The Embodied Imagination: choreographic practice and dancing our way into being

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ABSTRACT

‘The Embodied Imagination: choreographic practice and dancing our way into being’ is a practice led research project completed between 2013 – 2016 at the Victorian College of the Arts. The thesis comprises a performance outcome and a dissertation.

This dissertation examines the scope of the imagination and looks at the way we imagine which includes image making but is not exclusive to the realm of mental images. The premise is that the imagination is a vital synthesizing force that animates the world and which can be appropriated in choreographic practice. A wider definition is proposed that attempts to capture the totality of the imaginary as a continuously emerging potential.

I will build towards a discussion on the interplay between the real and the imaginary and develop the idea that through performance we open the possibility of perceiving and imagining in new ways. Through this we create the possibility for tiny shifts in how we can be in the world.
DECLARATION

‘The Embodied Imagination: choreographic practice and dancing our way into being’

This is to certify that:

(i) This thesis comprises only my original work towards the Masters of Fine Arts (Dance)

(ii) Due acknowledgment has been made in the text of all materials used

(iii) The thesis is 15,505 words in length, exclusive of figures, bibliography and appendices

Paula Lay

Signed:

Date:
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INTRODUCTION: Dancing my way into being

I dance not to awaken, but to be awake
Here and now, and here and gone
For its
Aliveness
Fleeting glimpses of beauty and sadness
To chase the sublime
In the ordinary
It is a pursuit in being
A dedication to nothingness
And a nod towards the spaces in between

i. Preamble

‘The body is the storm-center, the origin of coordinates, the constant
place of stress in (our) experience-train. Everything circles round it, and is
felt from its point of view. The world experienced comes at all times with
our body as its center, center of vision, center of action, center of
interest’.

My relationship between my body, dancing and choreographing, and the imagined and the
imaginaries have been at the forefront of my thinking in recent years. I became increasingly
interested in the role of the imagination in choreographic practice and how I was working
with images and the imagination. How did my understanding of the imaginary inform the
way I was operating not only choreographically but implicated in the way I was and could be
in the world? How was dancing an act of becoming? What was it about dancing that
facilitated a process of potentially knowing oneself better? How did this lead to the
possibility of being able to develop a deeper engagement with the world around me? This
intricate relationship between the mind/body/environment pointed towards a complex
dynamic of shifting between the known and the unknown and the tangible and intangible.

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As my choreographic process evolved I realised that what I was calling ‘choreography’ had become increasingly about cultivating sensitive states of awareness. I also began to notice that imagery was really fundamental to how I navigated the choreography. My body was still at the centre, acting as somewhat of a gateway to exploring the imaginary. I likened the imaginary as parallel to exploring interiority. Within this interior landscape, the seemingly intangible matter of imagery, mood and feelings, would take physical form. The physical inquiry of being with my body would lead to images arising within the imaginative realm, through personal associations, dreams and memory. Apart from images arising of its own volition, I could also actively choose to use a particular image or imagined place, such as an open grassy field, and work from that place. The process of starting from an open grassy field could potentially end up in a completely different place, such as a concrete bunker. I use this stark contrast as an example to illustrate the fluidity and indirect manner the imaginary often takes. The role of the imagination and the associative potential and the process of inhabiting interior landscapes would become the choreographic archeological terrain. As Helen Herbertson has so often said in relation to developing choreographic material, ‘dig deeper’. My investigation of the imaginary and interior landscape would facilitate a sifting down (a meeting of mind/body/environment) of the choreography that would become embedded in my body, through gesture, habit, movement, and rhythm.

My interest in the imagination and its relation to embodied practice has emerged through working with various choreographers. Some key influences include my time working with Zikzira physical theatre², where I worked intimately with choreographer Fernanda Lippi. This time lay down the groundwork towards my understanding of improvisational practice, however it is my more recent experience that resonates with the current research. These recent experiences include working with Ros Warby, Deborah Hay, Rosalind Crisp, and Helen Herbertson. Having had the opportunity to work with all of these choreographers has enabled the knowledge of their own practices to filter into my experience. The language of Warby, Hay, Crisp and Herbertson have become so deeply embedded into the way I think about choreography and performance that it becomes difficult to separate. This is the way with embodied practice, what you learn starts to feel as if it is your own. This implies the

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² In 2009 as a recipient of the Dr Phillip Law Travel Scholarship I was able to undertake travel to Belo Horizonte, Brazil to work with Zikzira Physical Theatre for 12 weeks. We worked on a medium-length dance film ‘O Grande Congelado’ (The Great Frost). For further information visit [www.zikzira.com](http://www.zikzira.com)
difficulty in locating authorship in choreographic practice, but will not be dealt with in the scope of this work.

Throughout the following chapters I will examine philosophical frameworks that explore the imaginary within a choreographic context and for its wider implications, in regards to how we are and can be in the world. This will be done largely through the lens of choreographic practice specifically through the work *10,000 Small Deaths*\(^3\) as choreographed and performed as a solo work in 2014 at the Victorian College of the Arts and then as part of Dance Massive at Dancehouse in 2015.

I will explore the philosophical terrain led by the work of Kathleen Lennon, *The Imagination and the Imaginary* (2015). Through this work Lennon develops the premise that ‘The imagination is that by which there is a world for us.’\(^4\) David Abrams *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) will be included to flesh out phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s theories of perception and the imagination, particularly the notion that the imaginary is interwoven into the texture of the real. The work of neurologist Antonio Damasio will be applied to deepen and ground the various philosophical perspectives in understanding choreographic practice. Alongside the theoretical frameworks I will draw upon examples of my own practice such as excerpts of personal writing, description and articulation of choreographic process and scores to flesh out the ideas presented. In addition key artistic influences will be referenced and used to provide context for my own practice.

The research will draw upon a variety of sources to navigate the landscape of working with images in performance. The aim will be to learn more about the imagination within my choreographic practice and move towards some speculative conclusions on the role of the imaginary in a broader context.

As with any specific field of practice there may be some unfamiliar terms that arise. I will briefly give an overview of my personal context of contemporary dance practice in order to provide a broader reading of the following material. In talking about dance, I am referring to contemporary dance within a postmodern context. The choreographers I have worked with and the training I have received mainly draw from the lineage of postmodern

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\(^3\) Hereby referred to as ‘Small Deaths’

choreographers that emerged from the sixties onwards. Choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and composer John Cage, to name a few, have been heavily influential in our understanding of contemporary choreographic practices. In this period Pedestrian movements became integrated into dance vernacular and the idea of who a ‘dancer’ was and who could perform a dance was challenged and broadened. This was reflected in practices such as using performers from dance and non-dance backgrounds, challenging the stereotype of the ever ethereal, graceful dancer and the use of unconventional performance settings, such as outdoor spaces, community halls, galleries, etc.

In relation to my own practice, dance improvisation can be traced back to the emergence of the Judson Dance Theatre, a collective of practitioners that included choreographers (Yvonne Rainer and Steve Paxton are mentioned above), composers, and visual artists who performed at the Judson Memorial Church in New York City between 1962 and 1964.

This process of collaboration between artists is something that remains very present in contemporary dance practice and is particularly of note within my creative work 10,000 small deaths that comprises a large part of this research. My creative work was a collaborative effort and although I worked solo for significant periods of time, the collaborative aspect of the work was essential to the creative process.

In summary, within the context of this dissertation, dance practice is located within a postmodern context, drawing from ideas that challenge the notion of what dance is and what dance can be.

ii. Methodology

‘I want to develop the idea that dancing and making dances forms a space or a substrate within which to think about dance. Rather than dances being the outcomes of thinking done previously, dances are the actual process of thinking, and this process is the core methodology of studio-based dance research.’

The methodology of my practice-led inquiry has been varied and shifted over the course of time. The core of practice has been supported by improvisational strategies, key collaborative relationships, and an on-going interest in looping choreographic practice with primary design elements. These design elements have been integral to the creative process and although I worked solo in the studio for a large percentage of the time, the impact of the sound, lighting and in particular the work with live video has been significantly influential.

Improvisational practice and an attempt to refine and distinguish what that means within my own choreography has been a large part of the creative process. Spontaneity, crafting and responding in the moment is often at the centre of improvisational practice, however, it is a very broad term to describe a variety of approaches. These approaches will be specific to the choreographer themselves.

As mentioned earlier, I have been significantly influenced by the work of Ros Warby, Rosalind Crisp and Helen Herbertson. Ros Warby who has worked extensively with Deborah Hay draws strongly from Hay’s approach known as ‘performance practice’. The process of working in the studio is the ‘practice of performance’. The approach attempts to diminish the hierarchical relationship that often exists when shifting from working in the studio to performing in front of an audience. The principles of Hay’s work rely on the intervention of language, often given in the form of riddles or what might be seen as a Koan. The language aims to interject, inform, question and stimulate new ways of dancing and choreographing. The backbone phrase often heard in a workshop setting is that perception is the dance. This provides an anchor to notice and unhinge what and how one perceives. Jim Drobnick draws from his own experience as a participant in one of Hay’s intensive workshops. Drobnick examined Hay’s performance lexicon and says:

‘Artist Deborah Hay has created an elaborate and distinctive language to articulate an aesthetic philosophy, to communicate with performers and to serve as a pedagogical tool.’

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6 A riddle, statement or question that provokes doubt and requires contemplation
Rosalind Crisp’s work is underpinned by her extensive and ongoing studio research. In my studio work with her she has shared some of what is in her ‘toolbox’. This toolbox consists of a variety of strategies that are grounded in the realm of physical sensation and the continuously shifting relationship one can have with the sensory dimension. Crisp describes her work as ‘choreographic’ rather than improvisational. It is choreographic in the way the body has been worked with. Working with Crisp’s strategies demands a deep investment in experimenting with the seemingly unlimited possibilities of the body’s landscape. Working consciously with the physical and sensual world creates depth in the movement vocabulary and facilitates the building of a choreographic palette that in Crisp’s words can ‘saturate’ the body.

