

The Right Unravelling Exploring The Synthesis Of Somatics, Martial Arts And Improvised Dance For Technique And Performance



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Abstract

Figure 1 The Right Unravelling, VCA (July 2015) Image: Jeff Busby

The research investigates the synthesis of somatic movement practices with performance based training forms, including martial arts, singing and percussion, to create a solo performance. Culminating in the work, The Right Unravelling, the research aims to discover a wide, specific and expressive movement vocabulary that can be used as the basis for sustained, continuous improvisational performance.

By drawing on diverse methodological theories to underpin the development of the research including Dialectics, Quantum Theory and Autopoiesis, the project develops a conceptual and practical approach to viewing working with choreography and improvisation as conscious movement choice making arising from somatic embodiment practices.

Within this context the title of both the research and performance, *The Right Unravelling*, can be seen as a practical metaphor for the development of the research itself, “unravelling” from inquiries and explorations that grew out of the simultaneous practice of diverse modalities.

The research is undertaken through four phases of the choreographic process. The first, synthesises experiential learnings from various somatic studies into one form; the second, applies this form to realise new developments in technical studies in martial arts and choreography; the third applies these new developments through improvisational practice with an awareness of the underpinning methodology as an influential agent in practice and performance; and the fourth recapitulates the lessons from the previous three

phases to drive the evolution of the research towards and within performance.

The research culminates in my solo performance work, *The Right Unravelling*, presented at Art Block 876, VCA Art School, Faculty of Fine Arts and Music, 2015, (see Appendix 1: Documentation of Creative Outcome) which draws together the research experimentation with the addition of rhythmic patterns and singing. At the meeting points between the research as technical discovery, improvisational practice, and as improvised performance, *The Right Unravelling* enacts a detailed exploration of the research themes. In this exploration, somatic synthesis, technique development, martial arts, percussion and singing are exposed and altered by the introduction of narrative and performance “presence” considerations.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

1. The thesis comprises only my original work towards the MFA thesis except where indicated.
2. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used.
3. The thesis is less than 20,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Z. Jones', written over a horizontal line.

Zachary Nicholas Jones
February 2019

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Introduction: Background To The Study

The research, *The Right Unravelling* began a process of discovering a wide, specific and expressive movement vocabulary that could be used as the basis for sustained, continuous improvisational performance. By working somatically the necessity arose to include a diversity of training influences.

I begin by backgrounding the journey that preceded this study and describe a moment of somatic realisation that lead directly to the current research. I then encapsulate the principles upon which the research currently stands and lay out a brief overview of each chapter.

The background to this research draws on my history of long term ongoing practice in different training forms as a dancer and martial artist; initially training in classical ballet¹ and later the traditional martial arts of Aikido² and Arnis.³

During my training in these forms, I was often instructed to relax but never shown how this relaxation could be achieved. Now and then things would just “work”, and after periods of intense practice and striving, suddenly I would “let go” and pirouette or execute a throw effortlessly.

Any attempt to reproduce this feeling of letting go, however, seemed to result in “sloppiness” and the complete opposite of the outcome I was seeking. I would then train harder and strive more vigorously, building more and more tension along the way, until once again a moment came when the build-up of striving and pressure became too much and I “forgot myself” and once more the technique was executed effortlessly and accurately.

Note on the use of the term technique

I have utilised the term technique to denote what I indicate as “traditional” training forms that require a visibly “correct” shape as well as efficiency of movement to delineate them from other training or performance modalities.

The Cambridge dictionary defines technique as “a way of doing something that needs skill”

¹ I began ballet at 8 Years old in 1986 studying Cecchetti ballet with Lorraine Blackburn and later trained at the Australian Ballet School graduating in 1997. From 1998 to 2001 I danced with Queensland Ballet Company.

² Aikido is a Japanese Martial Arts developed by founder Morihei Ueshiba in the early 1900s until his death in 1969. It draws on many traditional Japanese Samurai martial arts and emphasises redirecting the energy or force of an opponent in a circular fashion to control their joints or throw them. I studied extensively for 6 years in this art under Shihan Joe Thambu between 2004 and 2010.

³ Arnis is a traditional Filipino martial art that utilizes empty hand combat as well as weapons including sticks, knives and swords to defend against multiple opponents. I trained under Master Sir Jhoey Rodil in the Philippines in 2011.

Though the somatic forms which I describe as influencing my research throughout the thesis also share the Cambridge definition of technique I have chosen to think of them instead as methods which Cambridge lists as “a particular way of doing something.”

Though there is obvious skill involved in somatic learning and each form has its own parameters and pedagogy, in my development of this research it has served my own understanding to think of somatic disciplines as methods of “being and doing” and techniques as “appearing and doing.”

Throughout the thesis I use the terms method, practice and discipline when describing somatics and technique, or technical ,when referring to movement that also requires a visually distinguishable form.

The best exponents of what I have defined as technique practices, from my perspective, were able to reproduce advanced technical skills consistently and seemingly effortlessly. On enquiring as to how these results were achieved, the advice was to “just keep training hard” and it would “all come together.” However, this advice seemed contradictory, as I would then be told “to relax” as I was trying too hard, or on relaxing, I would be told to not be sloppy, to be precise. In other words, to train harder.

It was through these experiences of striving to achieve technical mastery that the first questions of the research arose. Somewhere between tension and relaxation was the “sweet spot” where perfection lay, yet glimpses of it only appeared sporadically, emerging from the body as natural expression. It was this natural expression that intrigued me. When I stopped trying and let go of striving the execution of movement “worked”. What was this mysterious way of working that allowed the efficient and correct execution of technique? It was not the technique itself, it was something else, an element emerging from the body and mind together. The search for this alternate element, the existence and expression of the organic living truth underneath technique, proceeding it, being it, encompassing it, and enabling its realisation and execution, led me to the study of somatics.

My study of somatics came about as a dancer on tour with Gavin Clarke’s A Country Dance project⁴ in 2008 I noticed that fellow dancer Alisdair Macindoe had an extraordinary capacity to move fluidly with ease and relaxation. There seemed to be no impediment to his intention

⁴ Gavin Clarke is an Australian choreographer and creator of Unwind, a Somatic method focusing on connective tissue integration. Our continued dialogue since 1998 has influenced the development of Path Wave, discussed in further chapters.

and embodied enaction of this intention in performance. It was as though his body was able to relax and yet stay alert and receptive to imaginative impulses. When I asked him how he was able to move in this way, he mentioned that his training with Wendy Smith⁵ in Ideokinetics⁶ and Skinner Releasing Technique⁷ based somatic work was partially how he was able to achieve this quality of movement. He also introduced me to the constructive rest position, where, lying supine, legs are bent, parallel and tied with a cloth, so they would not fall open and the arms are simply folded over the chest.

As I lay in this position, I felt tension releasing and draining out of my body, whilst my bones, particularly my shoulders and hips realigned. This was a feeling unlike any I had experienced. Without effort, actions were occurring in my body that allowed me to experience a better alignment. With no conscious volition on my part, I simply let my body rest in a position that made it easier to relax, observing great changes. I saw in a flash that this experience encapsulated the question of why things worked technically when I “gave up.” It was because in that moment, my body was in the right place to relax, and so the expression of technique from that position was able to be enacted effortlessly. Further to this, after 15 or 20 minutes of laying in constructive rest, I felt as though my pelvis sat on my thigh bones, my shoulder blades slid down my back and my collar bones spread to either wall, whilst my head simply floated above a dangling spine. I realised for the first time that alignment was only possible with release, and technique could only be executed effectively from a place where the bones were not being pulled out of their optimum range by superficial tension. In that moment, I committed to researching how release could be applied in every action and to different technical training modalities. This commitment

⁵ Wendy Smith is an Australian improvisational choreographer and somatic practitioner.

⁶ Ideokinetics is a branch of somatic studies founded by Mabel Elsworth Todd in the early 20th century. It aims to improve alignment, posture and ease of motion with the use of imagery following anatomical lines. Leading exponents are Lulu Sweigard, Barbara Clark, Irene Dowd and Andre Bernard. ⁷

Skinner Releasing Technique is a somatic based improvisational dance form developed by Joan Skinner. In the next chapter I discuss her work in detail.

⁸ Constructive Rest is a relaxation and alignment facilitation position common in Ideokinetics.

led me to explore somatic methods which included Body-Mind Centering,⁹ Continuum, Ideokinetics, Skinner Releasing Technique, Sensory Awareness,¹⁰ Breathexperience,¹¹ Structural Integration,¹² Feldenkrais Method¹³ and Alexander Technique¹⁴ as part of my investigation, and in Chapter One I describe in detail the methods drawn from the above list which most influenced the creation and direction of my research.

In this thesis I may seem to present the synthesised somatic outcome of this investigation as fully formed principals coherently depicting the essence of movement dynamics which then formed the basis of further choreographic investigations. However, the reader should be aware that this current understanding has been the result of many, many years of groping, hesitant exploration following threads and intuitions across a diversity of contemporaneously practised modalities. In time, I began to synthesise these somatic explorations into three principles I observed as universal and interchangeably occurring in every moment. This synthesis relied on the capacity to be simultaneously experiential/observational of innate physiological function, and participatory/intentional in terms of choice and direction making in improvised movement.

I came to refer to this synthesis as Path Wave Movement to indicate its fluid yet directional potential. The three principals of Path Wave Movement are as follows:

⁹ Body-Mind Centering, developed by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, is an experiential somatic method focusing on applied embodiment.

¹⁰ Sensory Awareness, a somatic method created by Charlotte Selver, focuses on deepening our awareness of our body and interaction with our environment by going deeper into direct perception of what our senses, in particular our sense of touch, are presenting to our attention.

¹¹ Breathexperience was developed by Ilse Middendorf as a way to naturally feel our breathing without the interference of technique or instruction.

¹² Structural Integration (SI) is a method of manual therapy and sensorimotor education that aims to improve biomechanical functioning through realignment of the human fascial network. It was developed by Ida Rolf.

¹³ The Feldenkrais Method was created by Moshe Feldenkrais as a way to reorganize connections between the brain and body and improve functional movement.

¹⁴ The Alexander Technique is a somatic method that aims to develop better alignment and avoid muscular tension. It was created by Frederick Matthias Alexander.

1. Release – specifically at the joints.

2. Connection – of the whole body in every action via awareness and integration of the connective tissue matrix.

3. Breath – its fluid use to inspire and integrate awareness and application of the first two points.

In the following chapters I describe the influences that shaped this synthesis, the methodological considerations that developed out of practice, and in turn, influenced ongoing discovery and the application of this somatic synthesis to technique, finally speaking to the utilisation of Path Wave Movement and technique in improvisational choreographic practice and performance.

In the investigations I have undertaken, the underlying driving force of the inquiry has been to discover the unity beneath a diversity of techniques and methods. This unity was identified as existing in the body, whose exegesis previously had only been found in technique, form and training. The feeling of freedom that dancing always promised and sometimes delivered was still too often expressed in the repetition of patterns of tension established by trying to master technique and choreography through repetitive action, until the body itself was synonymous with the accretion of tension, however skillfully acquired. It was only when I began the study of different somatic methods that I began to intuit a body without technique, a formlessness beneath all the forms I might learn.

Thus, the research is the culmination of a commitment to finding and creating a map of feelings and bodily sensation, at first hesitantly with many uncharted areas, but eventually with a sureness in my ability to express a new terrain.

I now see the journey of creating Path Wave Movement has been the search for a mirror image of what technique was previously to me: both jailer and liberator of the possibility of creative expression.

Its development has enabled a way of seeing the body itself as method, of identifying the dynamic interplay between constituent parts and calling on the innate physical properties of breath, fluid, tension and release to be the only choreography expressed.

Throughout this thesis I endeavour to keep returning to the examination of the various investigations that have made up the research, to what I believe has been the central and unifying issue.

That is: how can the body both “be” and “do”, simultaneously, without diminution of the potency or emergent capacity of either, without sacrificing release of tension for specificity, or intention and agency for undifferentiated movement integration?

In short, how can the “innate create”, and this creation alter the potential embodied pathways from which the next act may emerge, without disturbing the moment to moment awareness and understanding of what this corporeal potential truly is: weight, fluid, breath manifested, bone, sensate skin, a body in a dream.

Chapter One: List of Influences/Influencers

In this chapter I discuss the key influencers of both my somatic research as well as the development of its application to improvised movement. I discuss the common threads I saw in the practice of each modality that allowed me to begin the process of synthesis in my training, following an intuition that a unitary understanding leading to the process of synthesis was possible. In this chapter I list the forms of training that influenced my research. I do this by giving an historical overview of the forms, their founders and significant innovators, as well as explaining the ways in which I sought to synthesise them. My discussion is divided into three categories: the first, somatic methods; the second, martial arts, and the third, figures in the field of improvised dance. These practitioners have influenced me to use their insights as a prism through which to practice and perform a diversity of training systems. Although my understanding of all three categories of training has evolved contemporaneously in my practice, I separate them to emphasize the fundamental differences in the way that I approached each one, and to account for the insights that I perceived each form offered. Despite the fact that one of the somatic methods or practices, namely Skinner Release Technique, is also an improvisational dance form, I have chosen to describe it under somatic methods because of the technical influence it offered. Additionally, I have chosen to describe the somatic forms before those of the martial arts, in response to a perceived hierarchy of insight in the way the research has progressed.

Somatic Methods Continuum, Emilie Conrad

Continuum was developed in the 1960's by Emilie Conrad and built on her experience of Haitian ritual dances and African American contemporary dance as taught by Heather Dunn; both of which she pursued as a way to transcend the physical manifestations of deep-seated childhood trauma. Using these influences as the foundation of her own self-experiments, Conrad developed a technique to access what she termed "the fluid system"¹⁵ of the body, using a vast array of vocal sounds and micro-movements to transform the body's systems, including the muscular, skeletal, fascial and nervous systems. Through its deep connection to intrinsic physiological impulses, Continuum has been shown to be effective in the healing process for victims of stroke, paralysis and trauma, in addition to allowing movement practitioners a way to overcome issues with movement patterning by releasing the body's innate creative potential. This potential is often expressed through fluid spirals and figure eights, and an internal sense of the body's fascial pathways. It shares similarities with Unwind, the martial arts of Infinite System Kung Fu, and Systema, all of which will be described in detail below.

