader sense, even culturally affecting communities. It is through presentational acts, that we come to know our selves and others.

Returning to the geographical sense of in-between-ness, although I view my in-between-ness somewhat ambivalently, conversations with friends with similar experiences of living multi-culturally suggest we can also see in-between-ness as an expansion of one's horizon and broadening of perspective on experience, and interactions with others and the world.

Sometimes the discomfort of facing a new space can evoke something foreign, cold, a borrowed ornament. It can take time to fully know or reacquaint with a place. Sometimes however, I feel most connected when I am new in a place – my sensing self seems more acutely alert, as I navigate through space to find my bearings. While performing White Moth in Bedog in Java I felt lost in the vast performance space, and was overcome by a sense that I had lost my body. Creator of Suzuki Method of Actor Training, Tadashi Suzuki, discusses this phenomenon and suggests the orientation to a larger space renders a performer outside of his element as he is forced to readjust. His ability to project energy to every corner of the theatre is impeded, as he fails to consolidate all the spaces available to him.

**Spatial awareness**

The perception of the immediate space around us – our personal space – affects the way in which we relate to, and move through a place. Having grown up in Malaysia, and now living in Australia for more than two decades, I notice the change in my perception of my personal space when revisiting Penang. I find myself walking into objects on the much more crowded streets and into furniture in buildings, as if there is not enough space for my corporeal self. Waking up in my room in the dark, and groggily, making my way to the bathroom, I have to be extra vigilant. A sense of wariness and disorientation seems present most of the time, resulting in a degree of spatial anxiety. Returning to Melbourne, although the resonance of wariness is detectable at times, I feel a sense of spreading out. It is generally acknowledged that Australia is relatively spacious, there seems to be a room for everything. Most children have their own bedrooms, and even dedicated rooms as play rooms are the norm. By contrast in

40 Tadashi Suzuki, *Culture is the Body* (New York: Theatre Communications Group, 2015), 128.

41 An excerpt from *moths…*, adapted/performed as a study of the piece in various outdoor spaces in Indonesia and Malaysia, Aug/Sep 2014.

42 Suzuki, *Culture*, 129.
Penang, particularly within families of lower socio-economic groups, rooms are shared between siblings and the living room is used for all sorts of activities – entertainment, dining, play and even to sleep.

Other aspects of place

Our sensory perception as we are in a place may include our sense of the weather, the prevailing climate of the place. We notice this as one of the many characteristics of the place at the particular time. As Tuan notes, place comes with its own particular chemistries.43

Climate of a place

Environment is part of the complexity we call place, and particularities of climate, vegetation, and built-ness of a place, all contribute to our experience. Pointed roofs and pipes in buildings to accommodate the wetness of a place, compared to high altitude places where the roofs are different. The leaves of tropical low growing plants in the jungle are large, to catch the sun and rain, in thick jungles with tall trees.

Climate affects the way we dress and move. During the colder months in Melbourne, I notice a collapse in my stature. I hunch over as if I am closing myself into a smaller entity. This miserable stance makes me feel like a plant craving for the sun. In primordial times, the winter was a time to be insular, hibernating in the confines of a cave out of the cold. It seems, in contemporary times, we don't necessarily observe this gesture or have the capacity to do so, living in accordance with the demands of today's fast and driven modern cities. The layering of warm clothing cuts me off from the world around me and I move anxiously in space. My skin is no longer in direct contact with the elements. In performance, even in winter, I prefer as much skin exposed to my surroundings to feel more in touch with my environment. Could these winter-time phenomena be symptoms of homesick-ness?

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43 Tuan, Space, 14.
In the tropics, for obvious reasons I am dressed lightly. In the heat, I feel a sense of opening up, as if my skin spreads out to *slurp* in the warmth. Energetically it seems there is a wider scope of engagement possible, corporeally and mentally. An audience member at *moths*… felt that the piece conjured hot weather – the light clothing, thongs, sounds and movement suiting summer.

**Culture**

Places within particular communities or cultures are not just made up of bricks and mortar and the earth, but reflect the people living there. The workplaces, houses, public infrastructures and utilities show how a community lives, its degree of security, prosperity and values. In older communities, the past is reflected in physical inheritances like old buildings, ruins, memorials, and street names. Places have histories.

These constructions, both old and new are often taken for granted. By renegotiating my body’s presence in and around these, I experience the particular spatial constraints and shaping they afford, or once afforded others. Sometimes I notice finer details, like the manifestation of traditions, particular crafts, artefacts, pictures, furniture, pottery, carvings, musical instruments and the music they once made. These objects bear imprints of many generations.