Helen Herbertson’s influence has been integral to my creative process and choreographic development. Herbertson’s steady and experienced eye has often offered a deeper way of engaging with my choreographic process. It has been through a long series of discussions, feedback, suggestions and constant support that has facilitated a deeper knowing and understanding of my own process. In 2012 during a period of intensive study, Helen Herbertson would lead the group through a daily series of body-based tasks, often looping in the imaginary. This daily ritual of breathing, listening, and moving has deeply yet subtly inscribed its influence on my bodily self and really is an inherent part of the way I think and am choreographically and performatively.

As a consequence of working with these various choreographers, I have also considered what it means to improvise within my own practice. Improvisation has often been a starting point for my work and various strategies are called upon to intervene and shift choreographic ideas. Rather than it being purely improvisational it is more of an approach that involves developing a series of scores that have the flexibility to change within the choreographic structure. A score usually consists of a set of predetermined elements such as spatiality, relationship to time and a palette of movement possibilities. The score is often held together by a key image, a series of images or an imaginary space, place or time. Modulating between these various aspects provide degrees of choreographic play. The choreographic play is the flexibility and space to pick, choose or even change something in the moment.

Ros Warby describes choreographic practice in an interview by Erin Brannigan this way:
‘Framing, crafting and aestheticising dance is the choreography – an opportunity to detach from your individual idiosyncrasies and go beyond the surface of that purely kinaesthetic sensation. Choreography makes room for the performer to manage and organize themselves in body and mind, imagination and timing, within the framework of a singular vision’.

In describing these various choreographers, the imagination is not spoken of overtly, however is an implicit part of practice. The work with Deborah Hay, that relies heavily on language, challenges the imagination to go beyond what and how one would normally perceive and engage with the world. The imagination is drawn upon to engage with absurd instructions that seemingly have no answer, creating imaginative dilemmas, and consequently gives the dancer a way to navigate choreographic solutions. Crisp’s approach on the other hand, brings the physical body into sharp focus, the imaginary as image itself (for example, a monster) is a possibility, however, the imaginary in terms of bodily quality, such as to enlarge, yield, collapse, or push become more prominent as material to be experimented with.

Although a very brief and inadequate description of these choreographers’ approaches, I wanted to draw attention to previous ways in which I have understood working with the imaginary. My experience working with Zikzira Physical theatre existed much more in the realm of visualising and building imaginative scenarios. All these methods have influenced the way I think and work with the imagination and has become somewhat of an amalgamation of these various influences.

iii. Writing and dancing

‘I felt that I needed to produce some dancing in order to see which questions and issues the dancing brought forward’.

The practice of writing has been integral to the creative work and largely a process that has looped back and forth from dancing/choreographing to writing/thinking. It is problematic.

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to describe this as two separate dimensions as pointed out by Kim Vincs in her case study on studio based research\textsuperscript{10}. This is largely due to the distinction leading to the suggestion that thinking and dancing are two separate activities, where in fact, it is the very premise that through the act of dancing thought and knowledge may be produced.

It is not my aim to clarify or attempt to define the possible problems of an arts-led inquiry in this dissertation but I thought it important to note as it has impacted on the unfolding of my own process. The main body of writing that exists in my dissertation has been written retrospectively, although it has been supported and informed by pieces of writing that I have collected over the years of practice.

As a result of my process the dancing and choreographing was fore-grounded and the focal point for a significant period of time. This was supported through journal, reflective and poetic pieces of writing. The integration of larger theoretical frameworks came at a much later stage. Due to the retrospective nature of the writing being presented, the nature of my inquiry has shifted and changed according to the writers that I have come in contact with. This resulted in a substantial amount of distance from the making and performing of the creative work to the writing itself.

I wondered for a time how problematic this would be, but surprisingly, I have found it otherwise. Discovering the work of Kathleen Lennon has exposed me to ideas that illuminated my practice in unexpected ways. As a consequence there has been a growing capacity to make links between choreographic practice and broader philosophical frameworks that I would have found harder to imagine at the beginning of the process. I have been able to work from a place of subjectivity yet make reference to wider social and cultural implications of choreographic practice.

Overall the writing has been a creative endeavour in itself. Steeped and inspired by the practice, but also an entity to be discovered through the act of writing itself. This is reminiscent of the process of dancing, whereby allowing the process to arise has been critical to the practice. So it has also been for the writing: through creating a space to allow the writing to present itself, questions, ideas and postulations have emerged.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid.
CHAPTER 1: UNDERSTANDING AND DEFINING THE IMAGINATION

“There is no beginning, this is the dance.”

i. Studio practice excerpt

I start at the edge of the space.

It is a large black studio theatre. The space stretches before me. The thick black curtains hang heavy around the back. The sunlight softly falls through the windows, creating a large square of light on the floor.

I am alone.

I begin to move along the perimeter of the space, noticing the soles of my feet meeting and peeling off the tarkett.

I am walking at a natural pace but with a sense of direction. I pick up the speed and the energy of the walk begins to propel forward. I change direction, crossing the space on the diagonal, in a circle, horizontally, vertically, in a figure eight. I start to run. The run is interjected by short sequences of movement. The running whittles away and the movement sequences become longer.

I am caught up in the ‘arching’ and ‘hooking’ of my elbow that leads me in and out of the floor. The moving becomes smaller and smaller until it completely dissipates.

I lie down, flat on my back, looking up at the ceiling.

The movement has stopped but the resonance of it vibrates everywhere. My breath is rapid and sweat glistens on my face. I can feel my blood pumping. The weight of my body presses against the floor.

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A Deborah Hay instruction learnt from Ros Warby, workshop intensive at Dancehouse, October 2010
The temperature is cool and it is dark everywhere. I have fallen through the centre of the earth.

The weight of my body feels as heavy as wet concrete.

There is a crack of light that falls through the tunnel towards me, revealing the outline of my body. I slowly begin to peel my body off the ground.

The movement is microscopic, internal and barely visible. The action is magnified by effort and attention.

The body is the landscape.

The real and imagined are simultaneous parallel worlds. My body becomes the space itself.

ii. Imagination and theory

The imagination is broadly understood as the way images, patterns and forms arise and with which we experience the world. The imagination is often defined as the distinct ability to form new images and sensations that are not directly perceived through the senses; sight, touch, smell, hearing and taste. It is often assumed that the way we imagine takes place in the form of mental images or visualization. The formation of mental images is a way we do and can imagine however it is not the only way. If it is not the only way, how else does the imagination function?

Working with the imagination has been central to my experience of moving, dancing and choreographing. Imagining in and through the body has often been an interweaving of the real with the vast possibilities of the imaginary. Working with the body is firmly grounded in the way that we perceive the world through the senses and choreographically, imaginary responses often occur in a multi-sensorial way. This suggests the inter-relationship across the senses rather than isolating for example, the visual or tactile. The perceptual experience of bodily weight, musculature, tonality and visceral function is fundamental to the experience and the imagining of the body. Despite my experience of dancing being
grounded in perceptual feedback, the imagination has been essential in locating choreographic territory. The imagination has the capacity to summon what is unseen, yet can be felt and drawn upon for its choreographic possibilities. This may be something as simple as being in an imagined landscape, such as a beach, that then is explored from a variety of perspectives. Personal memory and associations may emerge, or textural details such as the graininess of the sand may become the focal point. The exploration becomes a collecting of material gathered through embodied play, which is the essence of my research.

The framework of this chapter will draw upon various philosophical ideas, largely through the lens of Kathleen Lennon. In the work *The Imagination and the Imaginary* (2015) Lennon explores the faculty of the imagination and its relationship to the imaginary and develops the premise that the imagination functions as a vital synthesizing force, integral to our experience of the world. Lennon hinges the discussion around a variety of thinkers drawing largely from philosophers Hume, Kant, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre to flesh out the relationship between imagination and perception. In Lennon's account she counterpoints the work between Hume and Kant, highlighting their differences. In the context of this research I will address these disparities to some degree when it is essential. The focus will be to speak to the ideas presented as stepping-stones towards a broader understanding of the imagination within choreographic practice, rather making a case for the oppositional points of views. This research intends to extend the understanding of and clarify processes of working with the embodied imagination within a choreographic context.

*I pick up the speed and the energy of the walk begins to propel forward. I change direction. I cross the space on the diagonal, in a circle, horizontally, vertically, in a figure eight.*

In this excerpt of studio practice, I am describing a series of events that are an example of how I might often start a rehearsal session. They are perceptual, action-based descriptions. Yet even within the simplicity of the description, images arise and a mood may be felt. To describe ‘energy propelling forward’ is to comprehend what is happening within the body and to also recognize what cannot be seen. The perceptual and imaginative faculties are both working to shape our experience of an event. Lennon explores the connections.

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between perception and imagination through analyzing Hume’s and Kant’s models of the imagination.

Lennon situates Kant in relation to Hume in order to clarify some of Kant’s ideas. The essence of Hume’s theory on the imagination is that ‘the imagination consists in the possession of mental images, faint copies of perceptions, conjured up in the absence of, and as an inadequate replacement for, the perceptual world. Here images are items in a private, mental realm, copies of something presented to our senses’\(^{33}\). Hume’s claim that the imagination is simply a copy of original sensory impressions renders the imagination reproductive and associative.

Although Lennon notes that Hume provided an inadequate account of the role of the imagination in regards to perception, he nonetheless posited that the imagination was pivotal to our perceptual experience. Lennon points out that Hume was driven to include the imagination into his theory of perception by recognising that we are often dealing with not only what is present in a concrete way, but with what cannot be seen. Lennon refers to this notion as the ‘absent present’. In other words, she suggests that the motivation for Hume to incorporate the imagination into his theory of perception was the understanding that perceptual experience is often laden with much more than meets the eye.\(^{14}\)

Another key notion developed by Hume was the understanding that all experiences arise from what he termed impressions. Impressions arise initially through perceptual sensations that lead to particular feelings of pleasure or pain. Through Hume’s understanding the imagination is seen to be just a replica of original sensory experience. Despite the ability for the imagination to be rearranged in multiple ways, it is considered to be lacking in vitality somewhat being merely an impression of the actual event.