My teacher and mentor in Continuum, US practitioner Amber Gray,¹⁶ describes the way Continuum can help with trauma and movement repatterning process thus:

Fragmented, choppy, non-sequential movement, slouched over and compressed body postures, individuals who cannot sit still or who are constantly moving a limb nervously; these are all cues that the natural, inherent wave motion of our individual body may be disturbed, compressed, or broken. With Continuum, a simple sound such as an "O" can begin to calm the nervous system, quiet the exteroceptive

¹⁵ Emilie Conrad, *Life On Land* (Berkeley, North Atlantic Books, 2007), 392.

¹⁶ Amber Gray is an internationally renowned Continuum Master Teacher and Trauma Counsellor. She studied for 8 years under Continuum founder Emilie Conrad and has worked with victims of trauma in many countries including Haiti, Sudan and Ethiopia.

input invite a sense of coherency and organization to a persons internal, embodied experience.¹⁷

I first began studying Continuum with Amber Gray in 2012.¹⁸ Since that time I have continued my own practice as well as continued to attend her workshops (which are regularly offered in Melbourne). Her emphasis on “interoception,” or the internal awareness of the body and perception, as well as her teaching that the movement of life is an undulating wave in which sound and movement exist on the same continuum,¹⁹ has changed my conception of what movement can be.

Incorporating Continuum into my choreographic practice has enabled access to ways of moving that I did not know were possible; specifically, the idea that the fluid wave system could be the instigator of the body’s movement through simply attending to breathing and vocal sounding. This also gave me access to a sense of effortless spinal and limb micromovement. I found that wave motion had the potential to be the unifying aspect between Somatic practices and all other technical forms. Wave motion, once activated through breath and vocal sounding and allowed to undulate through the body, could be self-sustaining, without the need to introduce any other elements, whether imagery or technique-based. However, when imagery was introduced to the practice of Continuum wave motion, I discovered it was able to be so much more potent and alive.

¹⁷ Amber Gray, “We are the Movement: Continuum Movement as Somatic Psychotherapy,” *Somatic Psychotherapy Today*, Fall 2016, 48

¹⁸ Amber Gray is a Continuum Master teacher and direct student of Continuum Movement Founder Emilie Conrad. Since August 2012 I have studied Continuum Movement with Amber Gray and been mentored by her in developing my own somatic practice.

¹⁹ Gray, *Somatic*, 48

In the next section I discuss how the influence of Skinner Releasing Technique's use of imagery, in conjunction with the undulation of Continuum allowed me to revolutionize my understanding and application of both technique and improvisational choreography.

Skinner Releasing Technique, Joan Skinner

In a similar manner to Conrad's development of Continuum, Joan Skinner developed Skinner Releasing Technique, (from here on referred to as SRT) in the 1950's as a way of adapting her practice of Alexander technique to assist her recovery from a serious back injury sustained whilst dancing. Although she initially began to practice in standing positions, Skinner soon realized that it was only by laying on the floor that she was able to find release from her discomfort. From this development she was able to discover the main principles of her technique. SRT uses rich imagery to inspire activation of the neuromuscular system, allowing for improved muscular skeletal alignment pathways in the body but without specifically referring to anatomical areas.

Although SRT may serve as a rehabilitative somatic practice, it is also an improvisational dance form, which relies on imagery to allow for a scenario

...where the student kinaesthetically releases patterns of excess tension in order to realize principles of multidirectional alignment and balance.²⁰

The imagery is divided into two categories: specific and totality. An example of the specific is the cue to "feel warm water running down the back and widening, deepening and spreading at the lower back" as a way of finding release and lengthening the muscles either side of the spine, without referring to any muscular or bony landmarks. An example of totality might be:

²⁰ Joan Skinner et al., "Skinner Releasing Technique: Imagery and its Application to Movement Training," *Contact Quarterly* Fall 1979, 11.

...the image of floating in a pool.²¹

This helps create kinesthetic immersion which allows for a richness, freedom and integration of movement expression.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter, I first began training in SRT with Wendy Smith in 2009. What struck me was the capacity for SRT imagery to “dance itself”; to give me the feeling of dancing both within detailed anatomical regions whilst at the same time having those regions magnified throughout the whole body. This quality of allowing the body to release tension and yet expand a feeling of presence, power and imagination has influenced me greatly as I synthesised different modalities both to create Path Wave Movement and also to aid in the development of improvisational choreography.

SRT also offered parallels and contrasts with Rosalind Crisp’s use of imagery in her work for the 2015 Dance Massive Festival The Boom Project. This was initiated by working with Helen Herbertson as companion to the piece, combining Herbertson’s approach to imagery in improvisation practice with Crisp’s Choreographic Improvisation technique. This will be discussed in a later section.

Unwinding, Gavin Clarke

In contrast to Conrad and Skinner, Gavin Clarke, the originator of the Unwind somatic and movement method, came from a background as a musician, footballer and dancer, and was inspired to create his innovative auto-fascial manipulation technique to heal his body after injuries sustained on the football field.

Drawing on Osteopathy, Yoga, and Contact Improvisation,²² Unwind seeks to bring the body into alignment with gravity through utilisation of the connective tissue or fascia. Through moving, manipulating, and balancing the connective tissue, the Unwind practitioner develops an awareness of apparent permanent or temporary distortions in the body’s alignment, gradually becoming conscious of how to diffuse load through the frame without it distorting natural alignment. This is different from simple relaxation techniques as it is involved in the creation of active states of connective tissue engagement within movement that are only relaxed or eased upon the understanding and resolution of a particular fascial line.

²¹ Skinner et al, “Skinner Releasing,” 1.

Clarke describes the discovery of his process and its development thus:

Seven years ago my body was failing to meet the demands of my performance career. I was spending all my money on therapy which was helping but not in any way sufficient to keep my body acting and dancing as was required of it professionally. Since that time I have been developing my own somatic movement practice based upon listening to the body, addressing the unconscious tension held in our soft tissue and internally re-aligning the bones and muscles for improved efficiency and power.

Unwinding was something I could do before I understood what it was that I was doing. It was an improvised response to feelings of discomfort that resulted in an illuminated perception of internal events. I would feel an urge to move, initiating the movement would create change and that would create a mental impression of what just transpired, building gradually a more thorough and accurate image on which to model my increasingly detailed sense of self.²³

As mentioned above, Unwind, through its work with fascial pathways, shares common ground both with Continuum and the martial arts described below.

Drawing on insights gleaned through my lengthy investigation of each of the above described Somatic modalities, my research has sought to combine all three in the Path Wave Movement training system that I have termed Path Wave Movement. Supported by imagery inspired by SRT, PWM uses the fluidity of Continuum, the attention to the fascial trains of the body as described by Unwind, as well as focusing specific attention on the movement potential flowing from release of the joints. In Chapter Three, I describe the technical aspects involved in unifying these techniques, both with each other and with additional training modalities. In this next section I will examine the martial arts training forms and finish by briefly describing how I have synthesized them with somatic practice.

²² Contact Improvisation is an improvised dance form developed by Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith and others since the early 1970s which involves the exploration of shared weight and contact points between you and your dancing partner(s).

²³ Gavin Clarke, "Unwinding: An Exploration of the Affective Nature of Being Through Somatically Informed Improvised Movement." (Honours, University of New South Wales, 2016).

Through its work with fascial pathways Unwind shares common ground both with Continuum and the martial arts described below. Clarke's Unwind method was an essential influence in the development of PWm as it showed me that an experiential understanding of the fascial network was possible to integrate into my research and gave me a deeper understanding of the other elements of fluid breathing and release I was exploring.

Drawing on insights gleaned through my lengthy investigation of the Somatic modalities, Continuum, SRT and Unwind my research has sought to combine all three in the training system that I have termed Path Wave Movement. Supported by imagery inspired by SRT, Path Wave Movement uses the fluidity of Continuum, the attention to the fascial trains of the body as described by Unwind, as well as focusing specific attention on the movement potential flowing from release of the joints.

Martial Arts

Although there are strong similarities in approach to training and awareness between martial arts methods and those of the Somatic innovators, there is a fundamental difference in the intended outcomes of the training. Whilst in somatic methods the goal is to improve movement and alignment function to better enhance the quality of life of the participant, in martial arts training the purpose is utilisation of improved physical awareness and capability to execute martial arts techniques primarily for self-defense.

In the explanations of different martial arts methods below, I describe how the technical qualities inherent within their forms link and contrasts with different aspects of the somatic methods.

Infinite System Kung Fu, Tuan Deres

Similar to Continuum, Infinite System Kung Fu, founded by Tuan Deres,²⁴ emphasizes spirals and figure eight pathways through the spine and limbs. My exposure to Deres' work is through my experience as a private martial arts student where I was encouraged to use his teaching as a springboard for investigation of my own choreographic practice ideas. I began working with Tuan in Melbourne in February 2011 and continued as a student until January 2013.

The development of spirals and figure eight pathways in the body is a key element of Deres' teaching is the development of spirals and figure eight pathways in the body. Once these patterns have been developed to such an extent that the neuromuscular system, fascia and ligaments are strengthened enough to take more pressure, sudden muscular contractions are added at the joints end range to effect strikes. For example, in a side elbow strike, the horizontal trajectory of the elbow takes the humerus bone of the upper arm to the very end of its range in the glenoid cavity or shoulder socket. The considerable power that can be generated by using the full physiological range of the shoulder must be slowly developed through gradual strengthening via increased muscular contraction around the area.

Following the muscular conditioning required to sustain contractual power at end of joint range, the training continues to include "bouncing" from one end range contraction to another, via the previously trained spiral pathways. The final goal is to be able to deliver strikes continually, from the smallest to the biggest range possible, with the strikes continuing to retain power, and without compromising the body's balance. Because both upper and lower limbs as well as the spine and pelvis are trained to incorporate these insights, the whole body is able to integrate and utilise multi-directional dynamic possibilities in improvised movement.

²⁴ Tuan Deres is a Martial Arts practitioner and Master Teacher and innovator of Infinite System, a fusion of martial arts Yang Mian, Wu Chi and Systema and utilizing his own improvisational approach to Martial Arts training.

By introducing the imagery based release of SRT, I was able to allow directed contractual movements to be preceded by release of tension at the joints, which helped to counteract the buildup of strain and fatigue that can occur when there is too much muscular contraction. By using Continuum based fluid movement I was able to access innate wave based spinal movement which helped access spiral patterns in the limbs more easily. The application of Unwind's fascial integration approach enabled these patterns to be strengthened throughout the entirety of the body. The use of joint end range contraction and bouncing was also fundamental in the discovery of a percussive dynamic that could be used when applying rhythmic patterns throughout the body. I will discuss this aspect in greater detail in Chapter Four where the development of the performance is investigated.

In addition to the common and synthesisable elements found between Infinite System, Continuum, Skinner Releasing Technique and Unwind, choreographically, I found a way to link Deres' Infinite System work with that of Systema teacher Rodney Stewart²⁵, by utilizing some of the dynamic and directional variation concepts found in Stewart's "12 Points"²⁶ martial arts improvisation method. My exposure to Systema has been as a private student of Stewart's whose system of spatial dynamic orientation I will discuss in greater detail in Chapter Three. In the following section I describe how ideas from Systema were combined with those mentioned above and acted as a bridge to the improvisational practices of Rosalind Crisp, which in turn influenced the improvisational direction of my practice.

Systema

Systema is a Russian martial art developed initially by Russian Cossacks in the first Millennium AD, and adapted to incorporate modern combat conditions in the Twentieth Century. Akin

²⁵ Rodney Stewart is a Systema Teacher and Photographer who brings a creative arts based approach to teaching Systema and who practices within the lineage of Vladimir Vassiliev. Reference?

²⁶ 12 points is a concept devised by Systema teacher Rodney Stewart to enable directional, speed, spatial and dynamic adaptability in the training of Systema. I discuss this approach in detail in Chapter 3.

to Infinite System and Continuum, it uses fluid, wave based movements to generate power. With an emphasis on relaxation, breath control, joint manipulation and economy of effort, it can be considered a somatic martial art. It's leading modern exponents and innovators are, Alexei Kadichinikov, Michael Ryabko and Vladimir Vassiliev, all of whom teach the importance of seamless transitions from floor to standing, and adaptability to different pressure and impulses, to create a feeling of psychological and physical ease.²⁷ Different movement speeds from very slow to fast as well as the development of tactile sensitivity are emphasized to create a knowledge of appropriate responses to combat circumstances. Recognizable characteristics between Systema and Contact Improvisation can be identified in their common sensitivity to another's body weight and relationship to gravity. Although relatively new to the West this is a deep and rich area of study and one I will be pursuing in future research.

My exposure to Systema has been as a private student of Rodney Stewart's whose system of 12 point spatial dynamic orientation helped to create a pedagogical scaffold on which to understand and assimilate the diverse and complex elements of Systema martial arts.

In a way that is similar to SRT, Systema also has a strong imagery component which assists in effecting physiological and movement changes. The result is an ability to access intrinsic muscles, fascia and tendons, allowing the body to respond naturally and instantaneously to stimuli. Again like SRT, this imagery encompasses both the totality and the specific. For instance, the totality might consist of imagining the spine as a swaying sapling, so as to better facilitate adaptable axial response, whilst the specific imagery could involve visualizing a training partner's application of varying levels of pressure on the joints, requiring a released movement response that includes changing dynamics, angles and levels.

Similarly to Continuum, Systema trains awareness and responsiveness to "wave" pathways in the body. However, whereas Continuum utilises internal wave motion created by breath pressure, Systema's wave accentuates the use of fascial and tendons to generate and respond to strikes and external approaches. Interestingly, this connective tissue aspect has parallels with Gavin Clarke's Unwind, and it has been part of my research to attempt to unify the different applications of wave power found in Continuum, Unwind and Systema. Systema's

²⁷ Vladimir Vassiliev, Scott Meredith, and Mikhail Ryabko, *Let Every Breath...Secrets of the Russian Breath Masters* (Toronto, Canada: Russian Martial Art, 2006), 93.

training to create contrasting tension, release and velocity levels in various areas of the body also inspired me to experiment with applying these principles to the spiral limb pathways of Infinite System. This aspect of playing with tension levels to facilitate different movement dynamics is something I also identified as shared with Rosalind Crisp's choreographic improvisation strategies, together with a common emphasis on adaptable responsiveness to any physical circumstance, rather than relying on technique. I describe Crisp's work and her influence on my research in the section below.