A place (the noun) is hardly a fixed entity. It may weather, have its boundaries readjusted, undergo development or experience neglect. A place can gather things that accumulate as a place continues to change and reflect the new lives it sustains. Places and their objects fluid or ephemeral though they may be, contribute to the fabric of our experience, offering us references, memories and more abstract poetical stimulation on a daily basis. Like the impact on our physical bodies of buildings and built space, objects or artefacts add to the particularity of our experience, and by becoming familiar to us, foster a sense of relatedness and belonging.

On February 2015 in Georgetown, Penang I performed *White Moth* in a place that was once a Chinese Medical Hall in the early 1900’s. On the walls hung old furniture, left over artefacts, monkeys’ skulls, natural lipsticks, tools and large vats once used for preparing herbal remedies, were a palimpsest of medical practices. The place offered the perfect setting for performing an excerpt from *moths*… My audience reported being taken

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44 South East Asia’s first medical hall, Yin Oi Tong served the community for 124 years before relocating. The site is now occupied by hotel Ren i Tang Heritage Inn and Yin Oi Tong museum.
into another time, when sailing ships and merchants populated Penang. As performer, my relationship to the place and its artefacts placed me in a trance-like state that conjured images of spirits of a past from the walls and large object-filled cupboard.
In *moths...*, the shared Indonesian heritage of Soemardjo and myself is reflected in the use of food items on the walls of the *Food Shrine* and in the soundscape. The domestic utensils conjured sound-memories and we were able to engage somatically with essential aspects of our culture. Engaging with these provoked a deeper and perhaps more authentic sense in my movement qualities and aesthetic choices. I recall being moved by Soemardjo’s voice, as she walked about with a large colander, humming an old Indonesian tune. I sat reminiscing against a wall in another space. Vivid images and sounds came to mind like the clanging of pots, cleaver on chopping board and the stone mortar and pestle pounding away as my grandmother prepared dishes. I recalled the smells and the mix of heat from the stove, and the cool tiled floors on the soles of my feet. Being in this heightened/remembering state during performance situates me, and comes with kinaesthetic resonances that brings to consciousness possibilities for action and attention. I believe that this contributes to the authenticity of my presence in action.
Language and gesture as a reflection of culture

The form of our speaking, our language, is always evolving as we add new words and adapt the old, or change the syntax or rhythms of our speech. The stories we tell reflect our views, our experiences and our sense of being in the world. When we share a place with others it seems we have much in common, including the way we speak. Speaking affords a connecting bridge and is intrinsic to our relationship with others. Sharing the same language of course increases the chances of being understood. The degree of difference or synchronicity in language impact on my feeling of familiarity and determine my sense of being part of a place and feeling of belonging.

We also share gestures and signal with our bodies in ways that can be specific to communities and places. In 19th century Hunan, China, women developed the Nu Shu language to communicate undetected by men. It acted as a bridge in bonding women – a sisterhood known as Laotong – and relieved the isolation they felt during that period in history where foot binding was the norm. Laotong recognised the importance of women's supportive relationship, and aided the endurance of hardship in their lives. Language has the capacity to bond and affects one's sense of home and belonging to a place. There are a few old women who can teach Nu Shu in China today. However the practice of Laotong no longer exists, pointing to the eventual loss and forgetting of this particular community and a language that reflects the way of life in another era. It brings to an end...

...a way of being, a way of seeing, the steady erasure of evidence that anyone who thought this way or lived like that was ever part of the planet. What is lost and forgotten is the knowledge that illuminated a specific part of the natural world; that revealed how we learned to adapt and thrive in a given environment.46

When in Malaysia, I slip into a familiar way of speaking, or Manglish and a certain degree of colloquialism emerges quite spontaneously. Travelling between Malaysia and Australia, I find myself struggling at times in confusion over which accent to adopt. The way words are structured in sentences is place specific affecting the way I speak, and sometimes the way I write. It doesn't stop there, it also affects the way I carry myself and

46 Flora S. Michaels, “Lost Words, the Language Wars,” Australian Womankind 2015, 55.
47 “Manglish” or “Malaysian English” is spoken in Malaysia and is an English based creole with words borrowed from the different ethnic groups – Malay, Chinese (from the dialects of Hokkien, Cantonese and Mandarin) and Tamil.
think. Language reveals cultural specificity, and also its diversity.

A sense of conflict is evident when I return to my home country. As a second generation Chinese, I speak my mother tongue, Cantonese, poorly, as I do the languages/dialects I learnt growing up – Malay, Hokkien, a few words of Mandarin, and to a lesser degree English. However Manglish, as dysfunctional as it may sound, seems to conjure a feeling of fitting in somewhere. This statement is not to dismiss my years of growing up in Malaysia and then living in Australia, but to bring to fore that the uncomfortable disposition does affect my assimilation into life or how I land in either place.