Hume articulated that perceptual sensations generated either feelings of pleasure or pain. These sensations defined as impressions would leave a faded image that could then be later recalled via memory or the imagination. An image recalled via memory would be an exact yet somewhat faded copy of the original sensory experience. In contrast, the imagination allowed for the original impressions or images to be arranged in multiple ways that were distinct from the original experience. Despite the capacity for the imagination to rearrange

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\(^{33}\) Ibid., 15.
\(^{14}\) Ibid., 16.
sensory impressions, Hume still regarded all imaginary ideas to be derived from sensory impressions.\textsuperscript{35}

In the studio writing excerpt I describe that ‘the temperature is cool and it is dark everywhere’. According to Hume’s understanding, this would be derived from my previous experience of temperature and light. Memory enables me to construct a reproduction and my imagination facilitates a reconstruction or rearranging of that experience. The image that arose for me, being in the centre of the earth, is obviously not something that I have had experience of. However, according to this definition I must have had a similar sensory experience of lying in a dark space, or on terrain that is gritty, which is where my imagination derives its impressions for reproduction.

Moving towards an understanding of how imagination and perception work beyond reproduction and association is important for understanding choreographic practice as it broadens the possibility of what constitutes the imagination whilst dancing. While reproduction and association are elements that are a part of the way we can and do imagine, the imagination can function in a way that offers unexpected alternatives. In this sense it offers possibilities that may emerge through imagery in the conventional understanding of the word or alternatively it may become something other. This other may be considered to be the imagination as an animating force, giving the present its pulse, understanding and depth.

Kant recognized the gaps in Hume’s theory of the imagination and built upon this by introducing the term ‘the productive imagination’.\textsuperscript{16} For Kant the productive imagination is an active faculty that gives shape, form and meaning to all perceptual experiences and was seen to be central to our experience of perception.\textsuperscript{17}

In Lennon’s account she highlights Kant’s description of the productive imagination and its central role in synthesizing our experience. The suggestion that the imagination has a synthesizing function in order for us to experience and make sense of the world has illuminated aspects of my own understanding of working with images in performance. Images and/or imaginings within my own practice and subsequent choreography would

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 15.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., 19.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
often become the foundation for form, structure, sensibility and affective qualities to emerge. These aspects are by their nature synthesizing in their ability to make sense of the world.

Lennon states that for Kant, the imagination ‘is the faculty by which sensory intuitions are given shape or form, without which perceptual experiences are not possible’\(^{18}\). The imagination was seen as necessary for our experiences of the world and for the creation of the fantastical and illusory. Kant did not see the imagination as functioning simply as the way in which we created fictionalized and made-up worlds/realities which is what some everyday usages may bring to mind.

A distinctive feature of Kant’s productive imagination was that it was seen as an active faculty and that this was essential in our ability for synthesis in order to have perceptual experiences.\(^{19}\) Our perceptual experience is not marked by an intake of raw sensory data but rather as Kant expressed, synthesis is ‘a manifold of intuitions, always and already organized/shaped by the application of a concept’\(^{20}\). Therefore, our perceptual experiences are synthesised or in other words, collated and interpreted via the faculty of the imagination.

‘In the Kantian account, the imagination is at work, not only when a child treats a broom as a horse, but when she perceives a horse as a horse also’\(^{21}\)

The notion of synthesis is fundamental to understanding how the imagination is integral to our perception of the world. Kant noted that the process of synthesis required both the productive and reproductive imagination. He identified three distinct stages in how this took place\(^{22}\):

1. Apprehension of a manifold of intuitions
2. Reproduction in imagination
3. Recognition in a concept

\(^{18}\) Ibid., 2.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., 34.
\(^{20}\) Ibid., 19.
\(^{21}\) Ibid., 20.
\(^{22}\) Ibid.
These stages illuminate how the various manifolds or intuitions converge in the present to give perception its depth. Another way to describe this process is captured by Peter Strawson, as Lennon discusses what is involved in perceiving a dog. Strawson describes that ‘to perceive a dog, when silent and stationary, is to see it as a possible mover and barker’.

This does not mean that in perceiving a dog that we need to summon previous mental images of a dog barking and moving. What is suggested by this description is that the potential for barking and moving is ‘alive in the immediate and present perception of the dog’. To summarize, our perceptual experience is marked by this inherent depth and fullness according to our past experience and the imagined potential, and this captures the essence of synthesis.

iii. The imagination, form and affect

Choreographically the process of synthesis and its potential depth can come to the fore in the performers and the audience’s experience and subsequent reading of the work. It assumes a rich landscape within the perceptual and imaginative field. I am reminded of the well-known quote from the beginning of William Blake’s poem *Auguries of Innocence*:

‘To see the world in a grain of sand’

Blake evokes the same notion captured in poetic form. It is as Lennon states from an idea first used by Sartre and that later becomes central to Merleau-Ponty’s work that ‘perceptual experience is pregnant, with a past, an elsewhere and with possibilities for our future’.

Lennon distinguishes the imagination as the faculty where we create imagery and form, whilst the imaginary is considered to be the domain that connects imagery with affect. This connection between imagery and affect has subsequent implications such as giving the world greater significance and meaning. The definition of affect is often used interchangeably with the term mood or emotion although it is a much broader term that

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23 Ibid., 21.
24 Ibid.
26 Lennon, Imagination and the Imaginary, 32-33.
encompasses the possibilities of emotions, moods and feelings. Neurologist Antonio Damasio offers the definition; ‘Affect is the thing you display (emote) or experience (feel) toward an object or situation, any day of your life’. In effect it is ‘the way in which we not only think, but feel our way around’ and poetically described by Lennon as the ‘emotional contours’ of the subjects world being revealed.

The link between the imaginary, imagination and affect shifts the focus from mental images to a sense of the felt experience of the subject. Through Lennon’s definition of affect, the imaginary is given form through imagery. This provides a sense of feeling and emotional tone that is linked with a certain image or series of images.

I have fallen through the centre of the earth.

The weight of my body has become as heavy as wet concrete.

In this instance the image arises and affect is given form and the feeling life of the subject is revealed. In my experience, the process of discovering and creating a choreographic score has been marked largely by that felt experience. An image can act much like a container for the score. The image or images end up serving as an anchor to launch from and come back to rather than creating definitive boundaries.

The body is the landscape.

Within Small Deaths the perceived and imagined morphing of the body’s size resulted in a choreographic score called ‘Giant’ to emerge. The attempt at microscopic attention magnified the landscape of the body. The giant became the key image that generated a multitude of subsequent images. The associative images had to do with where the body was located, particular body parts, light falling on the body, the weight and effort required to move, etc. The key image, of a solo figure, shifted from being located in the centre of the earth (making the body very small in context), to being washed up on a deserted beach shore (reminiscent of the giant in Gulliver’s travels). The score was telescopic in nature,

27 A R Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens (Harcourt Brace, 1999), 342.
28 Lennon, Imagination and the Imaginary, 12.
29 Please refer to appendix 1 for a list of scores used within the creative work.
shifting from the various perspectives of large to small, and from within (my subjective experience) to without (imagining myself from the outside). Through the process of discovering and creating the score, the ability to locate myself imaginatively would facilitate a dropping into the felt experience – real and imagined.

iv. Imagination and Practice

In one of the first workshops I undertook with Ros Warby in 2010, we learnt a small piece of choreography from Deborah Hay’s work ‘Fire’. The very first choreographic instruction was:

‘Take 6 steps into the light, without taking a step’.

Hay’s Koan style instructions often create perceptual and imaginative dilemmas of grand proportions. The group of dancers and myself included, grappled with the instruction. Some diving into it and embracing the absurdity, while others encumbered by the riddle, awkwardly dealt with the instruction in some way or another. Neither group was better or worse, or right or wrong. In Hay’s practice, ‘My perception is the dance’ is the fulcrum to which all other instructions seem to stem from. The instructions have been crafted to unhinge preconceived ideas of what it is to do something. In this case, it was to ‘take a step’, a seemingly mundane task. Drobnick clarifies Hay’s approach insofar that:

‘In Hay’s usage, seemingly common terms such as ‘awakeness’, ‘positionlessness’, ‘listening’, or ‘returning’ bear intentionally deflected meaning that seek to direct the actions of performers without overdetermining the outcome, instruct while stimulating creative thought, and critically challenge physical and mental habits that diminish the potential of the body. The discourse that Hay provides is deceptively simple and oftentimes paradoxical, yet it effectively opens up possibilities for experiments in selfhood and performance.’

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30 Ros Warby workshop intensive October 2010 with a group of 16 dancers, Dancehouse, Victoria
Although it does seem that Hay’s approach aims to undo ideas of dance, Warby says in an interview with Sally Gardner and Elizabeth Dempster that ‘I don’t know if Deborah asks you to ‘undo the dance’, but she would invite you to engage with your perceptive awareness’\textsuperscript{32}. ‘Open practice’, the term used to describe working in the studio without a choreographic framework, is defined by attempting to bring the body into a state of question. This state encourages the whole body to be ‘processing nonsensical questions or instructions that are impossible to achieve, but the sheer attempt of them is what stimulates this performative state, and what performance material then manifests’\textsuperscript{33}.

The language and nuances of Hay’s performance practice has been fertile ground in exploring my own choreographic territory. A statement that Warby articulated in relation to the act of dance as being ‘committed to the daily practice of playing awake – a perpetual perceptual exercise, a constant state of inquiry’\textsuperscript{34} has inspired me to try and be rigorous in my own choreography. The instructions and statements of Hay’s performance practice as I experienced via Warby hovers in the background of my work and I regularly drew upon them to dig deeper into an idea. The instructions function like a set of tools much like Rosalind Crisp’s, where certain interventions can be called upon when needed.