Tai Chi

Like Systema, Tai Chi is an ancient martial art and Eastern somatic practice which seeks to relax and unify the body and mind to better co-ordinate and execute self-defense based physical actions. However, it differs from Systema in being primarily focused on the directed flow of internal energy or "chi" through the body. Using slow controlled movements with no extraneous tension in their execution, Tai Chi creates the conditions for energy flow. In the one of the most important books on the form, *The Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan*,²⁸ uses poetic description to unpack highly technical physical explanations, with imagery as a strong component.

I have included a training poem from the above mentioned book titled *T'ai Chi Ch'uan Ching* by Chang San-feng in its entirety to highlight this interplay between technique and imagery:

In motion,
all parts of the body must be
light
nimble
and strung together.

²⁸ Benjamin P. Lo et al., *The Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan: The Literary Tradition*, trans. Benjamin P. Lo (Berkeley: North Atlantic Books, 1979), 100.

The ch'i (breath) should be excited
the shen (spirit) should be internally gathered.
Let the postures be without
breaks or holes,
hollows or discontinuities of form.
The motion should be rooted in the feet,
released through the legs,
controlled by the waist
and manifested through the fingers

The feet legs and waist
must act together simultaneously
so that while stepping forward or back
the timing and position are correct

If the timing and position are not correct
the body becomes disordered
and the defect must be sought
in the legs and waist

Up or down
front or back
left or right, are all the same

These are all the I (mind) and not external

If there is up, there is down;
if there is forward, then there is back
if there is left, then there is right

If the I wants to move up
it contains at the same time
the downward idea

By alternating the force
of pulling and pushing,
the root is severed
and the object is quickly toppled,
without a doubt.²⁹

Scott Meredith, author of *Juice: Radical Tai Chi Energetics*³⁰ and other books on Tai Chi and energy cultivation, takes much of the information in the Tai Chi classics and reimagines its internal technical and energetic components for a modern audience. This has, in turn, influenced my research as I adapt existing pedagogical structures within the modalities I have been discussing.

For example in working to combine diverse movement modalities such as Systema, Somatics and Kung Fu, I found a conceptual shorthand was needed to be able to simplify and distill the complexity and density of the information.

In notes from my choreographic journals I have written:

any net stretched pulls the whole thing along
at any point there is no point
start to pull somewhere
and where else isn't it?
you'll know by the tight sides where the knots tied

²⁹ Benjamin P. Lo et al., *Essence of T'ai Chi Ch'uan*, 19-22.

³⁰ Scott Meredith, *Juice: Radical Taiji Energetics* (San Bernadino: CreateSpace Publishing, 2014), 315.

how small can you feel it all?
Sometimes the taut thing feels out
a different tensing
that can release within winding
can open space
loosen the weave
open trace³¹

The above poem describes how through connective tissue the whole body moves at the same time and where a part of the body is not responsive to or allowing movement from another area to affect it, tension will be felt.

There is no hierarchy of movement instigation and execution. Within each directed movement action are the micro movements of fluid, breath and connective tissue and within these micromovements lie the potential for the next directed movement.

Where/how can the minutest movement in one area of the body be felt in another area/ areas? By using the image of the loosening weave even tension can be moved through as the fascial net that holds movement and is movement is allowed to expand.

This poem and others helped me create easily accessible reference points from which to continue to develop the research from. In Appendix 3, I have further examples of training poems with detailed explanation of the technical outcomes.

I first began training in Yang Style Tai Chi in 1998 in Brisbane and it was my first exposure to a style of Somatic training, one which bridged the gap between meditative stillness and movement. I discovered that Tai Chi is also a movement form rich with imagery for the purpose of achieving better alignment, chi-flow and technique execution. This use of

³¹ Notes from my choreographic journal, June 2015

imagery also shares deep roots with SRT and Crisp's The Boom Project work, whilst the introduction to the practice of wave dynamics from Continuum has allowed a greater, more consistent sense of chi flow.

It is by underpinning my daily practice of these Martial Arts with Path Wave Movement, for instance in accessing fluid movements from Continuum whilst moving slowly in Tai Chi, that I have found I can unify both the somatic and martial forms in the one practice, by using improvisation structures to combine all of the technical aspects of my research in a performance context.

Improvised Dance

The improvisation methods I have drawn from, though related to the modalities described above in aspects of somatic and directional qualities, have as their end goal an aesthetic that encompasses the performance of dance and choreographic choices. In addition to attempting to describe the methods of the artists described below, I also investigate the ways in which their work relates to somatic and martial arts practices.

Rosalind Crisp

Through training with Rosalind Crisp,³² an Australian and European based improvisation practitioner, I was exposed to a form seemingly without obvious structure, where I understood that attention to sensation, combined with inhibition of the dancer's natural urge to perform without attention to the movement for its own sake, made possible an expansion of choreographic choice. I was drawn to Crisp's work after attending her classes and dance³³ workshop intensives between 2012 and 2015. I found her detailed, specific understanding of a physical and imaginative response to the immediate moment to contain parallels with my own research. Crisp's use of physical "tools," for example, following a bone through space, relaxing or

³² Australian born choreographer Rosalind Crisp has created an improvisational approach that utilises awareness of specific physical and imaginative cues to stimulate choreographic innovation.

magnifying muscular tension, or ceaselessly moving two different body parts to move towards and away from each other, deepened my awareness of the potential of a commitment to attention, resulting in an eventual sensitisation of the whole body to movement and imagination. I found Systema, which also uses immediate moment sensation attentiveness rather than technique to discover movement, to be adaptable to Crisp's methods because of the emphasis both placed on responses that developed from unabstracted focus on the body and its immediate environment. Having exposure to two distinct modalities that nevertheless shared what I perceived as qualities in common, aided the development of this aspect of my research by layering depth, breadth and a diversity of detail to the concept of movement outcomes springing from sensorial choice.

In addition to the work of Crisp, I found the practice of SRT to be an essential contributor to the research, emphasising physically affective imagery to inspire an imaginative superstructure, an overarching tool to animate improvisation while providing a glue within which the performer could focus their attention and breath to articulating tools and directional tasks. This has enabled me to discover through my own practice a self-perpetuating performative quality where I found the capacity for conscious decision-making, although embedded in somatic qualities, could exist inclusively with all the other qualities of performance and technique. Suzanne Langer, an American educator, philosopher and writer who was known for her work on the influence of art on the mind and behavior describes imagery as that which

...formulates a new conception for our direct imaginative grasp.³⁴

I found that the idea of imagery as making the abstract workable or practical within the realm of technique allowed me to formulate new ways of creating solutions to physical and technique related problems or questions in my practice.

This "new conception" in the research was the discovery that all the developments in technical and somatic knowledge could be unified in the practice of improvisation by unfolding them within the ceaselessly adaptable structures of Path Wave Movement, Stewart's 12 Points and Crisp's "tools". In turn, I found Stewart's and Crisp's improvisational methods were able to be subsumed, without loss of specificity, in the SRT inspired totalities

³³ Rosalind Crisp's *dance Project* deals with a volatile group of choreographic principles which guide the way movement is produced by the dancer. Initiated in 2005, it has been in continuous development ever since. I had the opportunity to attend workshops drawing on Crisp's *dance* concepts between 2012 and 2015.

³⁴ Suzanne Langer, *Problems of Art* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1957), 23.

of kinaesthetic imagery that were developed throughout the research.

In Chapter Three, I provide and discuss “in practice” examples of my discovery of the growth

of imagery within Crisp’s work, and its importance in helping me expand my research towards performance, whilst incorporating elements of SRT served to “fill out” my initial experimentation with imagery in improvisation, bringing all the competencies within the forms together through imagery to investigate diverse qualities in practice.

Helen Herbertson

The final influence on the shaping of an improvisational practice for performance was through contact and conversation with Helen Herbertson.³⁵ Our contact, through intense studio practice and physical focus began in 2012. Herbertson’s influence and concentrated focus on an embodied, three dimensional quality in the body, described by her as

...how the framing of a detailed and exact physicality can be done within a spacious performance possibility.³⁶

were crucial in opening up my investigations leading into the 2015 performance of *The Right Unravelling* (which had hitherto been primarily studio and non performative), to the actuality of presenting to an audience.

Herbertson has said that her work

...focuses on the dynamic flow between people and place: the interaction of body

³⁵ Helen Herbertson is a renowned Australian choreographer and former artistic director of Danceworks and my primary supervisor for my MFA.

³⁶ In conversation with Helen Herbertson, July 2015.

and landscape or situation-interior life with light, form place-person and place.³⁷

Herberton's emphasis on the potential to "consciously place myself within" the space I was performing in, offered a way to flow between my own body, and my perception of imagery and the bodies and lives of the audience. At a crucial moment of indecision it gave me the confidence and freedom to transform the movement synthesis explorations of path Wave Movement, into the performance of *The Right Unravelling* in such a way that none of the details of the technical and somatic exploration were lost.

It was the unification of many different training influences that enabled this insight into the underlying unity of the body, the sub-strata from which all outer actions and forms might emerge. Only by training extensively and contemporaneously in these forms was this unity intuited and a way of practising developed that could "hold" and respect the specific parameters that delineated one modality from another whilst incorporating insights gleaned from each.

This led to investigation into how the insights formed within training helped me to develop a "meta-insight" or perspective into how this confluence of explorative discoveries pointed towards a methodological way of working that was able to support both the synthesis of methods towards Path Wave Movement and its application in improvisational performance.

³⁷ Erin Brannigan and Virginia Baxter, eds., *Bodies of Thought: Twelve Australian Choreographers* (Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 2013), 138.

Chapter Two:

Theoretical Framework

The realisation that I was using a theoretical framework gradually became clear through my ongoing research explorations. This chapter outlines the steps by which I created the underpinning theoretical framework that united and drove the research, by discussing the essential theories that informed the theoretical framework, and show how my practice developed. It became clear to me that the practices I had trained in so assiduously for many years, were themselves the very things preventing me from experiencing ease and integration in my body and thus inhibiting any advancement in technical mastery.

I identified that technique inherently involved intention for a directional movement of the body to be executed. Hitherto in my practice, this intention often went beyond consideration of the body's moment to moment realities of weight, breath, tension and proprioception in space, and so overran the living, breathing, bodily material that technique was composed of.

However, through an immersion in somatic practice, particularly Continuum, an awareness grew of the vast, ever changing world of movement coursing through my whole body in every millisecond.

On developing this new perspective of the richness, diversity, and potential for movement already inherent in the body, I perceived that these elements were utterly absent in my practice of more traditional technical forms. I realised that my movement choices came not from my body's living imperative to adapt "naturally" to internally and externally inspired changes in weight and pressure, (for instance the instantaneous turning of the torso to avoid an incoming strike in martial arts). Rather, they were seen to arise from attempts to replicate a once successfully, or partially successfully executed action within the scope of a technique. In addition to this, attempts to replicate the "ideal" form demonstrated by a teacher or advanced practitioner further conspired to distance me from an inherent knowing of my own body's understanding.

I perceived further that when I tried to perform an action without the stimuli of the identical scenario that drew it forth, or without modifying the original intention to accommodate micro-movement, tension arose to support this action that was not representative of the actual moment to moment realities of the body.

I observed that this tension would magnify through the whole body the more my intended outcome was progressed towards without considering somatic elements of micro-movement, breath, weight etc.

However, it was through simultaneous practice and juxtaposition of somatic practices with technical forms, that the germination of an idea grew. This idea was that somehow the power, the dynamics in movement that I desired to express, that I had hitherto observed only in the expression of traditional technique, could arise out of the richness of the field of sensation, of present moment awareness.

This search, combining different somatic methods and techniques, engendered a way of working that progressively created layers of knowing through the body which developed out of practice. These layers in turn birthed new ideas, pathways and considerations for further investigation.

The chapter attempts to explain these layers of working, how they grew out of each other, and how they were then recognized as existing in potential methodological frameworks. I noted that these frameworks allowed a structure to exist that was able to hold the integration and evolution of all the elements of synthesis, technique and performance together.

Three theories were identified as contributing to the methodology: Hegelian Dialectics, Autopoiesis, and philosophical considerations stemming from Quantum Physics. Hegelian Dialectics served as the foundational aspect of practice synthesis and creation, while Autopoiesis was used as the framework that supported the application of the synthesised methods in practice. Finally, Quantum Physics allowed me a context from which to examine the ramifications of choice as well as an association with imagery in performance.

In the next section I will discuss Hegelian Dialectics and its influence on the development of the technique synthesis, Path Wave movement, through an exploration of the practice and processes that brought it about.

It is important for me to emphasise again that the use of a theoretical framework grew out of an emergent practice context and was seen as a fluid scaffolding on which to hang and regard my ever-shifting and evolving practice in a diversity of modalities.

As I became aware of the fact that everything I was developing was towards synthesis, systemisation and the interplay between an awareness of bodily sensations and conscious choice-making I began to search for theories that would help me both support and develop my practice further.

My conception of these theoretical frameworks can therefore be regarded more as metaphors to enable new practice developments rather than clearly delineated and structured methodologies.

The development of the technique synthesis, Path Wave Movement through an exploration of the practice and processes that brought it about, is considered in relation to Hegelian Dialectics.

Hegelian Dialectics

Hegelian Dialectics can be defined as

...an interpretive method in which the contradiction between a proposition (thesis) and its antithesis is resolved at a higher level of truth (synthesis).³⁸

This insight, that two apparently opposing ideas, when practised and observed in conjunction with one another, could bring a new element into existence became the basis of a dialectical

³⁸“Hegelian dialectic,” in Collins English Dictionary – Complete & Unabridged (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/hegelian-dialectic>: Harper Collins Publishers, 2012).

approach and the foundation of all explorations towards movement modality synthesis.

Historically, as I had studied and trained in diverse disciplines contemporaneously, I found it natural to combine elements of each. For instance, when I began training with Tuan Deres in Kung Fu, I realised that the exploratory nature of finding spirals taught in his method became easier to perform as I breathed with a fluid Continuum wave undulation. I felt instinctively that the whole body wanted to release to allow the breath to come through. I observed that by incorporating and developing this insight in training I could change the way I experienced both breath movement and technique and thus a new aspect or movement insight was born that was a marriage, a synthesis of both.