Every language belongs to a specific place. It can migrate, it can spread. But usually it is tied to a geographical territory. […] In a sense I’m used to a kind of linguistic exile. […] here your language is considered foreign, you feel a continuous sense of estrangement. You speak a secret, unknown language, lacking any correspondence to the environment. An absence that creates a distance within you.48

There is a strong connection to how I speak and my place-ment in the world and this is intrinsically connected to my sense of comfort, discomfort and disposition. I notice that I am much more comfortable dancing than speaking publicly. My everyday disposition is inevitably reflected in my practice. Richard Schechner observes,

...theatre and ordinary life are a möbius strip, each turning into another.49

My practice and everyday life are inseparable, and as a practitioner, I am always located – I am placed. There is no separating out the implications of place on that practice.

Similarly perhaps, food is not only our fuel for life, but in its sourcing and preparation involves a significant level of socializing. It plays an important part in the shaping of our cultural identity.


Culinary particularities of place

Food is inherent to the way I associate to a place. My friends and people I meet consider Asians, or in my case, Malaysians, to be obsessed with food.

The forms of food preparation and range of cuisine in a region can give a historical and ethnographic representation of the culture. For example influences from the major ethnic groups in Malaysia, the Malays, Chinese and Indians, are evident in the food, along with the culinary legacy of colonizers in the past such as the Portuguese, British and Japanese. The ways in which I prepare food and my palette are influenced by my upbringing and I have a sense of feeling at home when I consume Malaysian food. If I feel homesick in Melbourne, I eat at a Malaysian restaurant.
Perhaps the importance I attach to food underscores its presence in *moths*… performed at the VCA, where audiences were offered a sampling of *kueh* – cakes my maternal grandmother used to make, accompanied by Chinese tea. Food was a means of reconnecting with and sharing my cultural traditions. In its everyday-ness, the preparation and consumption of food is a reminder of domesticity. So although Soemardjo and I were interested in using sounds, food and objects that rekindled memories of our ancestry, and as mentioned earlier we hoped to enable audiences to settle, be focused, alive and attentive to each other and their immediate *place-ment*, our strategy also endeavoured to evoke a sense of other places, and to suggest other cultural references.

**Place and performance**

In the preceding pages, I have drawn on examples of my practice in particular places. I want to close with some more general comments and several illustrations from my practice. Clearly the experience of place affecting performance and vice versa is not unfamiliar to me. Much of my work has been site specific – responding to site or allowing site to feed into the structure of a piece. After a recent performance at the National Gallery of Victoria, I remember passing the site days later and feeling a closer sense of connection to the space. My familiarity with the space was enhanced by my time spent there. Awareness of the textures of the site, such as the stone ground, were rekindled.

I have vivid memories of places like Georgetown, Penang. I recall/remember its tangible and intangible rich heritage, its built landscape, and communities. Experience lingers as embodied memories, and sensations once experienced in a place can be rekindled.

The expression *if these walls could talk* suggests interest in the history of a room or a particular space. The phrase has new meaning if one considers that it is in fact one’s sensing of place that *is* the place, and attuning or giving our attention to the walls/space the process of revealing.

In a recent performance experiment at a street intersection in Georgetown with a photographer, I recall the moments he captured my *conversation* with the street and the goings-on at dawn. I was conscious of many relationships at the time – the relationship between place and my body, of me as performer with passers-by, and performer with photographer. The responses of people were vividly captured as images, revealing

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and reflecting attitudes of a culture and aspects of the place. The digital reproduction of the images – a document of something happening in time – now has its own materiality and degree of permanence. Time passed has its materiality here and now as we engage with the photographs. The act of documentation and its reinterpretation is in itself another strand of experience of things. The images are not just documentary but a subjective viewing of things, the photographer’s viewpoint is reflected in the images that hold us frozen in time and framed as his subjects. The event underscores the subjectivity of my experience of place(s) and my reliance on sense, perception and willingness or interest to engage in a place.
Occupy/Preoccupy was performed on the forecourt of the State Library of Victoria on a busy Friday at peak hour. To occupy a space and paradoxically be pre-occupied by it was a reflection on loss and longing. The place where my father was most present, our home in suburban Victoria, is no longer a place I can return to. The traces that facilitate and trigger my remembering are his clothes I salvaged after his death. Wearing layers of his suits in a performance in a public space brought out a deep sense of vulnerability, as I became preoccupied and at times en-tranced in recalling and reconnecting to his spirit. Oscillating between my inner world and the myriad of memories that arose, and juxtaposed against a public and somewhat impersonal and noisy outer world around me, emphasized the tension between the tenderness of being cocooned in his clothes and the disparity of exposing my inner feelings in public. Surrendering to the harshness of the place exposed a deeper vulnerability.