There is something refreshing and liberating to be told to start in the middle of the dance. As performers and dancers we are primed and trained to understand the beginning, middle and end. Permission to cut loose the habitual gearing up and the winding down of a choreographic sequence invites a lateral point of view within choreography and asks us to question the act of dancing. It shines a light on those habits that become so ingrained we are not even aware of them.

Hay’s performance practice invites us to actively participate in the process of forming, re-forming, re-arranging and re-imagining our perceptual experience. Our perceptual experience is constantly emerging at an impossible pace. How can I be inside this experience and serve the choreography? It is a juggling act, as I have often heard it described by choreographers Ros Warby and Helen Herbertson. The choreography is a modulation between the various choreographic and perceptual elements. I can turn up the volume on an aspect such as the musicality, but not at the expense of losing a sense of

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ros Warby workshop intensive October 2010 with a group of 16 dancers, Dancehouse, Victoria
where I am in space. Another apt description that Ros Warby uses is the ‘ping pong’, we constantly shift from one aspect to another, although we are attempting to hold many balls up at once.

Hay’s choreographic approach is a continuous re-imagining of what choreography is and can be. The strategies attempt to break down what could be considered to be an inclination towards the reproductive imagination, being the realm of habit and memory. Shifting from a reproductive mode of operating towards actively engaging with the capacity for the imagination to inspire new possibilities corresponds with Kant’s notion of the productive imagination. Hay and Kant’s notions suggest that our experience is reciprocal in nature and that we have the capacity to be actively engaged with the perceptual and imaginative experience.

The questions of what choreography can be and situating the role of the imagination is expanded significantly by the ideas presented via Lennon and through the work of Hay, Crisp and Warby. The territory of un-doing the dance and my notions of what constitutes choreography has been and continues to be fertile thinking ground, while the philosophical frameworks allows me to contextualize the research. What stands out for me in relation to Kant and Hay’s key ideas is that the embodied imagination is always emerging. Within my own practice the dance and choreography attempt to harness this continuously unfolding event.
Chapter 2: The interplay between the imaginary and the real

i. Shifting between the real and the imaginary in performance

There is something about landing on a particular image or imaginary realm that has often allowed for a distinct shift to occur for me performatively. This landing is accompanied by a sense of being 'located' and I have a clearer capacity in knowing where I am navigating from choreographically. As Lennon describes the ‘images are the vehicles for such affect, the way in which it is given form’ and through this the choreography, performance and the experience begin to be contained within particular imaginary impressions that may become imbued with a specific feeling tone.

Within the choreography there is a fluid shifting back and forth between the real, the imagined and the spaces in between. The physical reality of being in the body and its relationship to space, place and time, intermingles with the less tangible aspects of interior experience to create the basis for choreographic expression. The dimension of the real and the imaginary as discussed so far really sit alongside one another. They are fluid in relationship, one looping in with the other. Choreographically and performatively I have the agency to construct and create using the malleability of the perceptual and imaginative realm. This may include shifting perspectives, such as taking a subjective or objective point of view, in a real or imagined way.

The negotiation that occurs within a performance context between what is real and present, to what is hidden and imagined, can be used to create choreographic tension. This can simply emerge through the effort involved in the attempt to track what is occurring imaginatively, physiologically, spatially and/or emotionally. It is these multiple threads that can contribute to create a sense of richness within the performance.

An Australian theatre maker Bagryana Popov, in a lecture on her process of making articulated the various aspects of performance eloquently. She described them as ‘The 3 Planes’ that we work with in performance. These planes referred to are the following:

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35 I attended a series of workshops with Bagryana Popov at the University of Melbourne, VCA, in 2012.
1. The real – the body, the space, the room and the relationship to the space.
2. Personal physical memory and personal experiences.
3. Expression of the other - the imaginative dimension.

The real refers to what is tangibly there in the actual moment, what is present and can be perceived. Personal physical memory and personal experiences, rather self-explanatory, is our personal histories. These histories can be seen to be stored on a physical and cellular level, referring essentially to body memory. Our personal experiences can filter through in a number of ways, through recalling the actual experience or re-remembering the memory (perhaps in an altered way). What and how much can be recalled is also another dimension to the process. Perhaps it is the visual details of the memory that stand out, for example, what I was wearing. Alternatively it may be the smell of fried chicken that really brings back the sensorial impression of a particular point in time. Often memory appears in fragments and there are gaps that need to be filled or imagined. The expression of other encapsulates this imaginary dimension. In Popov’s words, in creating work for the theatre we are in a process of ‘summoning the world to us’. This ‘summoning’ can be likened to Kant’s concept of synthesis whereby we experience the inherent depth that is made available via the imagination. Popov’s ‘summoning’ indicates a rather active involvement that articulates how we make the ‘invisible’ visible.

The relationship between the 3 planes allows for choreographic layering to occur. It describes a process where these elements co-exist and intersect. The score ‘Maria’ from Small Deaths eventually became based on the premise of not being able to move off the spot. This constraint enabled me to render some of the physical material that had emerged through previous experimentation and I worked towards creating a choreography that had the same vital energy of travelling through space but that did not move off the spot. Choreographically this resulted in a sequence that built in momentum, gathered through the repetition and the increasing urgency of these repeated gestures.

The real captured in this example is largely based upon the spatial relationship that my body had in time. My physical experience would shift as the score progressed and I would become increasingly fatigued and challenged by the repetition. In the development of the score a personal dream emerged. This dream became a container for the score, and within it many other images arose. As the score built I wanted to create a sense of continuous images materializing and dissolving. This sense of colliding and merging of different
images became an important part of building urgency and crowding within the score. The dream itself is part of the imaginary dimension, yet there were images within the dream that lent itself to personal memory. There was a merging and intermingling of what was real and remembered to what was imagined, through gestural sequences in the score where I would go under a huge wave, hold a small baby, or pull on a heavy rope.

This score starts to illustrate the 3 planes in a choreographic context. The relationship between the real, imagined and personal dimension is always in play, and this can be drawn upon to create rich choreographic possibilities.

ii. Field of awareness

The field of awareness may be described as the spectrum of one’s perceptual and imaginative capacity. The concept ‘field of awareness’ has emerged from my choreographic practice. It simply refers to the ability to amplify or diminish our attention to what is present. For example, the imagination enables us perceptually to find a singular point of focus. Let’s imagine a wildflower from a visual point of view. Firstly, you might notice the flower amongst many other flowers. Once you settle on one particular flower the details come into the foreground; the size of the petals, how many petals there are, the shifting shades of colour, the tiny little hairs on each petal, the texture of the centre. This process of zooming into the specific and the detailed is to take a microscopic point of view.

Even though the field of awareness narrows significantly in order for this to happen, the perceptual acuity becomes sharpened and magnified. The components make the bigger picture come into focus and what may have been invisible becomes vivid and pronounced. Importantly, this process of narrowing the field of awareness is possible with any of the senses. I might notice the sounds and/or tactility of my fingers tapping the keyboard, or the lightness of my breath, but then my attention might also be drawn to the bird song out my window or the low rumbling of nearby traffic. My attention could shift amongst these possibilities or hear them simultaneously. I could continue to take my attention further and further afield – challenging myself to hear as far away from my immediate surroundings as possible. It can be truly incredible what you might hear if you actually pay attention. On the other hand the ability to block out sounds or for it to become a background noise is absolutely essential, particularly if you live near a very busy road or a train station.
This ability to be selective in where our attention is directed refers to the agency and intentionality one might use in everyday life but that is appropriated significantly during choreographic practice. The somatosensory faculties arise from the physiological and kinesthetic sensibilities; spatial awareness, touch, pressure, pleasure/pain, temperature and movement. In the choreographic score Giant that has been mentioned, the field of awareness is closed down to imagine the visceral in tiny increments of movement. For example, part of the score is to begin by attending to the action of my little finger and the pressing down of my kidneys. I then continue to track the flow on effect of this action, such as the sensation created down through the hip, the leg, and all the way to my foot. This score started from a microscopic point of view that eventually opened out to become larger in perception but also in actual size of movement.

It is interesting to note that this spectrum is not absolute and fixed. For example, when I shift the field of awareness from the entire room and my body within that space, to just the immediacy of my body, the spectrum also shifts. My body becomes the macro whereas it had previously been part of the micro landscape in relation to the room. The spectrum can also go in the opposite direction by continuously opening out awareness. This may include other people, objects, space, sounds and then attempting to go beyond what I can actually see, the spaces outside the room, the sky above me, the suburb I am in, the city, the country, the surrounding body of water, the entire planet, etc, etc. A distinction that can be drawn by the perceptual field of awareness is that it is bound by what is real whilst the imaginative field of awareness is not.

Kant posited that the imagination was integral to the experience of perception and that the imaginary provides the texture of the real\(^6\). To support this claim, Lennon turns to the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Jean-Paul Sartre. Merleau-Ponty is well known for his work on the theory of perception and for introducing an embodied way of being into philosophical discourse. He is less known for developing a theory of the imagination, contained within his work on understanding perception.\(^7\)

\(^6\) Lennon, Imagination and the Imaginary, 50.
Merleau-Ponty’s theory of perception developed in his seminal work *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) built upon the theories of Edmund Husserl, the founder of the school of phenomenology. Husserl intended to develop an understanding of the world not through explaining it as the mathematical based sciences had done but through attempting to describe the world as it unfolded in its felt immediacy. Phenomenology is known as the science of experience. ²³⁸ It also seems important to mention here that as an authority on body-based research Merleau-Ponty is as Richard Shusterman declares something ‘like the patron saint of the body’²³⁹. Shusterman states that despite the work of other great thinkers regarding the body, such as Diderot or Nietzsche, the realm of championing the ‘body’s primacy in human experience and meaning’ really belong to Merleau-Ponty.⁴⁰

Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the imagination became more explicit in his later works particularly in his final work *The Visible and The Invisible* (1968). This work places the imagination on an equal footing with perception and is revelatory in its insight where ‘the imaginary is already woven into the very texture of the perceptual world’⁴¹. The ‘imaginary texture of the real’ refutes the understanding of the image as a faded copy of the actual perception and that the imaginary stands in opposition to the real.