Hegel discusses a philosophy that

...can lay aside the title 'love of knowing' and be actual knowing³⁹

and of

...grasping and expressing the True, not only as Substance but as Subject.⁴⁰

I interpreted this, in the context of movement, as the resolution of technique with somatic, physiological understanding. I felt a new ability to actualise movement intention normally expressed through technique, with the intuitions and perceptions of bodily awareness. Once again, a synthesis of technique with somatic perception resulted in a new appreciation of the scope and possibilities of expression. Active, directional-based movements could now be received through the whole body and the breath could fluidly "move the spine". Through this insight into the somatically potentiated body as the basis for movement integration and skill development, I saw that the breath driven fluid itself could

³⁹ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. Arnold Vincent Miller and John Niemeyer Findlay (United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 1977), 3

⁴⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 10.

be the instigator for movement of the spine which then radiated out into the limbs. This was achieved by never letting the pressure of the breath, as it displaced fluid through the body, collect in any one area for more than a millisecond. It was through this practice I came to recognise how every breath could instigate movement throughout the whole body.

From the perspective of the martial arts practice, specifically the use of spirals, I saw that any intended directional-movement based action that did not align with the body's natural responses to gravity, shifts in weight and incoming pressures was met with resistance associated with the unmediated intention to act itself. The enacted intention to move I perceived as gathering tension in inverse proportion around it, the more it moved in the direction of the intended outcome without allowing the internal connection of release to flow through. However, when this action emerged out of the moving fluid of the displaced breath pressure, I discovered that a resolution could be achieved between intended action and the body's own physiological realities.

This application of Hegelian Dialectics in movement practice, with each discovery within exploration manifested as the union of oppositional ideas, has been crucial in my continual ongoing innovation of movement potential and improvisational choreographic insights. Once these methods came to be applied in improvisational practice, however, I noticed that my focus changed along with the necessity for continuous improvisational action. As the synthesised elements began to be applied together, I started to perceive them as more than just solutions to movement problems that arose out of the need to resolve diverse aspects

of training. Each solution or synthesis was seen as its own insight, irreducible in terms of efficiency of movement and underlying theoretical conception (at least at that time).

These insights (such as the understanding of the blending of fluid breath with the movement of the spine as one discreet conception, and the continual contractual rebound bouncing of strikes through the body as another), though overlaying and weaving through each other, utilising each quality for kinetic expression, were still identified as separate expressions of

movement dynamics that required the continual sustenance of choice to keep them alive as choreographic expressions.

As synthesis took place through dialectics, I began to feel that the body of work I was improvising consisted of a collection of irreducibly blended elements, and that only through constant maintenance of each element could it be said that the “body” existed. This perception of improvisational choreography as a body or system of self-sustaining elements led me to a discovery of Autopoiesis, a branch of systems theory which became the next stage of inquiry in the creation of a methodology.

Autopoiesis

Autopoiesis is a branch of systems theory originated by Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela. Autopoiesis has been described as

...the characteristic of living systems to continuously renew themselves and to regulate this process in such a way that the integrity of their structure is maintained. It is a natural process which supports the quest for structure, process renewal and integrity.⁴¹

According to Maturana and Varela,

...living systems are cognitive systems and living as a process is a process of cognition.⁴²

⁴¹ Margaret J. Wheatley, *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1999).18

⁴² Humberto R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living* (Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980). 13.

The idea that to be alive was to be cognisant and that it was by a continual process of conscious renewal that living systems were maintained, spoke to my own work, as I saw that to apply these synthesized elements in dance, they had to be perpetually supported by an awareness of their mutual interaction. Because these elements were related to the living realities of my body (breath, release, connection), and the utilisation and interpretation of these realities through a diverse synthesis of techniques and modalities, the continued sustaining of this information in practice was identified as a living process.

Thus I felt that the “information of life” I was dealing with supplied, through constant renewal, a structure that could be flexible enough to contain both detailed specificity of action and also participatory response to observed changes in the synthesised elements.

An illustration of this in practice was the selection between interchangeable elements. For example, whilst practising to combine the wave motion practice of Continuum with the complex spiral elbow pathways of Tuan Deres’ Infinite System; as I noticed breath moving fluidly through my body, I also became aware of the changes in pressure this brought to bear around the supporting structures at my joints, as well as the movement throughout the body created by the rise and fall of the fluid breath. This awareness was also experienced as both a process of cognition of interactions between integrated components, and an upholding and continuous replenishment of this living information.

I then recognised, through the identification of a systemic approach to practice, that a new development in my methodology arose out of the requirement to perform precise actions. These actions, such as simultaneous spirals at different joints or poly rhythmic subdivisions between limbs, grew out of the previous considerations of Hegelian Dialectics and Autopoiesis.

However, I ascertained that the decision making component inherent in performing specific actions was of another quality to those of the previously described methodological approaches.

Both the methodological approaches of Hegelian Dialectics and Autopoiesis were distinguished as being concerned with the creation, renewal and sustenance of synthesised

elements of fluid breath, connective tissue, release, and the different techniques re-imagined through them. But it was the moment of choice itself, and the attendant changes in the body that followed even the most minute intended action, that became the next consideration in practice. The question of choice itself as another element effecting both the practice and evolution of the research began to intrigue me as I saw that the progression of the methodology corresponded with the evolution of perceived differentiation, from an observation of physiological processes to a participation and eventual manipulation of them.

Quantum Physics Paul Levy's Interpretation

Though it was well beyond my ability to understand the mathematical and complex theoretical aspects of Quantum Theory, through reading *Quantum Physics: The Physics of Dreaming* by Paul Levy, I found a way to condense the complex and highly technical details of physics in a poetic and philosophical way that would speak to my imagination and inspire the adaption of concepts from his book as practical metaphors for my research.

In addition, Levy's work was a vital component in helping me to link ideas from quantum physics to improvisational practice and performance by serving as a bridge that spanned theory, imagery, technique and execution.

In the next section I will discuss Levy's work as it relates to a consideration of methodology, and will also demonstrate how the use of ideas from quantum philosophy helped to translate improvisational practice into performance by serving as a bridge that linked theory, imagery, technique and execution.

Quantum Theory As Practice Metaphor

Levy explains how from the perspective of quantum mechanics the act of observation

changes both the thing observed and the observer.⁴³ According to Levy's interpretation all things are in a state of undifferentiated potential until the observer notices an element and in that moment the element changes. This is known as quantum collapse, the collapse of all possibilities in that moment to a single point in space or time. This concept served as an overarching theory within the practice itself.

From a movement practice perspective, this means that before the decision to make a particular action, the body existed as potential, but with the decision to act, all possible futures and pathways collapsed to exist in and of that moment. This idea, of choice arising out of the realities of the body, struck me as a supporting notion in understanding a way in which to integrate somatic methods with directional-based technical performance. I saw this undifferentiated potential as the somatic aspect of the practice in its unity of breath, connective tissue and joint release. I perceived that interactions between these elements were happening as part of the body's existence in every moment; in every breath, the skin and connective tissue stretched, the joints loaded and their load potential was released or increased by responsive shifts of weight. However, when choice of an action was introduced, this latent state became actualised through the observation of interactions between the identified somatic elements. With this act of choosing not only did one aspect change, but the whole body in relation to every other part changed. For example, when breathing fluidly the dispersal of pressure through the body created a wave of connection through the whole fascial matrix which in turn shifted the weight of the body, thus creating a subtle muscular engagement response in the joint loaded or pressurized by this shift. A decision to release this pressure, which in turn arose out of its observation, was identified as the collapse of all possibilities inherent in the body to that moment, which in turn, changed the shape and feeling of sensation within the body so that the field of potential itself was changed.

I saw Quantum Physics as a way of describing, of recognizing and acting on, synthesized

⁴³ Paul Levy, "Quantum Physics: The Physics of Dreaming," *Awaken in the Dream* (2014), <https://www.awakeninthedream.com/articles/quantum-physics-the-physics-of-dreaming/>.

somatic aspects; through awareness of the dynamic potential of choice as it rode on the living circumstances of the body's existence.

I perceived this as the methodological resolution of the previous theoretical and practical considerations, allowing imagination and invention to be expressed from and through the raw (seen as participation with pure physiological processes) and refined (seen as the transformation of physiological processes into technique) materials of systemised synthesis. In practice, this offered the solution for how to improvise creatively and dynamically and with complete freedom from the synthesised systemised elements of the research.

It was through this new awareness of the dynamic potential of choice as it rode on the living circumstances of the body's existence interacted with and from observation and manipulation of the bodies physiological processes, that an ability emerged to express and realize the innate potentials of the synthesis of somatic practice and traditional technique-based training forms. The closer and closer together these choices were made with the awareness of their collapsible potential, the more complex and instantaneous expression became.

An example in practice:

Fall the arm

Ankle rises from its loading line and each potentiated joint along its way alive

360 to release, stretch or strike along the changing way

As change changes all relations, directions, creations, imagine

The dance is choice and from the activated life of weight breath power⁴⁴

As a result of my awareness and engagement with the constant collapsing of possibility, the capacity of the body to express grew more and more detailed, expansive and adaptive. I noted that this resulted in a new relationship of the elements of physicality and awareness to

⁴⁴ Notes from my Choreographic Journal, entry July 15, 2015

each other wherein the slightest changes were noticed, received and responded to through the whole body, and the largest changes were recognized in the smallest shifts in micro-movement.

This in turn became a new consideration for technical development of specific areas, allowing every apparently guided or technique tending action, (for instance exploration of different figure eight spirals in the wrist), to be permeated with the whole body's response and involvement.

Quantum Entanglement

Quantum Physics offered me a way of recasting imagery so that it seemed that technique, somatic practice, image and choice of action could dance together. The aspect of Quantum Physics that inspired this approach was the idea of quantum entanglement:

The basic idea of quantum entanglement is that two particles can be intimately linked to each other even if separated by billions of light-years of space; a change induced in one will affect the other.⁴⁵

I saw this notion as an analogy for my research on somatic synthesis, in that tension loading in one area also created loading in another and when the choice was made to release one the other also released. I saw these areas as being examples of Quantum Entanglement and that this intermeshing was ever present in every movement and action of my body.

⁴⁵ Jesse Emspak, "Quantum Entanglement: Love on a Subatomic Scale," space.com (2016), <https://www.space.com/31933-quantum-entanglement-action-at-a-distance.html>.

I noted that this concept of Quantum Entanglement was also intrinsically embedded in the technique itself and danced on the very edge of awareness and choice making as I moved inside my improvisational practice in the body.

Conclusion

The common thread linking the methodological approaches of Dialectics, Autopoiesis and Quantum Physics could be identified as different aspects of awareness and cognition. This can be understood as

...not a thing but a process – the process of cognition, which is identified with the process of life.⁴⁶

With this unity and synthesis of theoretical praxis, I felt I was equipped with a methodological approach that could adequately “hold” the multiplicity of conception and action that this way of working required. The research to this stage had moved somewhat to answering the question posed at the beginning of the research:

How can the body both “be,” and “do,” simultaneously, without diminution of the potency or emergent capacity of either. Movement had taken on a new imagistic and multi-dimensional life, wherein an investigation of the ramifications of practice, process and choice could be seen as both synthesisable and influencing agents in themselves.

From this new stance, awareness and agency became the place from which a decision to move or to observe inherent micro-movement was “stepped down” from. This, in turn, enabled creative action to be freed from purely physiological determinants, allowing the

⁴⁶ Fritjof Capra and Pier Luigi Luisi, *The Systems View of Life: A Unifying Vision* (United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 257.



Figure 2 The Right Unravelling, VCA (July 2015) Image: Jeff Busby

consideration of imagery and layering of improvisational, performative awareness to be incorporated. The application of this methodology is described in detail in the following chapter, as applied to the synthesis of training and conceptual forms, from which arose the improvisational practices leading to the performance of The Right Unravelling.

Chapter Three: Technique/Method

While in the previous chapter the description of practice and technique was limited to examples that served to better explain my methodological reasoning, in this chapter I discuss the development and outcomes of the technical synthesis of somatic and technique training methods in specific detail. I do this by giving an overview of how the method exists currently, the motivations for its development and then dividing the discussion into the component parts that make up the method. After breaking these components down to what I perceive as their essential elements, I then describe how they were unified together as one coherent technical form. The discussion then focuses on the application of the technique within improvisational performance, and the influential figures (and the aspects of their methods of working) that have inspired this application.

Overview And Motivation For Development

As outlined in the theoretical framework chapter, the fundamental driving force for the development of an alternate technique was because of what I saw as founded in a perceived a gap in my own capacity as a mover, manifested as an inability to progress deeper into a mastery of movement forms beyond a certain point. Through study of

Somatics and internal martial arts, I eventually identified this as the point where an increase in skill was overridden or equalled by an increase in physical tension.

Thus the crux of any research into a new method is centred on becoming aware of what was physiologically happening, in this case in the body, and then allowing that awareness to extend into conscious action without overriding the body's natural physiological expression. This interplay between the observational and the passive, and the intentional and active allowed for a constant, shifting multiplicity of choices arising from awareness of sensation, breath, contact, tension and weight, whose field of play was the reality of the living body's existence. Each of the different components explored that eventually became the synthesis of what was to become known as Path Wave Movement were explored.

Fluid Movement Accessed Through Breath And Sound

A key element of Path Wave Movement is the influence of fluid breathing as the common element between observation and intention. This I perceive encapsulates the unification of my somatic and technique/skill development.

In Chapter One I outlined my study of Continuum with Amber Grey, and my growing awareness of how movement was made possible through what founder Emilie Conrad termed the "fluid system of the body". This notion of fluid systems directly influenced the formation of the Path Wave Movement method.

In Continuum, observation of the lungs filling with air and creating a displacement of the fluid pressure in the body inspired experimentation with movement that utilises the manipulation of this pressure, often experienced as tension or tightness in a specific area. Through allowing pressure to move without "collecting" in a particular area, or by letting the skin stretch or tighten at that area, I identified the internal instigation of movement via breath as replicating

the external response to pressure that occurs when the limbs are moved from the external or prime-mover muscles. However, by feeling the movement first from the breath, it enabled the “muscular” action to flow on the subtle pathways of connection perceived when undertaking fluid breathing. The result was that initially “superficial” action became transformed into an integration of movement with connective tissue. The natural rise and fall of the breath, a constant action vital for life, was observed to be the paramount instigator for all the movement ideas explored. In later discussion, I will demonstrate further the way in which breath became the central aspect of the movement synthesis that evolved.