Being preoccupied by my environment interferes with any tendency to complacently occupy/inhabit it. I am kept alert and in the present. In many respects my experience of places reflects on the condition of occupancy. This raises questions of the relationship to place and the terms of connection to place(s).
Chapter 4:
Concluding Thoughts

My practice-led research has brought to consciousness many aspects of my creative process. Initial interests in notions of trance and mediumship, have led to an appreciation of the way complex somatic sensing and focusing of attention are intrinsic to my performative engagement in places. I am aware of cultivating a sense of dynamic and reciprocating interaction with the world around me, and work from the premise that I am always in a state of becoming, that I am unfixed, and a self in constant negotiation. I have found that my being draws on and accumulates experience, much of which is tacitly held in my physical body. This body memory can be activated or triggered by my present situation and in these moments of remembering, past and present are interwoven. The remembering body and my experience of recalling images, sounds, smells and actions is a core aspect of my practice, as exemplified in *moths*..., highlighting the capacity of my body to resonate and respond in its performance/practice situations. My thoughts and findings continued to revolve around these key notions. I found that the half consciousness and deep musing implied in *trance* seemed inadequate for the state I experience in performance. The notion of being medium was apt but was rather meaningless without specific context. In the following I foreground core aspects of my practice and through their description enable the complex relationships of my particular sensing *performing* being and place-ment to be illuminated.
Mediumship

Mediumship, from my experience, requires somatic alertness, openness to the world outside, alertness to my remembering body and other beings and things. It is a state of focused attention to something, and involves my conscious awareness. Being medium occurs within this state. This state of my performative experience is paralleled in many other cultural settings where transformation occurs, where people act as shamans, forge links to the spirit world, or facilitate community connecting to nature. This performative state is also found in forms like butoh, where there is attention to a sensual being. Medium also suggests a state of in-between-ness or being in the middle of. In moths…, I negotiate between being in my live collaborative relationship with Soemardjo, my immediate somatic and perceptual experience, and the attention I seek to give to memories, including imagery and sounds, and bodily recollections. Being medium and my medium-ship in this case was thus a sort of liminal state, more layered and multi faceted than a single connection. Medium-ship is the action of connecting my sensing/perceiving self with other things, both tangible (of this world) and intangible, and in particular settings such as moths…, can foreground in poetic form, beliefs and values.

Attunement

Attunement in my practice refers to a state of receptivity and connectedness. I have a sense of being as a multidimensional field where all sorts of possibilities can come to consciousness. For example, I recall the interior structure of Fort Delta and the feeling and implications of that on me – not a physical force per se but nevertheless my perception of the space triggering in me minutiae of impulses/possibilities. Interestingly enough this correlates with Elizabeth Behnke’s micro dance,511 the myriad of tiny affects and possibilities of which we can become sensately aware. Attunement is a condition of my being medium, wherein I act as agent, between, in, from and to others and myself. My attunement reflects my perception. Attunement is a prior condition for my performance but, as my discussion of familiarity earlier showed, is somewhat paradoxical in that the motivation for attunement seems to have more impetus the less familiar I feel within a place. Indeed as butoh exponents suggest, the more we are empty as performers, the more receptive we can be.

Transformation

This is a concept that has various definitions. It might be about a material change, where physical form shifts for example, from pupa to moth. But it can also mean a shift in behavioural patterning. The latter can be conscious or not. It is enacted in response to one's place of being. For example in moving between Melbourne and Penang, I make adaptations to the way I speak that is particular to place/culture.

It would seem that the possibility of transformation is not far removed from my previous description of medium and mediumship, where the cultivation/recognition of affect and possibilities were considerations.

In practice, the process of dealing with affect and possibilities is what I call internal choreography. It is a process in the minutiae of time that is concerned with the recognition of affect(ed) self and its perception of possibilities in the present moment, and the decision or choice that is made. Internal choreography then is an ongoing processing – incremental transformations – that manifests as the dance.