Merleau-Ponty had mixed assessments of the research conducted by Sartre on the same subject matter. Sartre opposed Kant’s view of ‘the imaginary texture of the real’ however Merleau-Ponty supported it as well as grounding our embodied place within it through the ‘the shape of the body echoing the shape of the world’⁴² – an understanding of the corporeal gestalt that underpinned our experience and understanding of the world. As Lennon states ‘the imaginary texture involves a gestalt, a schema or organizing form’. Gestalt refers to the interrelationship that exists within the corporeal world and ‘emerges from a creative interplay between corporeal subjects and the world within which they are placed’. ⁴³

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⁴¹ Ibid.
⁴² Lennon, "The Imaginary Texture of the Real: Merleau-Ponty on Imagination and Psychopathology,” 90.
⁴³ Ibid., 52.
Sartre and Merleau-Ponty had remarkably similar phenomenological accounts of perceptual experience however Sartre differed in his views regarding the relationship between perception and the imagination. Sartre questioned whether perception was able to provide us with knowledge and whether perceptual experience was indeed a direct relationship with the world around us or based on assumptions.\footnote{Jean-Paul Sartre, \textit{The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination}; ed. Revised by Arlette Ekaim Sartre (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), xxiii.} This concern attempted to address the dilemma of whether we are indeed able to determine what is real and not real through the faculty of perception. In order to support this view, Sartre used the example of hallucination and the possibility that they could seem like perceptions.\footnote{Ibid.} Sartre argued that the imagination was more often ‘experienced as a creative act’ and although ‘images may arise unbidden... they are not mistaken for perceptions’.\footnote{Ibid.}

This view positions perception as that which involves an object that is real and present and the imagination that would place that object as a ‘nothingness’ meaning an absence of actual presence.\footnote{Ibid., xxiv.} This is one of the key differences between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, as Merleau-Ponty theorized the imaginary as integral to perception of the real and as an inherent depth in the perceptual world.

Merleau-Ponty builds upon the insights of Kant in the Phenomenology of Perception by developing language and understanding around the imaginary. He introduces the terms visible and invisible which reflect and resonate with Sartre’s terminology of ‘the present and absent, being and nothing, the perceived and the imagined’.\footnote{Ibid., 45.} ‘The imaginary is not the freely postulated irreality which Sartre suggests but the latent depth in the perceived world. Pregnancy is again the recurrent metaphor. The visible is pregnant with the invisible. The invisible is not the non-visible. It is made manifest through the visible, giving it immense latent content of the past, the future and the elsewhere, which it announces and which it conceals’.\footnote{Ibid., 45.}
Lennon clarifies that what Merleau-Ponty offers here is an alternative to the binary opposition of perception and imagination and instead offers an account that encompasses both of these elements in the concept of the ‘visible as in-visible’\textsuperscript{50}.

iii. The nature of perception

David Abrams points out in *The Spell of the Sensuous* (1996) that the body became increasingly prominent in Husserl’s work as ‘it is as visible, animate bodies that other selves or subjects make themselves evident in my subjective experience, and it is only as a body that I am visible and sensible to others. The body is precisely my insertion in the common, or intersubjective, field of experience’\textsuperscript{51}. Despite the prominence that he allocated to the body Husserl was unable to abandon his earlier work that posited the self as a transcendental ego, whereby continuing to place the body as a somewhat separate entity and it is this ‘disembodied, transcendental ego that Merleau-Ponty rejects’. Merleau-Ponty speculated that:

‘If it is the body that alone enables me to enter into relations with other presences, if without these eyes, this voice, or these I would be unable to see, to taste, and to touch things, or be touched by them – if without this body, in other words, there would be no possibility of experience – the body itself is the true subject of experience.’ \textsuperscript{52}

It was a radical line of thinking as many of us have become used to the idea that our ‘self’ is something other and beyond the body – the self is an entity that may continue to exist beyond our corporeal existence.

I want to divert momentarily to an idea suggested by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen about what she describes as the ‘dynamic activeness of perceiving’\textsuperscript{53}. Cohen states that movement itself is a form of perception and more specifically that movement is:

\textsuperscript{50} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{51} Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*, 44.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid., 45.
‘the first perception to develop and therefore the most important for survival; that as each experience sets a baseline for future experiences, movement helps to establish the process of how we perceive; and that how we perceive movement becomes an integral part of how we perceive through the other senses’.\textsuperscript{54}

Cohen establishes here the very fundamental nature of movement and the body’s relationship with the world. She suggests that it is this relationship that determines how we go on to develop our future perceptions which are built from the moment we are born and begin to navigate the world. This aligns with Merleau-Ponty’s understanding of perception and Abrams describes this reciprocity as ‘a silent conversation that I carry on with things, a continuous dialogue that unfolds below my verbal awareness’.\textsuperscript{55}

Merleau-Ponty conceived and proposed that the creativity and intuitive capacity of the human intellect was something that existed at ‘the most immediate level of sensory perception’\textsuperscript{56}. This suggested that the sensing body is not a pre-programmed machine but that its actions and intentions are continuously shifting and changing in relation to the world around. Abrams refers to the genetic predisposition of the spider and its wondrous capacity to build complex webs in a multitude of environments with so many variables and he challenges the idea that this behavior as often thought by many scientists as to be pre-programmed through its genes. Rather he suggests that although a spider will undoubtedly be endowed with an in-depth genetic inheritance; ‘they could hardly have determined in advance the exact distances between the cave wall and the branch that the spider is now employing as an anchorage point for her current web, or the exact strength of the monsoon rains that make web-spinning a bit more difficult on this evening’\textsuperscript{57}.

Abrams concludes that despite any genetic predisposition that may determine one’s behavior this will always be in relation to the present moment and the unique circumstances of that time and place. This demands the capacity to orient oneself in a way that is both receptive and spontaneously creative in adjusting one’s behavior according to present circumstances.

\textsuperscript{54} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., 49.
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 50.
'It is this open activity, this dynamic blend of receptivity and creativity by which every animate organism necessarily orients itself to the world (and orients the world around itself), that we speak of by the term "perception". 58

Merleau-Ponty insisted that perception was always from somewhere, and perspectival by nature and that the body is the place where perceptual experience always begins.59 The participatory nature of perception is considered to be central and through the act of perceiving I enter into a symbiotic relationship with what is being perceived. Thus far in this dissertation perception has been referred to largely within visual terms however it is important to mention that perception involves all the senses and that perception really refers to the inter-relationship and synthesis of all of the body's senses.

As is evident through Merleau-Ponty’s postulations our interaction and being with the world is a weaving back and forth between the past, present and future, with the body at the centre of all real and imagined experience. Perhaps more importantly is that ‘the invisible is something that is offered to our senses, but not as a positivity and not determinately. We are creatively involved in bringing it to expression, in gesture, in language, and in works of art60. This suggests the interactive process of taking up, revealing of, and the discovering of form made manifest through various mediums, being the body, clay, wood, paint, etc.

In conclusion, the imaginary (the invisible) according to Merleau-Ponty is integral to our perceptual experience of the world and is the animating force that allows the gestalt of the world to be revealed and experienced. This notion of the invisible as the latent depth that is always present as a field of possibilities will be followed throughout chapter 3 as the force or electric charge that enables multiplicity and complexity to emerge within choreographic practice.

58 Ibid.
60 Lennon, Imagination and the Imaginary, 46.
Chapter 3: Choreographic practice, performance & the imagination

i. Working with images in performance

The problem of working with images and the body is that there is a tendency to think about images as being visually representative. This can be seen as a product of a world saturated with the experience of images as external representations. The word image is generally understood to involve a definition of a visual representation of an object with a similar likeness, such as would be caught by the lens of a camera or a mirror. This definition is based upon the idea of an image being representational and a replica of something other, rather than of itself.

As discussed so far, through dancing, images emerge through various ways that can then become choreographic material to be mined for artistic and expressive possibilities. Articulating how images arise and from where, can appear to be somewhat of a mystery. In this chapter I will be attempting to look at how the imaginary is embodied and emerges within choreographic practice to further appreciate the complexity of working with images when dancing.

Choreographically, images can be thought of quite literally or approached conceptually. For example, a choreographic instruction such as ‘dropping a light bulb down through the body’ could be translated quite literally and I could attempt to convey a light bulb through trying to replicate the shape, or through demonstrating the action of turning on a light bulb. Alternatively I could draw on the abstract properties of the image, such as the imagined heat or warmth, the fragility of the glass sphere, the sparking of electrical wiring, etc. As becomes quickly apparent through this brief explanation, steering away from representing an image opens up almost limitless possibilities of how an image can be worked with. I could use the shape of the light bulb to create a spatial pathway or as a metaphor for the choreographic trajectory. I could choose to work with the inherent textural qualities of the light bulb, inspired by the wire, glass, and metal fitting. I could experiment with the idea of light itself, the possibility of beams, shards, and flooding. This process can continue to open out, before landing on a spectrum of possibilities that then become the choreographic palette for a score.
Through my dancing, an embodied understanding of working with images is one where an image is no longer just an idea that exists only conceptually or as a mental representation but has bodily ramifications and expression. It is understood through the body itself and this is experienced as a complex inter-relational process between mind/body/environment. Warby describes it this way:

‘Putting it into words feels like I’m undoing the complexity of that process. The only way I can work with those kind of simplistic images in performance is if there is a sophisticated layering occurring ... to be with the image or instruction and out of it and combining it with other images at the same time ... I’m being constantly available at every moment to impact upon my perception – whether they’re from the audience, the space, the instructions or my imagination’61