As well as developing the purely physical aspect of movement from the breath, imagery to support the Path Wave Movement method arose naturally, and, with other aspects of the method discussed below, helped to link the explorations to an eventual application within choreographic improvisation and performance. The image that accompanied the detailed examination described above was that of the fluid inside the body, and everything outside the body, seen as an ocean separated only by a membrane of skin. I found support for the concept of the image as an instigator of new movement possibilities in Joan Skinner’s statement that

...an image makes possible the simultaneous processing of diffuse inputs.⁴⁷

Through this way of working with image, I observed movement to be accessible via internal breath impulses merging with images of currents and ripples from outside the body; engendering movement within it and in turn being moved.

Skinner also inspired me in the use of imagery to support whole body movement exploration with her concept of image “totality” mentioned in Chapter One and her understanding that

⁴⁷ Skinner et al., “Skinner Releasing,” 1.

...Students eventually can become so captured by the totality that its environment becomes real – so real that the feeling state evoked by the image is experienced as another reality.⁴⁸

Having explored how creative movement could be accessible from the observation of, and participation with, the natural act of breathing, the next section describes how I became aware that through “release” the inevitable tensions that occurred in the body (specifically the joints), could become the source of multidirectional, dynamic, integrated and responsive action.

Joint Release

In her seminal work *Sensing, Feeling and Action*, Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen describes the joints as the source of proprioceptive movement and awareness in the body, as the reason we can sense where we are in space.⁴⁹

The joints are the area where volitional movement, the movement of specific action, is accessible in the body. However, due to training and social pressures we often associate joint actions with a certain amount of tension. Many aspects of movement training, whether dance, martial arts or sports, unless they include a somatic approach, involve the creation of tension at the joints as an unintended consequence of an ongoing striving for technical mastery. Regardless of how they are performed within diverse training modalities, joints are

⁴⁸ Skinner et al., “Skinner Releasing,” 1.

⁴⁹ Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, *Sensing, Feeling, and Action* (Toronto: Contact Editions, 2012), 22.

always the repositories of conscious movement in the body. The tension that occurs in them at the bony meeting points of muscle attachment and tendon can be the source of dynamic potential for movement.

Through training concurrently in Martial Arts and Continuum, I noticed that any time there was a shift in pressure, or a transfer of weight, the joints were loaded with muscular and connective tissue tension. This loading in turn was seen to offer movement potential at any point the tension was felt. Because the directional capabilities of joints tend to spiral, this was also the direction they moved in when their tension was released. For instance, if tension was felt at the top of the shoulder, when awareness was brought to that area, I observed that it was the whole shoulder structure that had a level of tension or loading. Although this tension may have been concentrated most on the top side or prime-mover muscular side of the joint, when any part of that tension was released, I perceived it as having a directional pathway akin to a stream running in the direction of release.

Similarly with fluid breath, I ascertained that creative choice was made available to the body through the observation of and participation with physiological realities, in this instance the letting go of tension into spiral movement at the joints.

Imagery that I developed to support this exploration was of “seeing each joint as a chocolate egg filled with caramel.” When tension was observed at a joint, focusing on this the imagery allowed for the outside tension to melt in, thus creating movements tending towards axial, or internal fluid expression, or from the internal out, creating engagement with the directional potential of the connective tissue.

Another image that emerged was that of the joints as “golden spheres floating in the body, releasing their movement potential” in a manner similar to the egg image above, but with the added ability to interconnect with the shared imagery of the other elements, because of the sense that the spheres floated in, and were affected by, the ocean.

Connective Tissue

My focus on the connective tissue, or fascial pathways in the body, and the way an exploration of them led me to further realisations and synthesis of the two elements, breath and joint release. As Continuum style breathing showed, “connective tissue” links and integrates all physical movement. Sometimes known as the extra-cellular matrix, it surrounds the organs and muscles of the body in a protective and connective sheath. Thomas Myers, in his work *The Anatomy Trains*⁵⁰ describes how connective tissue can be thought of as trains linking limbs and enabling movement. Demonstrating how this idea developed (with related imagery) to support my explorations, the following examination of connective tissue was also influenced by Gavin Clarke (mentioned in Chapter One)⁵¹.

Furthering the previous examination of tension release in the body, and how this allowed for naturally flowing yet volitional movement to occur, my explorations of connective tissue also played with the effects of tension and release, but in this case, through observing how these effects could create integration and connection. The notion of release of tension travelling like a stream through the body could also be applied to the connective tissues, where my investigations showed how this could be understood as meaning a stream of release running through and linking the fascial tissue pathways in the body. In the case of tension, however, I found that when a certain area was pressurised, it was possible to stretch the tension from its locus (primarily at a joint) through the very same pathways identified in releasing. In addition, it was observed that the releasing pathways tended towards falling; whilst the tightening or stretched pathways rose up through the body. This observation illustrated the general tendency of release to fall and tension to rise; a principle crucial to the efficacy of martial arts. I also observed that when tension was permitted to spread through the

⁵⁰ Thomas W. Myers, *Anatomy Trains: Myofascial Meridians for Manual and Movement Therapists* (London: Elsevier Health Sciences, 2009), 115.

⁵¹ Conversations with Clarke since 1999 have influenced the development of my explorations with connective tissue.

body on a particular line or train, it was as if the dense location of tension at a joint spread its energetic value through the connective tissue and was expressed instead in the fascial lines.

Another aspect of the exploration of connective tissue was also influenced by Gavin Clarke's Unwind method. Specifically, Clarke's concept of opposing "torque" between opposing muscle groups and connective tissue allowed a coiling spiral effect which heightened the potential for movement to be identified and released along fascial lines.

This torque also had parallels with Tuan Deres' Kung Fu method and further enabled a way to explore his joint spiral practice, so that spirals could be transmitted through the whole body. The discovery of connective tissue pathways accessible via tension resulted in a greater augmentation of choice in movement.

I also found imagery to be useful in accompanying this method of conceptualising connective tissue in the body. An image of seaweed-like strands stretching from the toes and fingers in five lines, each connecting through the torso, when applied to movement exploration, enabled a sense of instantaneous connection and interchange between limbs that could otherwise be lacking. To support and extend this image another picture was developed of the strands having an accompanying three dimensional "exo-skeleton" at the front and back of the body, with the same properties of connection as the internal strands.

When applying the "torque" approach I used imagery of the seaweed strands twisting from their extremities of fingers and toes or from tendrils trailing from the any part of a joint's circumference. Furthermore, these tendrils could extend out from one joint or multiple joints and connect in a coiling torque to one or multiple other joints. This in turn allowed for a deeper complexity from which to choose to connect fascial lines or to allow release at the joints, or simultaneously, to do both in different areas of the body. In application, this had the added capacity of creating a greater sense of dimension and "place" in which the movement

could sit. This enabled the Path Wave Movement to be imbued with a sense of life and narrative which is discussed in the chapter on Performance.

Unity Of Technique/Method

The three elements of the synthesised technique came together, both in their technical aspect and through the use and development of supporting imagery.

Initially I observed “fluid breathing” to be the primary instigator for all the other components being explored. Thus in the upcoming analysis of how the synthesis occurred, my examination uses the breath as the central aspect from which the other aspects will emanate and to which they will return. In the research to this stage, breath on rising and falling, was found to move fluid pressure through the body, creating pathways of movement that were identified as being part of the connective tissue matrix. This fluid breathing was seen as initiating the internal sense of connective tissue and activating simultaneous engagement with the external sense of the fascial layers.

Unifying Imagery

The imagery that developed to enhance the unification of this perspective, was that of an internal ocean moving through seaweed strand-limbs into a wider ocean. In this image the strands float out and are moved by the greater ocean in the same way that the internal fluid breath moved the inner structures. Compared to how fluid breathing enabled the sense of connective tissue to be observed and activated via imagery, attention to the breath allowed for perception of subtle and releasable tension at the joints, both on an inner and outer level. On the interior level this perception arose from the sense of the skin

tightening in response to flowing pressure moving through the body as has been discussed previously (see: Fluid Movement Accessed Through Breath And Sounding). When I discovered this contraction was specifically locatable at the joints as the fluid moved through the body, it offered specific opportunities for releasable movement.

It was here that the use of imagery, mobilised to focus on the joints as a source of proprioceptive movement and awareness(see: joint release), came into play. The image of warm golden spheres melted tension inwards and allowed a deeper subtle spiral between joints, or seeped outward towards more extrinsic movement, either within the movement of a specific joint or linking the joints through release travelling on external fascial pathways. In this way I perceived that the streams of movement created through joint relaxation, linked with strands of connective tissue pathways, were perceived as being 'breathed' into existence by the liquid awareness of inhalation and exhalation.

The imagery that came to unify all of the above into a cohesive movement "totality," was of floating points of golden fluid light linked by strands. These strands, although encased in a diaphanous, completely porous membrane, could trail out forever, suspended in an ocean whose inseparable internal and external currents danced and released the strands and fluid points of liquid in an ever changing renewal.

From this I saw that it was only through harmony of all the synthesised elements that the complete expression of each could be experienced. Imagery was thus recognised as extending the possibilities of technical aspects into choreography and performance outcomes.

Path Wave Movement Integrated With Other Modalities

In the next phase of the research I expanded the investigation of the original synthesis to describe the developmental intra-actions that took place when this synthesis was applied to the teachings

of martial arts innovators including Tuan Deres and Rodney Stewart. Many different influences drawn from the practice of choreographer Rosalind Crisp brought the research work together in such a way that all of the technical and theoretical aspects were able to exist in the practice of improvisation and performance creation.

Tuan Deres Spirals And Strikes

The form of Kung Fu practised by Tuan Deres focuses on ever more intricate execution of spiral movement and figure eights through the whole body, with differing dynamics and spirals opposing each other. It also includes the application of the idea of “wave power”. Once these spiral and wave power movements have been integrated in practice, the application of “contractual strikes” is introduced. These strikes are first applied at the “neutral” range of the joint and then at the “end” range. This end range contraction results in a natural “bounce” or elasticated recoil which offers a dynamic energy potential to the whole body which can be harnessed in many different ways. In its use in a martial arts context, this would often include bouncing the recoil from one joint to another at high speed. However, applying the somatic principles of joint release, whilst letting the breath swell fluidly through the body, enabled an inner understanding of spirals as they release naturally in the body, moving from both release of tension and from fluid moving along connective tissue lines. With the influence of Clarke’s connective tissue torque approach, this synthesis changed the outward application of the Kung Fu form, giving it a relaxed dynamism that required no tension or “loading” to shift from the softest exploration of spirals to the most powerful execution of strikes.

Rodney Stewart's 12 Points

In the work of Systema practitioner Rod Stewart, I encountered his innovation of the "12 points" of movement and directional dynamic that enabled the martial artist to find, in a continuous way, variety and elements of surprise in their training. These 12 points constituted a spatially and dynamically orientating framework from which to improvise; one that could "hold" all the previously mentioned aspects of technique and yet also act as the bridge to an adaptation of Crisp's improvisational tools and choice making approach.

These 12 points included three aspects for each of the following: time, distance, level and directional facing. Time could be experienced in action as slow, medium or fast, distance as close range (to a partner), medium range or further away, level as low, middle or high, and direction as facing your training partner directly, obliquely to their side or turning away from them completely.

In the practice of solo improvisation these 12 points involved infinitely changing configurations through which to apply the dynamics of the synthesised elements and the explosive nature of Deres' Kung Fu. This enabled an expansion of the "movement palette," an interpretation of choice-making in improvisation and performance that will be discussed in the next segment on my adaptation of Crisp's work.

As an example of the interpretation of these points in practice, I have included at least one quality from each of the twelve points acting as a kind of "superstructure" for the application of the somatic and kung fu qualities as described below:

I slowly lower my body by bending my knees via release of tension, whilst at speed performing a contractual strike with my right elbow that grows out of a fascial line drawn from the dispersal of pressure from my legs; letting a swelling in breath turn me away from

an imagined audience, whilst bringing my head closer to the back wall in a coiled spiral emanating up my spine from my waist.

The following section details how the work of Rosalind Crisp and her ongoing dance explorations have influenced the application of the somatic approach to the choreographic elements found in the performance of *The Right Unravelling*. I begin by describing her method and then finish with my adaptation of her work to my practice.

Rosalind Crisp's dance

This section details how the work of Rosalind Crisp and her ongoing dance explorations have influenced the application of the somatic approach to the choreographic elements found in the performance of *The Right Unravelling*.

It was Crisp's method of improvisation, specifically the idea of her "attention scores" and "rules," that inspired me to apply them to my own choreographic practice. In her essay *Rosalind Crisp: Dance of the Possible*, Isabelle Ginot describes Crisp's practice thus:

The performer is free to produce their own dance on condition they respect the rules. Then we need to understand what "rule" means in dance: a principle that must be respected as long as it is "productive"; that is while it allows the dancer to produce something unique; and which must cease being respected when it becomes normative or compulsory.⁵²

I was inspired by this notion. The disruption of the need to have continuity in a particular movement, action or theme and its replacement with continuity of attention spoke to the concepts of Autopoiesis and Quantum Physics as in my conception, all three shared a living awareness of unfolding processes that both proceeded, enveloped and superseded the enactment of pattern-conditioned continuity.

Another intriguing aspect of Crisp's dance was its conception of the body as "dispersible,"⁵³ a field of:

⁵² Brannigan, *Bodies of Thought*, 22.

⁵³ Brannigan, *Bodies of Thought*, 21

...vigorous and subtle differentiations, which are essential for the maintenance of a large number of simultaneous actions and modes of attention.⁵⁴

In my research, I interpreted this as a creative space where all cognised occurrences in the body could be responded to, interpreted and extended by rules which were

...accompanied by...supple and inventive application.⁵⁵

In applying Crisp's rules or "tools" to develop the somatic synthesis method within choreography, I initially began by using the following:

- follow a part of the body until you notice another part, follow the latter until the next...⁵⁶
- increase, decrease or maintain the distance between two bones,⁵⁷
- constantly change the speed of the movement being executed, the level duration and amplitude, add tone or effort to one surface.⁵⁸

To use these tools in my own practice, I tried applying them to some of the existing somatic synthesised methods I had developed. For instance, the idea of "adding tone to one surface" when seen through the prism of a connective tissue pathway, resulted in the spread of that tone in a directional line through the body. This "adding to" I identified as coming from increased observed realities of existing loading at a particular area.