Remembering body

Central to my practice is body. What is constantly revealed is the body's capacity to remember/recollect. This shouldn't be surprising as I am drawing on past experiences all the time. My body not only learns to do but has the capacity to re-enact things learnt without conscious thoughtful control (to ride a bicycle for example). Body learns and acquires patterns of action or behaviours that can, in time, become automatic – corpus habitual. The body's intelligence allows many aspects of our day-to-day life to occur without conscious attention, the down side of which may sometimes lead to thought-less or mind-less action. The body is a repository of a lifetime of experience and in its materiality, emotional and imaginative aspects reveal the complexity of our selves. The body can recall particular experiences – a form of explicit remembering of particular events that have specific situations and occurrences in time. These include traumatic and significant events in one's life. There is a more general remembering where memory is implicit – like the action of playing the piano. We don't need to recall the actual event of learning certain scales or keys in order to play a piece of music. Such capacities highlight the somatic sensibility of kinaesthesia – our capacity to know, and remember action and movement. We remember the feeling of our moving, its dynamic, its energy, shape and articulation. In watching others moving, we recognise and resonate kinaesthetically in our bodies with the others' actions. It is a part of our body intelligence.
This capacity to resonate or have a bodily understanding of the other is indeed an intrinsic part of my performativity. It reflects my body’s capacity to remember, and enables physical autobiography and authenticity of movement.

My remembering body becomes a site and reflects my (intimate) engagement and exploration of the world. Through my remembering body, I can reawaken not only events but also aspects and attitudes of my self. Through this inquiry I have referred to my shifting states of being – and this correlates with what some psychologists might term shadowed selves.52

There are other conceptualizations of body, including body as multifaceted or body comprising layers that may be peeled to reveal aspects of my being. These are useful to therapeutic techniques such as BMC that bring to consciousness the imprints of wounds/trauma. The notion of peeling away also enables not only self-recognition but the emptying aspect of my performativity, that facilitates attunement.

**Imagination**

There is a point where awareness of affects and possibilities, the products of attunement, opens the door to choice, imagination and action. There is something intrinsic to the future in the present.

**Knowing a place**

I know some places by past experience or everyday living such as my own house, and particular parts of Melbourne or Penang. Being in these places is full of the memories of different connections that I feel to the place. Attuning to the setting/environment of performance is an aspect of my relationship to a place. I can be aware of my mood or emotional feelings in that attuning. I am aware, as objects are added or things/people moved in that space, I might experience a shift in my mood. Attunement inevitably, involves emotional feeling. Familiarity might be better.

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understood in terms of our placement/displacement and experience of the environment, including others around us. Familiarity is an emotional experiencing. Shifts in familiarity reflect very much on the nature of our being. In this research context, shifting places/events/settings of performance was a means of finding distance/objectivity on my being as I renegotiated my degree of familiarity.

Attunement with place

The experience of a place involves somatic and my often almost automatic sensing being heightened and focused. It is a perceptual aspect, which is an awakening within me – or a conscious attending to the place. This constitutes an inter-relationship of me and the place. I sometimes find myself

Fig32, 33 Site responsive experiment in an abandoned building, Gopeng, Malaysia (Oct 2014) Images: Eelin Cheah
making all sorts of associations to the place through memory and imagination. My encounter with an abandoned shop-house in Gopeng activated in me remembrance of inhabitants of a particular time and type of place – a burly Chinese taukay (shop owner), cigarette in hand, taking a break, chatting with his customers in different dialects, while his slightly built wife strutted about attending to domestic chores.

In my practice/understanding of place, I am conscious of place as a sensory perceptual experience. A place exists in and through my interaction to it. Bodily immersion in place (the lived experience) becomes a preferred path, and any pre-concept of place something to be sceptical of, or at least considered as a superficial layer, in one's experience of place.

In this state of connecting/inter-relating, I have the possibility of my whole being being opened, through which, remembering and recollecting past experience occurs. The conversation between myself and place broadens and deepens. This was indeed happening in Gopeng. I had a sense of bringing things recollected to this space and place, and engagingimaginatively with it, even as I somatically and perceptively was present in the place. This attunement with place is part of my performative process.

Places in my experience are always differentiable. Through my various projects and practices, I have come to notice the particularities of places – that they are not only differentiated in terms of their physical or geographical form, but also by their inhabitants' social customs and values. A place is not only known in terms of its roads, boundary/fences or its architecture, but community and individual beliefs. In the iterations of moths… at Fort Delta and VCA, the spaces had not only their own qualities and histories, but the cultural icons, sounds and gestures that I brought to them. For example, we introduced the complexities of timbre, textures and tonalities of Asian music; and a collection of clothing iconography that pointed to Christianity and christening. In this inhabiting of particular spaces comes a mutual imprinting – I not only feel the walls of Fort Delta and read their history – but put myself, and other things, within the space. My attunement is in this latter respect, a complex interaction.