Warby refers to how working with images may appear to be very simplistic, however it is the layering and the building of the choreography that gives it complexity. Within my own practice the layering often includes an initial process of identifying the perceptual and imaginative material at play. Once these layers are clear enough there is the space to weave, modulate, foreground or diminish the elements that then compose the choreographic score. Imagery, movement, sound, breath, space and instructions, become the building blocks for creating the bigger picture. This is part of the creative process and also continues in performance as it is something done ‘live’ and in the moment. The elements become choreographic references that create a framework to navigate through. As Warby describes:

‘The choreography is the framework or score for the dancer to occupy, whether in solo or ensemble form. Choreography is a designed structure that can provide strong reference points for the dancer to dance from, or inside of, and not get lost in their own preoccupations. Choreography cannot be seen unless danced, as a song is not heard unless sung.’62

To ground the process of working with images in choreographic practice from a physiological perspective, neurologist Antonio Damasio’s work provides linguistic

61 Brannigan, "Ros Warby: Reframing the Dancing Body".
62 Ibid.
frameworks that move beyond the dominant mind/body dichotomies that are often problematic when discussing working with the imagination and perception. He articulates how images, image-making and the world of the imaginary, encompass far greater implications than simply seeing an image as a visual representation. He suggests that an image can be something that is not only seen, but also felt, smelt, and touched. By this he meant that an image could present itself via any of the senses, such as an aural image, a tactile image, or an image of a feeling state. In other words each of the senses has the capacity to produce images that are:

‘visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and somatosensory. The somatosensory modality....includes varied forms of sense: touch, muscular, temperature, pain, visceral, and vestibular’

This language that has been developed is particularly useful in discussing the practice of dancing as it enables a discussion around the mind and body as inter-dependent processes. This has significant implications for choreographic practice as it conveys the potential complexity at work in engaging with bodily processes that we mostly take for granted.

Shannon Rose Riley discusses the implications of Damasio’s theory of mind, that posits that rather than the mind as an object being located somewhere in the body, it is more specifically ‘an interactive relational process between brain, body and environment.’ Consequently, the mind is embodied and made up of the interaction between the organism in an environment that is specific to time and place. In *The Feeling of What Happens*, Damasio articulates that images are not located in the brain as inert and unified structures but that ‘all images are emerging and embodied’. An image could be of an object as diverse as a bodily ache, the sound of an airplane in the distance, or a feeling state such as bursting with excitement. In defining image Damasio saw it as a ‘mental pattern in any of the sensory modalities’. Riley describes the process in the production of images as follows:

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65 Ibid., 452.
‘the process of mind is constituted by what he calls multiple, parallel, converging streams, coded as images, which flow throughout the body and brain in response to the environment, forming multiple temporary feed-forward and feed-back projections’.

The images themselves are considered to demonstrate a preference towards or away from the object (giving it its affective quality) as well as the physical traits of the object itself. The construction of image making is seen to be a constant and ongoing process that never really stops during the hours that we are awake and even continues during our sleep through the process of dreaming. A key term that Damasio coined was that images could be seen as ‘the currency of our minds’. If images are considered the currency we are in constant engagement with, then it seems that Damasio’s framework supports the notion that the imagination is inherent to the way we experience the world.

Riley distinguishes the two kinds of images that Damasio differentiated between. Firstly, he described “perceptual images” as those developed through perceiving in the moment. Secondly, he articulated the term “recalled images”, to include images that have been imagined or created such as mythical creatures like a unicorn or memory images such recalling the saltiness of sea air.

I am seated at a desk, reading. I can feel the texture and shape of the chair underneath me. Although I cannot see the chair underneath me, its vivid orange color, is still present, in its absence. There are various objects around me. My desk is cluttered with books, papers and pens. I can hear the sound of the train in the distance and my partner chatting in the next room. I occasionally look out the window. The light falls softly on the tree outside. I sit cross-legged which is starting to give me an achy knee.

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68 Damasio, The Feeling of What Happens, 319.
This writing excerpt provides an example of sensory information being perceived and the consequent images that are formed. This type of perceiving is a description of perceptual images\(^\text{69}\).

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\text{My mind may turn elsewhere as I drift into thinking about what I will have for dinner tonight, then to a troubling conversation I had earlier with my partner, or some upcoming travel plans.}
\]

This drifting from the past, to the future and back to the present and their accompanying associated images ‘are known as recalled images, so as to distinguish them from the perceptual variety.’\(^\text{70}\) Important to note here that recalled images also refers to events not yet happened in the future.

Damasio captures the complexity of image making beyond the visual through the concept of perceptual and recalled imagery. This provides a much broader understanding of what is occurring within the choreographic process. It has often felt overly simplistic and reductive to describe a choreographic score as being based upon a piece of poetic text about fireflies. It immediately feels limited and reduced to the image itself. Despite the essence of the score being captured in this description, the process is more layered and indicative of an inter-relational process happening between mind, body and environment. Damasio’s broad definition of what constitutes ‘image-making’ opens up the possibilities of all of our senses as integrated in the process of experiencing the world.

The primary line of thought throughout the discussion on how images work in choreographic practice is grounded in the idea that there is a continuous flowing interaction that occurs between the brain, body and environment. Returning to the idea that the actual ‘process of the mind is constituted by multiple, parallel and converging streams, coded as images, which flow through the body’\(^\text{71}\) capture this interactive and complex process. The idea that the mind is coded as images suggests that on the one hand images are simply the way that we interact with the world and secondly that the imagination itself is constantly and always on the brink of emergence. In many ways it suggests that imagining is a way of being in the world.

\(^{70}\) Ibid., 96-97.
\(^{71}\) Riley, “Embodied Perceptual Practices: Towards an Embrained and Embodied Model of Mind for Use in Actor Training and Rehearsal.” (Need a page number here???)
What can be concluded here, is that dancing and choreographing is a practice that encompasses working with images in multiple and varied ways. This includes the possibility of working with images in the limited but traditional understanding of the word, as a visual representation. This understanding enables a scaffolding to hang choreographic practice to include multiple ways of engaging with the imaginary, not only through visual representation but to include all of the senses. It suggests that through the imagination the potential to understand the depth of the world is made possible and is in itself a way of perceiving. Damasio’s theories ground our imaginative and perceptual experiences through the field of neuroscience while developing key terms of understanding that is in itself poetic in nature. Lastly, his broad concept of imagery being a ‘currency’ that we communicate and understand the world with also mirrors the potential depth and complexity of using imagery in a choreographic context.
ii. **The Poetic Imagination: space, place & time**

'The poetic image is a sudden salience on the surface of the psyche, the lesser psychological causes of which have not been sufficiently investigated....The poetic image is not subject to an inner thrust. It is not an echo of the past. On the contrary: through the brilliance of an image, the distant past resounds with echoes, and it is hard to know at what depth these echoes will reverberate and die away.'

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Working on Cockatoo Island became a significant period of creative development for the work Small Deaths. I was part of a 10-day development period which then led to the 2-day Underbelly Festival where the artists had the opportunity to show their work-in-progress. Cockatoo Island is off the harbour of Sydney, Australia, and was originally used as a convict outpost and gradually converted to a Naval Dockyard in 1913. It has since been converted to a tourist destination and regularly used for art festivals and events.

Cockatoo Island in its entirety has a majestic sense of faded grandeur and the traces that have been left behind can be clearly felt, seen, and smelt. The numerous industrial buildings on the island are vast, cavernous and striking in scale. On arrival to the island, one of the first features that you see is the large face of granite rock that has been cut through to make way for a tunnel from one end to the other. Being an island, the buildings are surrounded by water and seagulls roam freely.

During the creative development, I worked mainly with one of my key collaborators Martyn Coutts (the dramaturge and video designer). I also worked remotely with my composer Kelly Ryall, and Mischa Baka documented the process. Martyn and I were assigned to the building B142 that in the context of the other buildings, medium sized, however, it was still fairly large. It was a space within a space, therefore the windows of B142 looked into other rooms. The surrounding rooms had large windows where light would pour in, however B142 did not receive any direct light which was preferable due to the use of projection. The main feature of this space was a great archway at one end of the room. The concrete floor was covered in a thick slick of grime and oil. The walls were a combination of steel beams, arched windows, decaying concrete, and peeling paint. The space was physically and texturally cold. The concrete was dense, the metal pillars were rusting and the oil-covered ground was gravelly.

The impact of working site-specifically facilitated a period of development that was rich in perceptual and imaginative possibilities. Choreographically the site was inspiring although challenging to work in, with the concrete floors and cold winter conditions. There was a palpable sense of the imaginative reverberations of the space, alongside the actual historical, social and architectural dimensions. By responding, listening and being with the space on Cockatoo Island there was a transformation in my relationship to the
choreographic work. The choreographic relationship was underpinned by my reading of the affective qualities of the space, objects, and real and imagined histories.

In the language of Merleau-Ponty the idea of the invisible in the visible became central to the choreographic inspiration inside the space. A key part of the choreography was a process of imagining and re-imagining what was physical and present as well that which was immaterial and intangible.

The architectural dimensions and qualities of the building B142 became the first point of call for developing the score Obstacle Course. The spaciousness and length of the site was a significant feature and traversing from one end to the other, heading towards the archway, became the underlying spatial trajectory. Choreographically I started by responding to the structural elements such as the lines created through the large pillars and beams. The architecture of the body tried to meet the architecture of the space through variations of instructions such as:

1. Draw a line from one point of the room to another

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73 Lennon, Imagination and the Imaginary, 32.
2. Absorb a line in the room, take it into the body and move from here
3. Hook a part of the body onto a feature of the room
4. Experiment with the texture of gravel, concrete, metal, air
5. Allow the sounds of the space, the echoes, the birds and other people, to inform how and when I move

Moving, being and becoming familiar with the space became a process of collecting material for a choreographic palette. All of the perceptual elements such as the smell of the water, the texture of the oil and grime on the floor, and the dampness in the air became possible choreographic grist for the mill.