In addition, I experienced the constantly changing the speed, level and duration of the executed movement

⁵⁴ Brannigan, Bodies of Thought, 21

⁵⁵ Brannigan, Bodies of Thought, 22

⁵⁶ Brannigan, Bodies of Thought, 22

⁵⁷ Brannigan, Bodies of Thought, 22

⁵⁸ Brannigan, Bodies of Thought, 23

was experienced as an interplay between release of tension (reducing tone) and spreading load along connective tissue lines (adding tone). I observed that decreasing or maintaining the distance between two bones came from the rise and fall and observant participation with the movement of internal fluid breath.

An outcome of working with Crisp's tools in my own choreographic and somatic investigations was that I was able to find disruptions and changes of dynamic, direction and intention that transformed a method of moving from the body's inherent physiological capacities into a choreographic and performable score. When applied within the 12 Points concept of Rod Stewart, I felt I had found a way of orientating improvisation in such a way that it was dynamic, structured, and responsive to both physical and imaginative cues.

I was also influenced by Crisp's imaginary use of physical "tools" while participating in Crisp's 2013 workshop in Orbost, Victoria. This concept grew out of her development of The Boom Project;⁵⁹ a collaboration with Helen Herbertson.

In her project notes Crisp describes how:

'The Boom Project' has profoundly changed my artistic practice. The borders between sensation, imagination and fiction are now very slippery – if I take time to notice. I feel my elbow, I imagine it, I sense-see an imagined hole in my elbow...⁶⁰

Crisp goes on to explain that the

...news from the body as it happens" is a capturing of each minuscule local detail of change in my body (even breathing makes us move!) and a welcoming into

⁵⁹ The Boom Project. By Rosalind Crisp. Dir. Rosalind Crisp. Perf. Rosalind Crisp and Helen Herbertson. Arts House, Melbourne, March 20, 2015. Performance.

⁶⁰ Rosalind Crisp, "The Boom Project," (Arts House, Melbourne: Conrad, Berlin, 2015), 5.

the body of sensations – images from my lived experiences in this terrible time of extinctions.⁶¹

In Crisp's Orbest workshop in January 2014,⁶² I was lucky enough to experience this slippage between "the borders of sensation, imagination and fiction", when after an intense morning session working on her tools, I went outside and lay on the grass, looked up at the sky and observed eagles soaring high up, spiralling towards and away from each other, and crossing each others' paths at different altitudes. When I went inside for the afternoon session, this image of soaring birds inhabited my application of the tools, particularly the idea of different limbs moving towards and apart from each other. From this initial realisation, further imagery grew and infused the practice of other tools. For example, feathers floating or settling became the imagery to accompany the investigation of muscle tone described earlier, with floating feathers accompanying the rise and spread of tone, and settling feathers the lowering or relaxing of tone. In this way, I was able to "see" through the physical injunctions of Crisp's tools to a world where the corporeal and imaginative were one in the moment of dancing.

Crisp's development, introduction and interweaving of the imaginary with her movement tools allowed me to conceive of the idea for my own work; where the application of Path Wave Movement with its inbuilt focus on living processes, augmented by imagery and physical tools, could simultaneously combine attention, imagination and intention.

Here is a description of my first-person experience of both somatic and tool-based improvisational choreography animated with imagery as it occurred in my 2015 MFA performance of *The Right Unravelling*:

Left arm swings displacing the sea
Breathe an ocean inside goes out and see the currents of breath come back and lift
my spine apart

⁶¹ Crisp, "The Boom Project," 5.

⁶² Rosalind Crisp, "d a n s e Project Workshop." Week long improvisation workshop, Orbest, Victoria, January 2014.

Out to seaweed limbs
Nails trails forever float off
The jelly fish knees ankles hips separate and wander independent
Everything a bubble
Left elbow large as a shark fast as
Slam and feel the froth and the reverb volcano in the deep feet bones
Each step soft explosion shakes a jointed world
Neon Eyes roll in the shell skull take water weight and roll down
Feather rise right arm with a larger arm around a larger round that cuttlefish colours
etheric layers till the centre star sends back the gold to roll up face around its rays
more bubbles to micro-make the limbs reinventable in directions that wait for water
breath to rock pool animate ⁶³

Working with Crisp attuned my perception to seeking the question in every action, with the body serving as a framework for the imagination and the imagination as a framework for the body. By letting both body and imagination express themselves simultaneously I created dance without the need to resolve historically trained actions or become stagnated in purely physical observation. Instead I found to be the opportunity for dynamic performance incorporating many diverse elements that paradoxically were alive in every moment of action.

Conclusion

Crisp's use of choice, particularly her "start again"⁶⁴ tool also had a great influence on the performance aspect of the practice as well as having perceived parallels with aspects of

⁶³ Note from my Choreographic Journal entry July 10, 2015

⁶⁴ Rosalind Crisp, workshop within Post-Graduate Diploma course, Melbourne, Victorian College of the Arts, 2013.

Quantum Physics as described in the Theoretical Framework chapter. I saw the injunction to “start again” as being related to the quantum collapse of all possible potentials to one point that occurred when an observation was made.

A series of questions arose in practice through the use of this “start again” tool:

What was happening now?

How many collapsible futures could there be?

How close could they collapse together?

How many worlds created and disintegrated?

How many choices could change and change and begin and begin?

These questions could also be understood as another instance of an Autopoietic system, self-generated and sustained by awareness and the incessant replenishing of information.

The potential for a connection to improvisation to be enacted was also revealed, wherein the disruptive element of choice was still yoked to observation of the body, in turn filtered through the idea of a living synthesis, potentiated in every part of the body by practice, observation and imagination.

In the next chapter I detail how I came to create the performance of *The Right Unravelling*, in what way the technical aspects described above (as well as those from the chapter on methodology) were introduced as well as a “real-time” description of the performance itself.



Figure 3 The Right Unravelling, VCA (July 2015) Image: Jeff Busby

Chapter Four: Performance

In this chapter I elucidate how the technical and methodological elements explained in the previous chapter were harnessed to create the performance of *The Right Unravelling*. I discuss how I came to make these choices while considering the Path Wave Movement elements of the research in conjunction with the performance potential of the space, including acoustics and spatial dimensions. I also discuss how the use of the Path Wave Movement changed and developed to accommodate the new element, performance preparation which included discussions with Helen Herbertson about the use of imagery and presence to enhance performance.

Utilising The Space, Developing A Performance

When considering the presentation of *The Right Unravelling*, my first thought was, how could the actual elements of the research with all their diversity and complexity could be presented in a performance context. The presentation space (Art Block 876 in the VCA art school) was important in this regard, as I saw it as having many different possibilities for aspects of the Path Wave Movement method to be expressed in different ways. It is important to mention here that I was able to spend a month before the presentation of *The Right Unravelling* in the space, immersing myself in the dimensions, textures, sounds and atmospheres that it offered. This immersion

was accompanied by many enlightening discussions with fellow students, supervisors and creative collaborators who observed varying stages of development. This iterative feedback was instrumental in allowing me to sense, develop and eventually perform with an intimation of depth, imagination and immensity which only the layers of time, practice and emotion could have provided.

In discussion with lighting designer Paula van Beek,⁶⁵ through her sensitivity and intuitive understanding of the dramaturgical potential of light and body, focused “worlds” were created in which to perform the different aspects of the research. To do this Paula used layered lighting states and multiple shadows to hint at the many layers of physical understanding and movement training, as well as expressive potential contained in the research. The use of the recorded sound of a busy Melbourne street in the first section of the work was chosen with the performance space in mind, where outside street sounds were clearly audible inside the space. When the external sounds were played in the space itself, a sense of outside and inside sound blended together, a metaphor for the research itself.

The final step in developing the performance was the re-discovery of imagery. In the initial stages of conceiving a somatic form based around the breath, joint release and connective tissue, imagery unlocked the ability to make very specific movement choices. As I became more familiar with how these specific somatic movement choices felt, I stopped using imagery to focus clearly on the details of internal movement observation and response.

In discussion with Helen Herbertson during the rehearsal process and lengthy time in the space we investigated the concept of an awareness of different layers or “worlds” within which a sense of presence in performance could develop a sense of fullness. In Helen’s words:

A sense of fullness supports the idea of a three dimensional awareness in the

⁶⁵ Paula van Beek is a performer, performance maker and lighting designer. I have worked with Paula since 2012 on various VCA performances.

body, giving a density of being and a rich awareness of energetic potential that can support the emerging physicality. This coupled with a similar energetic awareness of the space/place the work is trying to inhabit as it moves from the research phase into performance, can bring forth a sense of cohesion and infinite potential.⁶⁶

These worlds were to evoke a conception of place: the place of the immediate experience of the body, where a notion of place is expanded out into the dimensions of the room, or outside the performance space: the place of the city, the country, or the planet. This play between different conceptions of dimensional depth and expanse allowed me to experience an imaginative, felt sense of belonging in whatever moment I found myself.

As a result, when rehearsing in the performance space, images returned to enliven the improvisations. Thus a full circle had been made to re-introduce SRT inspired imagery for performance, where I could let

...go of conscious control, intellectualization, and preconceived ideas, [letting] images arise seemingly of their own accord.⁶⁷

This return of imagery enabled both a deeper examination of the technical forms through the prism of new inputs engendered by imagination as well as a way to find emergent narrative, emotions and living decision making capacities in the ephemeral worlds of the performance space. I perceived this re-discovery of imagery as the final step in developing the performance.

Combined with the inhabitable worlds where these images could expand, augmented by lighting and sound, this new conception allowed me to discover a different way of experiencing the research.

At this stage, the question then became how to demonstrate effectively the specificity of each aspect of the investigation and yet integrate the elements with each other to create a performance. In response, I have chosen to describe the performance from a "point of view" perspective as it was presented to an audience. However, within this first person description, I discuss the dramaturgical choices that were made in consultation with van Beek and

⁶⁶ In conversation with Helen Herbertson in the rehearsal period within the performance space, July 2015.

⁶⁷ Skinner et al., "Skinner Releasing," 4.

Herbertson, to bring it to the point of performance.

I feel that because the performance itself arose out of the context of all the other elements, by working backwards from this point I could show the decisions, intuitions and reasoning that lead to the performance, whilst still writing from within the felt space of a creative presentation.

I begin by discussing the influence of the space and describe how this influence enabled the re-imagining of the technical and practice research in the context of the performance of The Right Unravelling.

The Space

The building Art Block 876 in the VCA art school, consists of a large high ceilinged space with two adjacent rooms offering different textures and ambiances. The main room is long and wide with brick walls and of the adjacent rooms, one is similarly bricked with a wood panel on the inside wall, while the other smaller room is brick only.

Elements Of The Space Crucial To Performance Development

In the initial stages of investigation, I combined practice of the Path Wave Movement in different areas of the space, becoming aware of its presence and resonance. The rooms of the performance space offered different textures and ambiances. Through taking time for immersion in the space I became aware of aspects that were crucial to decisions regarding the shaping of the form and content of the final performance development:

1. The sounds of the outside world resonated deeply in the dimensions of the space.
2. When practising the movement aspect, the size of the space made me aware of the smallness of my own body accompanied by a feeling of the movement being “lost” or overwhelmed by its size.

These two aspects drove my decision to:

- a. Use outside sounds within the performance and to experiment also with bringing sound into the space.
- b. Frame the work in the space in such a way that each aspect of the the Path Wave Movement method would not be lost, but could be enhanced in different ways, by using different elements and places in the space. This was achieved through use of both the upstage and downstage-adjacent rooms, as well as experimenting with lighting states with van Beek in such a way that these elements could be effectively highlighted. It was through these investigations that the idea of using each element of Path Wave Movement as its own performance aspect came about.

This spatial exploration was furthered through the use of sound. I had already recorded many sounds so I started to bring them in to the space and began to dance and practise using the juxtaposition of recorded sounds with those outside the space. I felt this created an effect that was in some way an aural analogy of the work itself; an investigation of internal and external considerations. When practising different aspects of the movement in this way, a natural dramatic or narrative effect arose, a sense that the improvisation was expressing the sound and the sound the improvisation.

In response to these outside sounds, I began to vocalise myself, drawing on primal sounds influenced by Continuum as well as melodic explorations that harnessed the echoes and resonances within the space. I also explored the dynamic possibilities of percussion, both by hitting parts of the space, hitting myself with different parts of my body or by creating

rhythms out of the Kung Fu “trigger bounce” mentioned in Chapter Three. This rhythmic exploration within the place/space spoke to the exploration of rhythms that I had visited earlier and within the context of the evocative nature of the space, vocal and rhythmic soundings began to suggest narrative and emotional resonances.

Development Of Narrative

Drawing from the exploration of different aspects of the synthesised technique, I began to formulate the idea of a meta-narrative superstructure that would contain the presentation as a whole, wherein the many different elements of the research could be shown as they arose, blended, and progressed.

I originally conceived of this narrative as being chronological, starting from the most basic elements of somatic exploration, to then show the growth into complexity as new aspects were introduced. However, I decided instead to adopt a non-linear approach so as to create dramatic effect. In conjunction with spacing and light, this approach would allow for a greater potency of the performance.

The methodology itself was represented in the stages, interplay and cross over between technique syntheses, systems and quantum choice-making.

To represent this meta-narrative, I divided the performance of *The Right Unravelling* into two parts. The first contained four sections, demonstrating synthesis in improvised practice, each section grew out of the previous one, and had elements of the previous section within it. The second, which brought together percussion and singing, contained elements developed in the first section with the addition of explosive strikes from martial arts. These strikes, heightened the dynamic possibilities of rhythm expressed through the body, with the intention for this to affect the timbre and performance of vocal work.

For the performance of *The Right Unravelling*, my objective was to show aspects of the research in synthesised forms and their development “unravelling” into improvisation. This notion of “unravelling” is used as a metaphor for the exploration of the practice in improvisation, whereby new insights are opened up and then synthesised into new forms to be explored in subsequent training sessions.