Less tangible embodied shaping/values

In my exploration of body and place and their inter-relationship, I ultimately reveal the ground of my beliefs and values. As a multi-cultural person I am conscious of cultural difference, of the nuances that inflect my gesture and speech for instance, in particular cultural environments. This awareness reaches to include aesthetic aspects particular to my practice that might differentiate it from another.
Though awareness of values, cultural or otherwise is not necessarily foreground in my consciousness every waking moment, I appreciate that I carry into my practice and day-to-day life, innate orientations and convictions that shape my every action. In the collaboration with Soemardjo, we had much in common, but our two (different) subjectivities enabled our interests to be deeply explored in a practical conversation. Our poetic gestures and responses in sound and action, and ongoing discussions over the two phases of moths…, enabled the work to crystallise and mature in its structure.

### Transforming being

In the course of my inquiry, the very notion of *my self* has presented some difficulties. The *look* of my self and my emotional feeling for instance, somehow invite a separation of feeling and body, which does not fit with my interest in a holistic being. Instead, the idea of a self has to allow for that morphing, transforming, attuning, adapting process of everyday experiencing. In our present *being*, we are the embodiment of our past, much of which is innately within us. The process of attunement is a process that is located and situated, and represents the finding of one’s being in that particular moment. Constant shifts in context/place/time suggest I too (my self) am changing and transforming.

The reality is that we are never wholly aware. We would be very busy people if we were. This leads us to particularize our focus. My practice then manifests as adaptive, unfixed and always a partial reflection of what constitutes me at any time.

### Internal choreography

Through this inquiry I have become conscious of my creative process. It is not that this has formal mechanisms and each creative process reflects its own specific setting, personal dynamics and resources. However, I am conscious of favouring a performative state of being that fosters moment-to-moment sensory awareness, perception and interpretation of my own relational context within the performance setting. My activity or en-act-ment at any moment reflects my attunement or dialogue with my environment and the perception of possibilities. As I choose or enact from the suite of possibilities my situation unfolds. This dynamic unfolding contributes to my sense of integrity in the moment and I have come to refer to this as my *internal choreographic process*. 
Possible extensions of this study

~ The connection of transformation and mediumship in performance practice invites further study. For instance, what forms do trans-generational connections take and how are they manifest somatically/performatively?

~ Further considerations of processes of attunement with place such as place as performance site, place as catalyst for studies in embodiment and place as cultural frame/object.

~ The intention to disseminate the research for publication in journals such as *Brolga – an Australian journal about dance* and *Journal for Artistic Research (JAR)*.
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Appendix 1: Glossary of Terms

The following are words or terms frequently used in the paper. They are listed here because my usage involves some manipulation of existing words and this has implications for meaning that I hope to clarify here. In several cases I have fractured words to emphasise aspects that may otherwise be less remarkable. These terms touch on or articulate core issues in my practice and this glossary may be useful in interpreting my text.

Attunement
Attunement is a term that arises in this research as a descriptor of the state of sensory alertness and openness of attention that characterises my improvisation practice. It is a subjective perceiving that is between who and what I am with my environment. It shares some ground with the usage of the term in psychology to describe how reactive/adaptive a person is to another’s emotions and moods.

Behaviour(al)
Behaviour and behavioural refer to observable activity. It is the manner of activity in humans and in some instances, as actions/responses accumulate over time, we can detect patterns. In my study I am interested in those patterns that can occur within me and also those that I might recognise in others – particularly those of my family and ancestors.

Danced 'by' my immediate environment
My multisensory body open to and in attunement with my immediate environment can be considered as danced by those stimuli as kinaesthetic qualities and sensations are activated within me.

Dancing 'with'
Refers to the interaction of my multisensory body, responding kinaesthetically and in attunement with my immediate environment/other(s). I am in dialogue or embodied conversation and in this case there is a mutual imprinting between my self and my environment/other.
Dis-location
Dis-location as it occurs in my practice is concerned with a perception and feeling of being out of place. In this state I am not connected in tangible or emotional terms to the place. This relates in some ways to *dis-placement*.

En-act-ment
Refers to the act of doing, the act of playing a part.

En-tranced
Within the context of trance/mediumship, this is a state different to the everyday being/self. In becoming en-tranced I cross a threshold between one state and another. There is an aspect of transition involved and I also understand it as a portal or opening through which I *enter* into heightened state of awareness, of reflection or musing and partial suspension of voluntary activity.

Genetic memory
This term refers to the embodied aspects both physical/biological and behavioural patterning inherited from parents/ancestors.