B142, being such a large space within an even larger room, resulted in exquisite acoustics. Sweeping feet on gravel, the occasional clunk of metal, bird songs, and the distant sound of other people working or wandering created its own composition. Sounds were close and then they were far. I could infer spatiality by what I could and could not hear. The seagulls would circle and hover around the edges of the water and their caws would echo if caught in the walls of the building.
There was an intrinsic depth about the space. This felt to be a combination of the architectural grandeur as well as the social and historical background that seemed somehow embedded into the very walls of the building and surrounds. This rich perceptual landscape that I was working in, also lent itself beautifully to imagining in and through. The imagination’s capacity to synthesise and amalgamate perceptual feedback to intuit beyond what is actually present became integral to the choreographic process.

I could not be sure of exactly what the space had been used for but there were clues everywhere. The ground was soaked in oil, the apparent grimy and sooty remnants of large machinery. I imagined the machinery to be constructed with various cogs, turning wheels, rubber, metal sheets, chains, levers, etc. These imagined objects became an essential part of the score and led to the name ‘obstacle course’, as the essence of the score involved moving through these imagined objects. The imaginary objects were inspired by a large piece of machinery in the space adjacent to B142.

The choreography was developed using simple action based instructions, for example, I could hinge, join, mold to, sweep or jab to find my way through the imagined landscape. The score then became a folding in of the real and actual with the imagined objects. This
resulted in a collision between the imagined and real, stimulating the choreographic process via the possible imaginaries that could exist within the space.

The score actively engaged in a multi-sensorial way. For example, the sound composed by Kelly Ryall, was investigated in a number of ways beyond experiencing it aurally. This experience resonates with Damasio’s suggestion that each of the senses has the capacity to produce images. As a consequence, sound would not be limited to being experienced just through hearing. This proposition implies that sound may be experienced as an imagined texture or scent, as well as for its rhythmic possibilities.

The sound itself was composed using deep resonating bells that had an almost hypnotic quality to them and drove the overall sensibility for the entire score. That particular composition in the space B142 inspired me to experience the sound for its spatial and textural characteristics. The deeply resonant qualities inherent in the music echoed the largeness of B142 and filled the space with a dense, yet liquid like texture. The sound composition was integral to the way I experienced and choreographed through the space. Not only did the sound fill the space with its resonance it somehow worked to mirror the vastness of my imaginary interior landscape. It triggered a distinct personal relationship due to the combination of Ryall’s composition and its use of the spoken poetic text ‘firefly’. The movement palette was eventually comprised of language and choreographic hooks such as, smooth, circular arc, jab, and sweep. In addition rhythmic instructions such as fill up with stillness, or allow stillness to permeate the space, all become pieces in the overall choreography.

The language and description so far of the choreography sounds quite mechanical in a way, however, they simply are the building blocks to dive into the imaginative possibilities. Laying down this groundwork allowed me to create the structure to play with the less tangible aspects of the choreography.

Through working on Cockatoo Island I was reminded of Helen Herbertson and Ben Cobham’s Sunstruck. I saw the premier of this work at the 2008 Melbourne International Arts Festival. It was presented at the Docklands, an area which at that time was still much of a mystery to most. After the adventure of finding the enormous shed 4, the audience waited in a created foyer area. There was a round table with sake and green tea being served & the length of the shed is concealed via a large curtain. The beginning of the work
was the reveal of the space with the audience gradually being led towards a dimly lit circle of chairs.

The two performers, Nick Somerville and Trevor Patrick, both idiosyncratic and unique in their physicality and performance styles, moved through a series of almost vignette like sequences. The choreography whispered of memories embedded in the body, and the opening image of the light hitting Trevor Patrick’s face, bathing him in warmth and light, has stayed with me to this day.

The circular structure of the audience configuration that was contained through Ben Cobham’s lighting design and being surrounded by the dark cavern of the shed, created an intimate theatrical experience. This was despite the enormity of the space. The outside sounds of cars on the nearby freeway occasionally swooshing by, or the seagulls outside, fed in gently and seamlessly with the live cello and violin. Jana Perkovic ruminates over the work, saying:

‘The sea, I hear you smart kids wondering, is also present, if nothing in the seagull cries right before the end, the seagulls flying over the construction landscape outside our enormous shed. If we believe in Camus, and there is no reason not to, it is at this point that the absurd finality, limitedness, of bare existence makes peace with the immanent, and the two two-dimensional men merge with the world. There is, really, nothing more. Like that Japanese cottage in spring, like utsubo, a quality, greatly appreciated in Buddhism, of being empty in order to contain the immense, hollow as an ability to become full.”

Sunstruck created a space that hovered between the dream world and reality. It created the emptiness to dive into the realm of imagination, being triggered by the allusive suggestions of the performers and the impressionable ambience that was created by the overall work.

The similarities of working on Cockatoo Island can be drawn through the spaces themselves. Large, cavernous spaces that would not at first glance lend itself to exploring

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the intimate, yet somehow enhanced the fragility of being rather than diminished it. The filtering in of the sound of birds and the nearby water again became a link that took the performer and audience outside of their immediate surroundings by reminding them and providing glimpses of the world beyond the space itself. All of this created a sense of the intangible, of lingering and continuously emerging impressions, created through time, memory and the imagination.

I would like to finish this thought with a quote from Bachelard who suggested that through being in the space and imagining into it, allowed for an emergence of being that was about that particular place and time.

‘Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination.’

iii. The relationship between the epic and the intimate in performance

The relationship between the epic and intimate is another aspect that has been fundamental throughout the development of Small Deaths and was particularly pronounced throughout the process on Cockatoo Island and became a feature of the work. On Cockatoo Island it was visible through design-based choices such as:

1. The contrast between the live body and the largeness of the projected body
2. The smallness of the live solo body in relationship to the vastness of the actual space.

![Fig. 5. ‘10,000 Small Deaths’ (2013) Underbelly Festival. Image by Mischa Baka](image)

The relationship between scale and perspective was clearer on Cockatoo Island as seen in figure 5 where the live body is the bright pool of light in the archway. This was still apparent when the work shifted into the theatre space of B221 however it did change significantly simply due to the constraints of working in a smaller space. What did remain and carry through was this internal sense of relationship between the intimate and the epic – a key notion that I carried through the work. It became a thematic concern but also a mode of perception and imagining.
Working in a solo context lends itself towards exploring the intimate. It provides the ideal context to examine minute physical details and in performance it opens the possibility of guiding the viewer in the same way. In the framing of a solo performance there is already the proposition of an intimate experience as there is only one performer that you are viewing. The intimacy that is established within this singular relationship enables the viewer to be guided to moments that may be easily missed in the wash of perceptual and imaginative possibilities. Ros Warby says on solo performance that it ‘allows for a particular kind of focus and the chance to become familiar with a singular way of moving’ and that ‘it is difficult to see and sometimes to practice, such specificity in group choreography when the focus is often directed elsewhere.’

Fig. 6. 10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby

Through working on Cockatoo Island another piece of the choreographic puzzle emerged. This turned out to be the amplification of the intimate and detailed against the grandness of the space. Intimacy became something that could be perceived in relation to the epic. Small choreographic details were able to be absorbed in relation to the largeness of the space. It was used as a creative construct that was used choreographically as well as

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76 This refers specifically to working in the B221 theatre space where the context was more conventional as opposed to working on Cockatoo Island where the audience had agency in where and how they viewed/experienced the work.

77 Brannigan, “Ros Warby: Reframing the Dancing Body”.

inspiration for the overall design. The title ‘10,000 Small Deaths’ is telling in its seeming contradiction. There was a play on the tension between insignificance and profundity. The contrast between the urgency of life and its parallel banality and the inability to reconcile these two ends of the spectrum inspired the creative work.

As mentioned earlier the relationship between scale and perspective was much more pronounced on Cockatoo Island due to the change in scale of space from B142 to B221. Making the shift to working in the theatre space of B221 was a big jump from having the immediacy of B142 where a few of the key scores were developed. The choreographic process shifted from the immediacy of the space, to remembering, re-embodying and re-imagining the work in a new way and context. B221 is a traditional black box studio theatre that has its own merits but lacked the vast palette of sensorial feedback that was a rich part of working on Cockatoo Island. What did remain and carry through was largely the imaginative dimension of the choreographic material alongside the physical manifestations that were developed in relation to the space. The relationship between the epic and the intimate became much more about a choreographic sensibility as well as thematic interest. In addition, the overall sense of design between the live and projected body continued to respond to the notion of perspective.

I would like to use a score called Giant that was developed over a number of stages that appeared as the opening to Small Deaths to continue discussing the relationship between the epic and the intimate to flesh out the choreographic process. Giant emerged initially through a written task set by Prue Lang in a workshop at the VCA in 2012. The task was to write a 1-minute choreography that included the breath.

*I lie flat stuck on the ground. My entire back surface is magnetized. My body is as heavy and as wet as sand (slurpy breath). I try to peel off my fingers … forearm … upper arm. The air is thick and dense and my arm (quick slurp) is drawn back to the earth. (Long slow breath) I am furious. My blood simmers with rage. My head slowly lifts and rapidly gets sucked back down. (Rapid breathing) I break out in beads of sweat. I have managed to lift my entire upper body (deep breath). I am up on my elbows. I press up onto my hands, bend one knee (breath). I gradually make my way into a crouch (breath, groan). I am shaking softly and I slowly roll all the way up to standing.*
The text became a starting point and through embodying and experimenting with the text I became interested in the imagined vastness of the body's landscape. It felt endless and shifted seamlessly from the micro to the macro. A sense of the epic and immense nature of the body in all its microscopic details became enlarged through the focusing of attention.

I experimented with real and imagined time through tasks such as:

1. Resist moving for as long as possible
2. How slowly can I take to come up onto my forearm
3. Explore gravity through playing with the weight of my head

There was an overall temporal arc that drove the choreography from the minute and imperceptibly slow, to gradually growing larger, fuller and faster.