Stage One Of The Performance

In discussion with van Beek and Herbertson and with the aforementioned consideration of lighting and dramatic effect, it was decided to start with a “bang” using the dramatic potential of a Kung Fu training form known as swing arm, whereby the arm was circled at speed in a way that activated the whole body.

At the same time as the arm was being circled, the other arm slowly expresses other patterns to demonstrate the range of different dynamics possible as well as in some ways referencing the unravelling title of the performance. I felt that by demonstrating the most powerful and complex movements in simultaneous conjunction with more delicate and expressive ones,

I was also demonstrating the potential contrasts in the research that inspired the search for synthesis.

After a period of time exploring these elements, I began to introduce complexity by bringing in elements of response to connective tissue and joint release. This was seen as representing the culmination of all the technical elements of synthesis without yet expressing their

narrative, emotional or imagistic potential and without the dynamics of martial arts or rhythm. At this stage I chose to simply demonstrate the kinetic interplay of breath, connective tissue and joint release and with it a “new world” as the lighting brightened and opened up the whole space in contrast to the spotlight focused arm segment where the darkness surrounding the action concealed the dimensions of the space.

In conversation with van Beek, this represented the opening up of the performance of Path Wave Movement to embrace new possibilities and discoveries, revealed through the lack of recorded sound accompaniment to allow the sounds of my own body and breath, as I performed the movement at high intensity, to blend with the outside sounds of traffic and trams.

This exploration continued until exhaustion, so as to contrast with the next section, which involved the investigation of breath. Travelling downstage towards the audience as a way of representing going deeper into the journey of physical exploration, the movement continued until it came to a stop, coinciding with the light once again focusing on the space immediately surrounding me. This spotlight with darkness around me served to bring the body into a more observable dimension, so that the details of the next section could be intimately observed by on offer to the audience.

Breath

From a place of apparent stillness, I was nonetheless still breathing heavily from the exertions of the previous segment. This physical exertion provided raw material from which I was to begin the next investigation. To my mind this movement also implied the idea that nothing that existed as a living form could be truly still. In addition, the heavy sound of the breath presaged the later use of vocal sounding. As my need to breathe deeply and heavily lessened, I began to be able to move the pressure of the breath more consciously which immediately showed the element of connective tissue moving the body.

This in turn focussed my attention to the muscular and structural loading caused by shifts of weight and the potential for movement emanating from release. It was this potential that I began to explore as the next layer of work within the context of the performance. I felt this was the first synthesis of the somatic elements and represented the actual beginning of the presentation of the research process.

From this place of initial synthesis, I allowed the next element, that of fascial connection and integration to emerge. I identified this as the introduction of a new, more active engagement that opened the performance out into the world of choice and engaged experience, whilst still integrating its connecting and loading lines with release and breath. In terms of representing the theoretical framework, I understood this to be the moment the field of somatic pure potential, or being, began to collapse into moments of decision, or doing. In *Action in Perception* Alva Noë writes that perception is not something that happens to us, or in us. It is something we do.” Noë’s concept of

perceiving as a way of acting⁶⁸

I found to be relevant for the exegesis of Path Wave Movement in performance as each perception of a feeling or state of being was also simultaneously one that was enacted in performance choice making.

This idea of perception as action I saw as crucial not only to the expression of the insights I had developed within the research, but also as the key element in translating the practice led research into a living, dynamic and adaptable performance by allowing the knowledge of and from the body to interact in real time with the generation of imagery and clear movement decision-making.

When I was satisfied that I had developed or activated the knowledge of the synthesised potential to a place where it felt “full”, I allowed a connective tissue line to take me away from the spotlight in which I had been moving. This was the cue for the lighting to broaden, and open and brighten again, to allow space for the next “world”.

To represent the opening out into the world in this section, I chose to use the sounds of the street to represent “the world outside,” whilst still dancing in the synthesis of the “world inside.” I identified this as another metaphor for the research itself.

The sounds themselves called forth imagery of streets: of people walking, tram bells clanging,

⁶⁸ Alva Noë, *Action in Perception* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2004), 1.

voices, and a flute playing high over the clatter of city sounds. I felt that whilst performing within Path Wave Movement parameters, I was also dancing in response to the sounds; affecting them and being influenced by them. I realised that whilst I still maintained the focus on the Path Wave Movement method, a sense of narrative came though, arousing and germinating imagery. This brought forth a new element in the performance and research; that of emotional and imaginative narrative as it arose out of the interplay between movement and sound.

I allowed this narrative and image to influence the execution of the technique. As I danced and explored this new world I observed choices becoming more dynamic in their response to sensation, movement and the stimuli of aural and emotional imagery.

Another element that arose was that of memory stored in the body, coming out of the interplay of release, connection, breath and sound. My perception was that as one area released, it spoke of surrender, of yielding, of letting go. As other parts increased in tension or connection, narratives around tension sprang up, and I became aware that tension was concerned with a greater sense of power and personal presence. As this tension was “dialled up” locally at a joint, or allowed to spread through my body, the perception of presence and personal narrative increased in the performance.

I experienced the kinetic potential of the dynamic interplay between all the elements becoming greater, giving rise to the introduction of opposing muscular and connective tissue “torque” discussed in chapter three. This torque presented the image of a towel rung in either direction, giving the body the possibility of new dimensions and dynamics springing from connection and release. This new potential, allied with the other investigated elements, to create a sense of a palette of choice, a richness of emotional and narrative potential and a sense of imminent capacity for dynamic surprise occurring in this moment to moment improvisation.

Improvisational performer Andrew Morrish discusses

...the plastic aspect of space and time which mark the particular qualities of engagement in improvisational performance.⁶⁹

This idea of “plasticity,” resonated strongly as the richness of imagery, technical expression and momentary choice enacted through space and time coalesced into one potentiated field.

When I felt that this exploration had activated and potentiated all I could feel and create in that time, when it felt “full” and completely alive, I felt ready for the next section. It was then that I stepped out of the upstage world I had been inhabiting, lit to enhance this aspect, and came forward again stage right, very close to the audience.

As I came forward, the lighting state changed from highlighting the upstage area with the downstage area in relative darkness, to its opposite with downstage light illuminating the stage right corner, whilst upstage faded into darkness.

This section introduced an investigation of balance and weight as I to leant against and pushed off a white wall to lean against and push off introduced an exploration of balance and weight, whilst I increased the intensity of all the elements combined in the previous section. From this ratcheting up of the dynamics between tension and release, along with the perceived potential for power and velocity of action that arose out of the use of torque, came the possibility of introducing the Kung Fu aspect of “bouncing” a muscular and fascial contraction from one area in the body to another along connective tissue lines. Thus a new element was created out of the intensity of the previous investigation; taking the body into different areas of balance that could harness their joint loaded potential for the next trigger strike, release or integrated fascial stretch. The accompanying recorded sounds became louder and more complex. Traffic noises, trams and voices all combined to influence the dance as if it were a living embodiment of everything contained in the space up until that point.

⁶⁹ Andrew Morrish, “The Improvisational Space,” *Journal of Improvisational Practice* 1, no. 1 (1995), 3.

When I sensed once more that I had activated and potentiated this world to its limit, I slowed down and began to descend to the floor. This was the cue for the lighting to lower towards darkness and for a beam of light to grow come from the alcove room to the right. In rehearsal discussions with van Beek and Herbertson, it was decided that at this point a quietening down was needed as a way of letting both the audience and myself rest from the intensity of the previous sections, and to link into the next stage of the performance where more elements of sound and rhythm were to be introduced.

Cicadas

Having activated the potential of the Path Wave Movement in the preceding part, I was now allowing it to become influenced by the evocative nature of the blue dim light coming from the corner on a diagonal downstage. I sensed that with this lighting state, a world was created that I then lived inside, rather than simply being an extension of the expression of the qualities explored in the research. I allowed images to arise as I slowly moved, subtly integrating all of previous explorations on the floor. Looking into the light I felt as if I was in a lonely place in the country, illuminated by the headlights of a car. As I moved from the fluid breath, the images changed to evoke the feeling of being deep under water in an undersea floating world, yet retaining this feeling of loneliness and remoteness. I decided to move along this line down stage, at first facing the light and then away from it, playing with its glow as if I were rippled by water inside and outside; a creature at the bottom of the ocean moving from fluid, from release, from connection. I let the movement once again be driven by these three elements with the addition of muscular torque, as narratives slowly stretched through my body, awakening and releasing physical memories, including imagery of seaweed strands floating in place of bone, dancing long fingers and toes rocked and articulated by the inner and outer sea.

The sound for this section was of cicadas quietly chirping intermittently. This in turn gave me the sensation of being inside and outside. Inside, I was the image of water to which my

body's exploration responded. Outside, I felt the touch of the light on my skin, crawling on a lonely road as the cicadas sang. This in turn created parallel feelings of narrative and emotion that were synthesised within the dance.

Eventually my progress through these states brought me to the down stage corner facing the wide dark aperture of the entrance to the next room.

This journey spoke to me of a bridging between the states of development of technique and narrative with the next stage of the performance, symbolised by the yawning darkness of the adjacent room.

My final movements within the light were to look back. I felt this image to be of Orpheus in the underworld, or of a someone farewelling an epoch in their life, recollecting all that had gone before as they hovered on the edge of the next adventure. From this edge, I stepped into the next room whilst simultaneously the light went out, leaving me in darkness in the next room. I slowly walked into the left part of the room, removing myself from sight of the audience, with a sense of journeying in darkness through a tunnel to the next stage.

Rhythm

As mentioned in the description of Art Block 876, I had begun my exploration of the space by playing with tapping and sounding along the walls. I saw this as the natural entrance to the next stage of the performance which involved sounding and rhythm dynamics.

This tapping and percussing off the walls once again presaged the first steps into the next

world, laying out the simplest iterations of rhythm that were to be gathered and exploited later, in ever expanding complexity and dynamism that extended through the body.

While I tapped, I also began to apply the Path Wave Movement, so that the sounds themselves would come through the prism of this movement as I travelled down the wall banging the boards. Sometimes I used my whole body to create crashing sounds as I slammed into the wall and as in the other exploration of worlds, I allowed this investigation to find its fullness, its potential, and activation of all the elements. This culminated in reaching the end of the wall at the corner, and once again becoming visible to the audience. From this initial entrance, I tapped my way into an alcove of brick, reducing the volume and speed of the sound, whilst at the same time lessening the range and scope of my movement. Within the progression of the performance, this felt like an emptying out, a resolution of one investigation and the first tentative steps to finding their way to the next.

The brick alcove I had been exploring in rehearsal was a way of realising the “steel body” power elements of the Kung Fu technique, a method of conditioning designed to weather the body to absorb forceful impact. This Steel Body technique⁷⁰ utilised a more intense version of the trigger contraction described earlier, and enabled me to investigate ways of slamming my back as well as the side of my torso, elbows and fists into the brickwork, in such a way that I would not injure myself. This alcove was now identified as a new world, with the decision made through the rehearsal process to brightly spot light this area so as to best bring out the intensity of the demonstration.

Initially, I explored using the different qualities of sounds that arose out of striking the bricks with different areas of my body. I found that the bricks required more impact from the body to produce audible sound than in the previous exploration on the wooden boards, and this necessitated greater range and velocity of movement.

⁷⁰ Steel Body was one of the Kung Fu technique taught to me by Tuan Deres as part of his Infinite System Kung Fu Method. It draws on his study of traditional Chinese Kung Fu, particularly Wu Chi and Yang Mian.

By allowing this swiftness and variety to be expressed through the research technique, I observed I was able to find a diversity of impacts and sounds that allowed rhythms to naturally emerge out of the dynamics of the movement and to return to them.

When I once again felt that I had reached a point of “fullness” and activated as many of the elements within this investigation as I could, I began to let the steel body strikes and rhythms open off the walls into the Kung Fu bounce contraction at the joints. Whereas before I had utilised the trigger as a way of finding new shapes and balance points in the body, I now incorporated the power of the previous exploration to bring more force to the trigger strike at the joints, which had the effect of creating sounds at the joints themselves. I let the trigger effect at the limbs bounce back and create percussive impact on my stomach, chest, arms, and legs.

The sounding and rhythms became a synthesis of steel body wall strikes, trigger joint bounce and body strikes, all expressed through the research elements of fluid breath, release and connective tissue.

I let the physical expression of rhythm and movement develop to what I felt was its potential for that moment, whilst allowing the investigation of trigger strikes and hits of the body to take me off the wall completely. As I moved just off the wall I began to let my breath and vocalisations come through, as I hit my body or bounce contracted my joints. These vocalisations took the form of grunts, hisses and guttural cries that expressed the particular impact stress or release coming into or through the body in that moment, as well as layering a new sound effect to the existing exploration.

For this new investigation, van Beek and I decided that the spot light would stay the same, but my movement would take me deeper downstage into the light to represent my going deeper into this rhythmic world.

I explored this state until I had activated the body by laying out all the rhythmic elements up until that point. From tapping to steel body wall striking, from trigger joint bounce to body hitting and percussive vocalisation, I had expressed the potential of the somatic research to blend dynamically with rhythm and with the infusion of vocal sound I was again at the beginning of the next exploration, the next world.

Containing the free play of all the Path Wave Movement elements introduced so far, as well as the emotional, narrative element re-expressing itself through a new prism of forcefully expressed physicality, van Beek and I decided this play would be in darkness, back lit by a side light to silhouette the body as I performed all the elements, breath, connective tissue, and joint release. Once again I allowed this play to become potentiated through an intensifying of all the elements until exhaustion, until the ability to respond creatively to the offers presented by the interplay of all the elements was subsumed by fatigue. As I felt this exhaustion, I continued to move at great intensity, to see if I could find a new element wrung from the last drop of energy. By combining release of tension with the speed and bounce of contraction, I found I was able to “wring” (squeeze) out more moments of intensity.

Joan Skinner notes:

...when students have realized the Releasing principles, they can unleash greater power, speed, and intensity of movement with the appearance of less overt effort than would be expected. Also, they can move suddenly with no apparent preparation, just as a snake strikes without warning. At the same time, subtle nuances can be expressed through the movement with inordinate clarity.⁷¹

By further synthesis of Kung Fu principles with SRT, I perceived the enhancement of my ability to find stamina in intensity through simultaneous diminishment and increase of effort. In effect, the release of SRT enabled a greater and quicker contractual capacity for Kung

⁷¹ Skinner et al., “Skinner Releasing,” 3.