In-between-ness
In this research *in-between-ness* refers to the condition of being between two things. It can be understood in terms of its geographic sense of being between physical places – I might be elsewhere between Georgetown and Melbourne for example. It can also refer to a felt state, an emotional or affective feeling or condition in which one is between extremes or may feel the co-existence of different states.

Internal choreography
My process of *attunement* creates and presents to me possibilities and choices. This feeds an on-going activity of *enactment*, in other words I choose to do from the suite of possibilities that are swirling before/within me. I think of this shift between *attunement*, perception of possibilities and *enactment* as a process of internal choreography.

Medium
Within the context of my research this term is used in relation to the capacity of performer to act as a conduit for memories connecting past and present, and between body and its immediate environment.
Memories
Memory is a complex process, involving sensing, storing and retrieving information. In my research I emphasise the embodied re-collection of events and lived experiences. These can be triggered by place/situation/culture, etc. and often refer to particular episodes or events. Memories are an intrinsic part of my cycles of reflection and sense making. There are other forms of memory including procedural or implicit memory where we remember how to do something.

Sensate awareness
The somatic experience arising to consciousness and attention in the present moment.

Shadowed memories
The term refers to events and experiences that are not often foregrounded or brought to consciousness.

Shadowed selves
In my practice I reflect upon the complexity of my being, and the different perceptions I may have of my self. Some aspects of who I am are less frequently conscious to me. Jungian psychology might suggest that the less conscious aspects of a person are shadow selves and these may have positive or negative qualities. In this research I am interested in attending to or being open to shifts in my experiencing and that this may inform in some ways on the complexity of myself.

Sit(e)-uation
Another play on words – this time situation – that underscores my circumstances and relationship within a particular location or site.

Somatic
Felt bodily experience that is distinct from the mind.

Unfamiliar(ity)
Opposite of familiar – whose Latin origin referred to a family servant. Familiarity denotes intimate knowledge of, or common usage. Un-familiar as I use it emphasises the perception of a feeling of disconnection with something, its strangeness and difference.
Appendix 2: List of Videos

The following video documentation have been selected based on their relevance to my research, supporting core aspects such as being en-tranced, embodiment, attunement and mediumship.

**moths are calling**
URL: https://vimeo.com/172068252  
Password: mothsvca  
Duration: 38:45 mins

MFA live performance work, presented at Space 876 VCA (July 2014). This work is concerned with the embodiment of memories connecting past and present. It explores fragments of real and imagined stories and its relationship and interaction with space and place. Central themes include ephemerality, becoming, liminal spaces and the mysteries of light and darkness.

**White Moth**
URL: https://vimeo.com/110452945  
Duration: 19:48 mins

An excerpt from *moths are calling*, the segment *White Moth* was adapted to the site, Yin Oi Tong Museum in Georgetown, Penang (August 2014). In the absence of musician Ria Soemardjo, I worked with a recorded original soundscore which I created using collected sounds (and digitally manipulated) including the noise generated during the site renovations in 2011.
From the Third Opaque
URL: https://vimeo.com/172374691
Duration: 2:23 mins

Excerpts from a 10-hour performance starting from the darkest hour at dusk on 22 June 2011 and ending at the first sunrise the following day. In the various stages of this performance, my body would feel weary from fighting sleep. However, it was at these moments that I also recall a state of being danced as if taken into another place. Presented at the Light in Winter Festival at the BMW Edge, Federation Square.

Bantengan (Bull Trance) Ceremony
URL: https://vimeo.com/172375975
Duration: 1:26 mins

A short documentation filmed during my field work in Indonesia (2013). The video features local participants under the influence of trance, induced by music and incense. Organised and supported by the Arts Island Festival, the ceremony took place in the highlands of Malang city in East Java.
Appendix 3: Chronological Map of Activities

The following timelines highlight the breadth of research relevant activities I have undertaken from the start to the completion of my MFA candidature (2013-2016). The activities are categorized according to the legend below and group into the month and year it occurred.

During this period I have been practicing and attending yoga classes regularly (since 2012), and intermittently attending butoh workshops with Yumi Umiumare and BMC one-on-one and group workshops with Alice Cummins (since 2008).
### Appendix 3.1