Perceptually this score was largely about the physical experience of lying on the ground and gradually peeling myself off the floor and being drawn back down by gravity and the repeated experience of this. I would always start by pressing down with the entire back surface of my body, creating a sense of being magnetized. The idea of being magnetized can be seen as a recalled response that was triggered by a conscious relationship to gravity.
The bodily felt experience of this repeated action created qualities that were dense, weighted and sinewy but also elastic.

Choreographically I was interested in reaching a particular point of tension before being released quite suddenly back to the ground. The image and experience of someone lying flat on their back having great difficulty getting off the ground has multiple and varied associations with the potential for meaning and context to continuously shift.

There were various recalled images that emerged through being with this score that were mainly imagined constructs of place and situation. At times I felt as if I was submerged deep into the earth, embedded in sludgy mud and that I was looking up through a long tunnel up to a small shard of light coming through the end as the hole opened up to the sky. As time went on I began to imagine that I was a giant lying on a beach shore, the tide just licking my body, the sand heavy and wet, with the sounds of the ocean rumbling. There was no decision in trying to stick with a particular imagined place but the key anchor was always about locating the body's felt experience at least to begin with. The image and the imaginary of being a giant emerged from that sense of the body being immense and endless.

As mentioned in chapter 2, the field of awareness was integral to this score. It is the field of awareness that enables a shifting from the microscopic to the macroscopic. Opening and closing down the field, essentially of perception, enabled me to either focus on the confines of my personal physical space all the way to the edges of the space and imagining beyond underneath and above me. Through my attention I was able to zoom into sensing how movement might feel before the moment actually began, attempting to listen in to the impulse. I am reminded here of a quote by Elizabeth Behnke who says that:

'Somehow the simple experiential move of consciously aligning with what is already going on anyway and gently illuminating it with awareness not only brings some clarity to the situation, but also eases it – loosening it up, as it were, the invisible lines of force that had set the situation up in just this way.'

78 Johnson, Bone, Breath, & Gesture, 239.
Behnke points towards the immediacy of experience and the capacity for our awareness to foreground details as well as diminish whatever barriers may be impacting our perceptual experience.

Choreographically in Giant I was working consciously with that sense of immediacy. I simply began by attending to the sensation of lying on the ground. I received the perceptual feedback of lying on the cool tarkett and felt the weight of my limbs. Alongside this, I imaginatively navigated through the viscera of my internal body, finding my way into the density of the organs and the pulse of blood and oxygen. I attempted to track the impulse of moving before actually initiating movement deep inside the belly. It was the mere thought that began to move its way through my body before it became actually visible in movement. Gradually, although still quite small, movement became more perceptible to the audience.

The attempt to hold onto this sense of the epic and the intimate simultaneously was mapped through the tracking of the physiological body, whilst simultaneously attempting to hold a view of the body from various perspectives, such as:

i. The body in relation to the entire room
ii. The bodily imaginary of a giant with heavy, wet limbs lying on the shore of a beach
iii. The bodily imaginary of deep, internal viscera (such as the kidneys and the blood pulsing through the veins)

What we return to here is the notion of multiple, parallel and converging streams, Damasio’s concept of the interwoven nature of mind/body and environment, experienced through embodied images. In this context the perceptual and recalled images are coinciding with the shifting relationship between the epic and the intimate. The perceptual anchors the choreography in physiological detailing, for example, the initiation of movement, and the weight of the head. It also becomes the framework to explore the intimacy of the subtle workings of the body. This is while simultaneously being charged with the notion of the epic, as tiny choreographic details are amplified through attention, resulting in the magnification and enlarging of the smallest of moments.

This amplification also became a design and choreographic choice that was echoed through the use of live video. The smallness of the live body could be read against the largeness and
distortion of the projected body. The nature of the epic was contained through this attempt to enlarge my perceptual capacity and to reveal details of bodily occurrence that could easily be missed or brushed off as insignificant.

Through enlarging the perceptual imagery, I was engaged in developing multiple bodily imaginaries. I was the live body there in the space and the imagined body. The imagined body or bodies was one that shifted between the giant seen from above, the giant experienced from within, and the smallness of the live body in relationship to the largeness of the mediatized and projected body.

The subsequent relations that existed between these various possibilities created a complex choreographic palette for exploring the fine line between the epic and the intimate. It was a choreographic trajectory made apparent through the movement development and the overall score pathway. It also became a significant part in the choices made in regards to the video design. Lastly, it was the conceptual idea that underpinned the affective qualities of the score and established the overriding arc of the entire work.
iv. Choreographic outcomes

There have been a couple of key choreographic methods that have emerged within my practice that I can identify. They are not necessarily new concepts, but framed within my own practice they took on a distinct focus and they may be of interest in the context of choreographic practice. They are outlined below:

1. Shifting points of view

I understood shifting points of view within some of my scores as a process of embodying conceptual material. This *processing* itself is important point here. Working with a score from multiple points of view opens up a dialogue between possible relationships and tensions existing between the image and body, or body and space. Within the score ‘giant’ as previously described the relationship between imaginative imagery and the spatial and physical dimensions were key to the aliveness of the score itself. Holding the tension between the subjective point of view, whilst imagining into the objective point of view (translated through the live video), created spatial, physical and imaginative relationships. This resulted in a strategy that became about negotiating and shifting between these different points of view.

2. Choreographic rendering

There are a couple of different aspects to the idea of ‘choreographic rendering’. Drawing from Damasio’s concept of images being the ‘currency of the mind’ opened up the premise that within an improvisational context, images are always available. The first part of this process involves being receptive to the arising of images themselves. Secondly, there is selecting, refusing, changing, resting or riding the image. This may happen very quickly or perhaps even imperceptibly or alternatively, the choice making could be much more deliberate.

In the case of the score ‘Maria’ I worked physically in the space for an extended period of time, until I rested upon a particular image of being rooted to the ground and trying to leap off, however, gravity was making this difficult for me and continued to pull me back. From this image, a series of images arose, almost like a flick book of images that would arise and leave the body. In playing with physical speed and duration of the score, the images began
to merge and collide, appearing and dissipating as soon as they arrived. This collision and merging of images within the body is what I am describing here as ‘choreographic rendering’. Through the compression of images I was left with just an impression of the original ideas.

3. Key image as the centre of a score

This is a central concept that emerges within my choreographic practice where usually one key image becomes the entry point into a score. This key image acts as the structure that allows for multiple images to arise from the key image itself. In addition, the key image becomes the point for divergence, departure and return, whilst being the anchor to which I can always return if required.

4. Holding multiple threads of attention

This is a strategy that is drawn from my main choreographic influences, Rosalind Crisp, Helen Herbertson and Ros Warby. The aim is to hold multiple threads of attention, physically, spatially, environmentally and imaginatively at any one time. The key thing to note here though is that this holding of attention does not necessarily translate as scattered focus (although it could), but usually serves to sharpen the choreographic lens by having a broad awareness while simultaneously attending to the choreographic instruction and/or image at hand.
Conclusion: Imagining the world into being

Prior to undertaking this research I understood that the imagination was an integral part of how I navigated choreography, but not necessarily how or why this was so. In my choreographic practice I would seek out that moment where something would ‘click’. The click was like a switch being turned on and I would instantly feel a deeper connection to my embodied experience. The effort to engage completely with my entire cellular experience would allow for tiny shifts to take place all the time, and every now and then there would be a significant shift – although it really was a process of all the tiny shifts that enabled the bigger shifts to happen. My research has really been driven to unpack and understand more about what was happening during those subtle changes that would move the choreography into a particular direction.

When the choreographic fire felt like it was turned on and functioning with full steam, I often felt like I was in a zone of effortless experience. I am reminded by one of Rosalind Crisp’s toolbox terms to be ‘looking through the window’. To be ‘looking through the window’ was to be so completely inside something, that the ‘I’ could stop navigating and allow the experience to unravel itself. This could only happen through the hours of work involved in laying down the groundwork to establish or again in Crisp’s words to be ‘saturated’ by the choreography. Being able to track choreographically within an improvisational score was to have experienced a choreographic idea so completely and from so many different angles that it could be forgotten in the moment. It was not forgotten in the sense that it was lost, but that it had become so engrained in my bodily self that I no longer needed the reference, yet it was there when I needed.

The focus throughout my process has largely been on the role of the imagination and the inherent complex relationships between the mind, body, and environment. This has been within the context of choreographic practice and as a consequence the ramifications have largely unraveled for choreography and dancing. Yet the impact of speculating that the imagination is interwoven into all interactions with the world suggests the poetic idea that we are in many ways imagining the world into existence.
Lennon says ‘the claim that our world is an imaginary world allows for the possibility of it being imagined in different ways, being open to alternative visions’\textsuperscript{79}. There is something inspiring and warming about the premise that our interaction with the world is malleable and full of possibility. Over time our habitual tendencies carve deep grooves that affect our capacity to respond to the world.

I like to think that the act of dancing contributes to our imagining of the world and to be in state of dance goes beyond what I do in the studio and in performance and some how gives us a window into what it means to be alive. Finally, that perhaps this window can inspire us to dig deeper into our experience and savor all its potential beauty, absurdity and sadness.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Fig.9.10,000SmallDeaths1stdevelopment2010ArtsHouse.png}
\caption{10,000 Small Deaths 1\textsuperscript{st} development (2010) Arts House. Image by Mischa Baka}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{79} Lennon, \textit{Imagination and the Imaginary}, 12.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1

List of scores within 10,000 small deaths in order of appearance

i. Giant
ii. Crown
iii. Maria
iv. Point Addis
v. Obstacle course
vi. Firefly
vii. 2D
Appendix 2: List of scores with images

i. Giant

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby
ii. Crown

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Mischa Baka

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby
iii. Maria

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby
iv. Point Addis

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby
v. Obstacle course

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby
vi. Glowfly

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby
10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby
10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby

10,000 Small Deaths (2014) VCA. Image by Jeff Busby
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