#### 2013

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MFA</td>
<td>Research begins</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collaboration: <em>Triestement Songs</em> with Domenico de Clario, (White Night, NGV, Melbourne)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Seminar presentation: <em>Double Eyelids</em> (CFI / Asia Partnerships, VCA, Southbank)</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>The Curious Other eJournal video submission: <em>Body in the Transient Space</em></td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>BMC with Alice Cummins: <em>Connecting Gut, Heart and Head</em> (Melb)</td>
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<td>A</td>
<td>Indigenous dance with Kawadji Wimpa dancers from Queensland (Melbourne)</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Collaboration: <em>Silenzio</em> with Tony Yap (Adelaide)</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td>Impro-Exchange Research Laboratory, led by Peter Fraser (Sydney)</td>
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<tr>
<td>J</td>
<td>Ecstatic Dance and Trance seminar presentation (Dance Research Group, VCA, Melbourne)</td>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Body Weather workshop with Peter Fraser (Melbourne)</td>
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<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>Responsive improv: <em>Wildlife Loves Silica Gel</em> Exhibition, accompanied by David Palliser/ The Charles Ives Singers (Melbourne)</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td>Colour of Silence (MAPping Melb Festival, Melbourne)</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td>Butoh Residency facilitated by Yumi Umiumare (Horsham, VIC)</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td>Penang: trance ceremony/place/culture research</td>
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<td>J</td>
<td>Kuala Lumpur: family history/culture/place research</td>
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<td>Collaboration: <em>duet for one voice and one body</em>, with Domenico de Clario (Arbar series, MCA, Sydney)</td>
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Appendix 3.2
2014

Colour of Silence, (Melbourne Now Festival, NGV, Melbourne)

Collaboration: equinox drawing, with Domenico de Clarico and Ren Walters (Melbourne Now Festival, NGV, Melbourne)

I Think I Can live art forum (Arts House, Melbourne)

Collaboration: Sound Body with Alice Hui Sheng Chang and Brett Thompson (Current 2014, Conduit Arts Gallery, Fitzroy)

Research presentation (Research Methods class, VCA, Melbourne)

Penang: trance ceremony (Hungry Ghost Festival)/place research

White Moth (Yin Oi Tong Museum, Penang)

Indonesia: trance/place/culture research (Aug-Sep)

White Moth (Arts Island Festival, Indonesia)

Bodily Talking: The Embodiment of Reflection seminar presentation (Dance Research group, VCA, Melbourne)

Occupy/Preoccupy (State Library of Victoria, Melbourne)

FJ M A M J J A S O N D

moths are calling (Fort Delta gallery, Melbourne)

Collaboration: Many Returns 12-hour durational performance with Riza Manalo (White Night Festival, Melbourne)

Adventures in the Field movement/sensory workshop with Camilla Maling (Yoga Lab, Brunswick)

Yoga 15-Day Challenge (Yoga Lab, Brunswick)

Kuala Lumpur: genealogy/family tree/culture research

Collaboration: Grasslands by Rebecca Russell (director) and Ken Evans (Clunes, Victoria)
Appendix 3.3

2015

Penang: trance (Thaipusam festival), place/culture research, article writing, discussions/site surveys with Georgetown Festival to present moths are calling (Jan-Mar)

Collaboration: Dua Wanita with Aida Redza (Whiteaways Arcade, Georgetown, Penang)

Penang: place/culture research, article writing (May-June)

Collaboration: Crossroads at Dawn site responsive experiment with photographer Andy Cox (Georgetown, Penang)

Collaboration: Permenant/Impermanence with Juana Beltran, Ren Walters and Michael McNab (Brunswick)

Collaboration: Clang/ with Robbie Avenaim (Conduit Arts, Fitzroy)

Collaboration: Under a Willow: a Long Way from China with director Rebecca Russell (24 Hour Experience Festival, Ballarat)

Collaboration: Hello, Welcome, Goodbye (Big West Festival, Footscray)

Collaboration: Dua Wanita with Aida Redza (Brunswick)

Kuala Lumpur: ceremonies & family reunion (Chinese New Year), geneology/culture research

Site responsive experiments with photographers Kenny Loh and Baerbel Starz (Georgetown, Penang)

Site responsive experiment with photographer SC Shekar (Georgetown, Penang)

Collaboration: Dinner and a Show with Ren Walters and Dure Dara (Brunswick)

Butoh masterclass with Seisaku and Yuri Nagaoka (Brunswick)
Appendix 3.4
2016

Butoh masterclass with Katsura Kan and Dudu (Brunswick)

Collaboration: Un-habited Space residency guest artist with Ren Walters, Carmen Chan and Michael McNab (Conduit Arts, Fitzroy)

MFA exegesis submission

Watching the Leaves Fall performance/exhibition for Copy, Cut, Post exhibition curated by Paula van Beek and Xanthe Beesley (Mechanics Institute, Brunswick)

Collaboration: Milk Bars by Metanoia Theatre (Mechanics Institute, Brunswick)

MFA Completion Seminar (VCA, Melbourne)
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Author/s:
Hoe, Janette Fui Yin

Title:
Performer as medium: connecting past and present in improvisation

Date:
2016

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