Fu strikes. At this point, I moved to upstage centre and whilst still silhouetted, the lights brightened to once again represent the apotheosis of that particular element. I played with incorporating all facets that had emerged thus far from the rhythmic investigation into the performance.

At the point I could no longer continue to make creative choices, the moment exhaustion overpowered my ability to both intricately and powerfully express the movement, I stopped the exploration and returned to simple breathing. Here I was just a breathing human, exhausted, letting the performance and all the aspects of technique and narrative empty out. I saw this as being a deeper echo of the first part of the performance where I exhausted the potential of the Path Wave Movement method by pushing my body to its limit.

In this place of exhaustion, I was no longer demonstrating or performing anything, I was simply truly letting my body be, existing as an exhausted, panting organism. From here I slowly and simply walked to the smaller room nearby, which was still in darkness. Facing away from the audience, I leaned against the wall and continued to breath against it until my exhaustion lessened.

Once again I sensed that I was leaving one world, leaving the realm of rhythms and power behind, to breathe and listen to the sound of my breath.

From this place, I was able to introduce the next phase of the work: extending vocal and melodic exploration.

Song

Eventually as I breathed I allowed my vocal chords to express more than simply the rasp of breathing. These beginning vocalisations were still linked to the sound of the breath and yet were a new thing, the introduction of the next element. I began to let the fluidity of breath

extend the sound and the sound itself to then be expressed through the connection and release of the Path Wave Movement elements. As this occurred I began to allow the vocal line to extend in duration, without yet being altered by the input of release and connection. At this point the lighting built to a warm orange which represented the next world being created. As the light increased in intensity and the melody rose and changed, I felt that I was singing this world into being, singing forth life from the primordial ocean of breath, release and connection.

As I saw these things, my body began to describe them and to write the words, letters and images that arose from song, whilst through the play of all the Path Wave Movement factors, the pressure of the vibrating sound created new provocations internally within the body to be released and connected.

As this exploration progressed, I stepped away from the room in which I had been sounding so as to once again allow the opening of the exploration to be reflected in the opening of the space. This in turn corresponded with the lights brightening to reveal more of the performance space. I began to investigate the potential of mixing melodic sounding with the reintroduction of percussive elements – of trigger contraction and hitting the body, as a way of bringing a new examination to its effect on the breath.

For instance, as I sang a melodic line and then performed a trigger strike into the joints, this sound created percussive effects in the vocal chords. When many triggers were performed close to each other it had the effect of “percussive vibrato.” If I hit my chest with a fist, in the moment of hitting, it cut off the sound only to release it instantly into a new sound, following the release of tension. As well as the choice to connect to a fascial line, it also raised the octave of the melodic line whilst releasing tension dropped it lower. Playing with these parts close together created a dynamic interweaving of song, sound, breathe, percussion, release and connection. This in turn was seen to heighten the sense of emotional narrative, and to release physical memory and image arising out of the voice. I played with all the aspects of the voice and body until I intuited once again that it had reached its most potent state and was ready to change.

Final Part

In this new stage I let the sounding and percussive elements ebb out and the body, playing with the echoes of the vibration, explore the newly activated potential of breath, fascia, release, imagery and emotion. I then allowed sounding via body strikes and connective tissue torque to return as elements rising out of the body itself, a potential within all the other potentials that collapsed into a new state the moment directed choice was made. I saw this multiplicity of choice as a palette of potentiated action, where all the elements danced together, the end of the performance but the start of the next journey.

For the lighting in this section, we decided to brighten the lighting state in the whole room as if to show everything within the luminosity of awareness of choice potential, as if everything investigated in the performance was now revealed openly to everyone.

In contrast to the previous sections, the exploration of “fullness” in this newly expanded world, had delicacy and stillness, echoing the small movements of the earlier breath and cicada exploration. The narrative that arose felt like a kind of summary, a telling of all that had gone before, yet showing what was occurring in the present and was yet to come. It felt as though I was able to utilise all the elements of previous explorations as punctuation, space and possibility in this summary, as though now for the first time a language was being coherently and evocatively spoken in performance.

I opened up the range of my movements to explore every part of the space, delving into the energies remaining in each area that held the vibrancy of previous exploration, allowing this vibrancy and memory of investigation to effect my choices of movement.

When I came again to what I felt was the point of fullness within this summary, I slowly began to reduce the dynamic expression of these elements, travelling downstage and to the left of the audience as the bright, open lights dimmed and a new spotlight surrounded me as

I came to one place. It was here that I felt I was saying farewell to the performance and to the audience, while still using all of the aspects discovered in the research and developed in the presentation. However, this farewell was expressed on a subtle, micro level, as all the potentiated places in my body and mind became the expression of feeling in that moment. It seemed to me as though this expression now was my life, my spirit and body written through the vibratory responses of these new creations – a synthesis of all methods, all imagery, all worlds created and felt to that point.

When it seemed once more that this place of subtle recapitulation had been expressed, I simply stopped, turned around and walked upstage and to exit behind the screen, finishing the performance. This walk itself spoke to me of the emptying out of all that had come before, yet also the first steps into the next world of discovery and integration.



Figure 4 The Right Unravelling, VCA (July 2015) Image: Jeff Busby

Conclusion: Discoveries And Next Steps

The process of researching and performing *The Right Unravelling* has changed my conception of what is possible in human movement, training methods, choreography, improvisation, and performance. What began as a nascent yearning to unlock the movement potential I intuited in my body, eventually became a complete disassembling of everything I thought I understood about my body and its movement.

The examination, development and refinement of physical specificity through a somatic prism and its application to training forms, choreography and improvisation practice has both opened the potential for my own field of study and will provide avenues of research for those investigating cross-disciplinary and somatic work. In concluding this thesis, I discuss the crucial findings that were discovered, their ramifications for improvisation and performance practice, and the themes that have arisen for ongoing investigations.

Assumption

Through questioning every injunction within dance training methods and teachings I had participated in, I came to the realisation that every action is assumptive in origin unless it springs from the organic matter of physical existence. The journey of the research from inception to culmination has led me to propose that conscious movement from this organic place follows a recursive cycle of attention, imagination, intention and action. When this recursive approach is enacted in improvisational or other choreographic approaches, the outcome, formerly the main consideration in any choreographic or technical act, becomes an arc in a feedback spiral, with awareness of physiological processes being the ongoing and continuous consideration at all times.

Path Wave Movement

In terms of training methods, the outcome through this research was the development of a somatic synthesis, culminating in the creation of Path Wave Movement, a dynamic fusion of fluid breathing, joint release and connective tissue integration.

Bringing this synthesis to fruition after intuiting its potential at the start of the thesis was immensely satisfying on a personal level, not least because in subsequent investigations, the principles uncovered in Path Wave movement have continued to remain coherent and consistent even when extended and applied to other modalities or aspects.

Imagery As Intrinsic To Movement And Performance

The rediscovery of imagery in performance, and the realisation that it had grown symbiotically with the development of Path Wave movement, has been important for my continuing practice. Acknowledging the essential nature of imagery for both technical and creative exploration has allowed me to develop technical, imaginative, and improvisational movement simultaneously. This has had the result of enhancing the uptake of new discoveries on both a deep somatic level and a creative one.

Methodology As Creation

Within the discovery of this methodological approach to practice, I reasoned that the influences of Quantum Theory, Hegelian and Autopoiesis had themselves become a synthesis, a meta version of the development of Path Wave movement and an “etheric” or higher level embodiment of the research itself. This has fed into the next stage of my practice which is the sense of all things happening not only simultaneously, but as representations, exoskeletons, shells or different bodies akin to the physical, mental or astral.

Permeable Realities

The process of synthesising different elements of technique, modality, and methodology has brought me to the understanding that my perception of reality is permeable in practice and performance. Permeable realities represent the integration of knowledge that occurs when formerly disparate approaches are blended together. In these new places, not only do training forms and methods seep through each other, but the feelings, the conceptions, the imaginations, the history, and

the cultures contained in each modality bleed into one another and become something other than they were alone. The research has shown the possibilities, ranging from the practical to the imaginistic and conceptual, that may occur within and from new multi-potentiated modes of expression making.

Ongoing Explorations

My ongoing direction and practice since the final performance of *The Right Unravelling* has been to develop insights into Path Wave Movement based on further exploration through the methodological process established through the research. Each of the elements of breath, connective tissue and joint release have been layered through each other with increasing depth, and complexity, to the point where they have permeated each other, and though potentially divisible for the purpose of training investigations are nevertheless interacting as one, living movement reality.

The introduction of poly-rhythmic patterning to Path Wave Movement is a further opportunity for research, where infusing and changing the potential of Path Wave Movement with a deeper and richer understanding of how the independent yet connected potential of the joints can act as rhythmic pulses. In addition to this, I have continued to develop vocalisation in movement practice, and these explorations, in conjunction with the rhythmic patterns, have served to enable a sense of the vibratory potential both in the joints and in the rest of the body. My goal is to develop these three elements of somatic synthesis, poly-rhythmic patterning and vocalisation until they too become a new synthesis, a new performable, permeable reality synthesis inspiring and uncovering the next discoveries.

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Appendix 1

Video Documentation Of The Creative Research

The Right Unravelling

Presented at

VCA Art Block 876

July 2015

Full Documentation

URL: <https://youtu.be/uwqD1usz8b4>

Duration: 34:03 mins

5 Minute Trailer

URL: <https://youtu.be/E8bZ8Bujuy8>

Duration: 5:04 mins

Appendix 2

Timeline of Research Development

- 2000** Began Training in Tai Chi.
- 2005** Began study of Aikido with Shin Joe Thambu.
- 2007** Began self study of Body-Mind Centering after being exposed to elements within a Pilates environment from Kim Sargent-Wishart.
- 2008** Began studying Skinner Releasing Technique with Wendy Smith.
- Attended Body-Mind Centering for performance and improvisation classes with Alice Cummings.
- 2009** Began self study of Ideokinetics works of Mabel Elsworth Todd, Lulu Sweigard, Barbara Clark, Irene Down, Andre Bernard.
- 2011** Trained in Arnis with Sir Jhoey Rodil in Occidental Mindoro, Philippines.

2012 Began training with Tuan Deres in his Infinite System Kung Fu

Began discussion with Gavin Clarke and realised the synergy between what we each were developing in Unwind and Path Wave Movement.

Began study of Continuum with Amber Grey.

Commenced Post-Grad Diploma in Performance Creation at Victorian College of the Arts and was exposed to the methods and

practice of Rosalind Crisp and Helen Herbertson.

2013 Began training in Systema with Rodney Stewart.

Began MFA at Victorian College of the Arts and began formalising the synthesis of technique and theory that has become Path Wave Movement.

2015 Thesis Performance of The Right Unravelling at Victorian College of the Arts.

Oct 2018 Continued Synthesis of Path Wave Movement method with applications to dance technique, (Ballet, Contemporary Dance), Martial Arts, Injury Rehabilitation. My choreographic practice has deepened the path Wave Movement application to rhythmic patterns and melodic lines.

Appendix 3

Example Of The Linking Of Creative And Technical Practice

In this appendix I want to describe the process or movement technology which has come about from the fusion and questioning of all of the above mentioned practices as they exist so far and continue to evolve. The principles of somatic, creative movement that underpin and are practiced in all the other forms within this work.

Each principal is described using poetic imagery first and then below each descriptive passage I will give a more technical explanation of what the passage means.

breathe and the spine breathes
pearls on a string in a current ocean,
prayer flags vertically up a submerged mountain
each bone back, front, side a flag and the ocean flutters it

Because of the attachment of the diaphragm to the spine, every breath moves the thoracic spine. Because of the proximity of the psoas muscle to the diaphragm the lumbar spine is also affected by breathing. Our bodies are mainly fluid so the filling of our lungs with air is creating pressure which in turn moves the fluid around our bodies in a wave or tidal motion. This also has an effect on the movement of the spine. The above images serve to create a felt sense of the multidimensional kinetic possibilities that can be experienced and expressed by breathing with the spine.

the breath winds its way in
around the organs and out
like the ocean swells into a kelp cavern
both moving, being moved by all that it is there
every current is a spiral and everything in the pool
is either pulled or released in response
and it is only in spirals that it may move
and let the tide slide through the fixed lie

This refers to the internal sensations perceivable by fluid breathing. Before I heard Judith Aston and Emilie Conrad speak of the weaving pathways of the breath as it moves in and out of the body, I had never considered that the organs, intestines, veins, bones and fascia might be in fluid flux; both responsive to and affecting of these pathways. Breathing is the fundamental movement instigator in our bodies. It is in spirals that movement is distributed through our bodies.

Tension felt in breathing is either because we are breathing to a capacity greater than our ability to relax or we are not allowing movement to swell, spiral and flow through the tense or held area.

where there is touch
there is skin
yielding bones weight
and there is the whole mountain falling
yet keeping its shape
it leans into the earth or sky
or out the side
and each falling is a stream
that on finding its new place
falls streams again
and a stream may fall up
a stream may float
it always winds

This refers to relaxation into contact points. By releasing tension at the site of a contact point the non-contacting areas relating but not limited to that point may also release. (For instance when the right hand contacting a surface relaxes into that surface, not only the elbow, shoulder and neck on that side have a tendency to release, but also other areas of the

body. This is because of the interdependent nature of connective tissue and its influence on patterns of movement relating to tension and relaxation.)

The sensation of releasing is not inevitably accompanied by a collapsing of the skeletal structure.

It is possible to feel the contact point and attendant limb/body release in such a way that the angle of the relevant joints stay more or less unaffected whilst the sensations of release are experienced travelling in any direction. If we allow ourselves to follow a pathway of release into a new positioning of the contact points (a shift, however subtle, to a new weight bearing area), the whole process as described may begin again.

It is also possible to imagine a contacting surface and use an experience of imagined yielding into contact to achieve similar but more subtle results with perhaps more performative potential.

how much can the contact points know?

how deep

how textured?

grass, sand, softest clay

everything untouched is tethered totally

to contacts blind true sense.

This refers to the contact points leading the body. Every body part that has a connection to a contacting point at any given time leads the movement. Through use of different imagery, different qualities of movement may be explored. Movement in other areas of the body are determined by the direction and quality of the movement on and from the contacting points. The contact points are tangible indicators to the rest of the body of physical position, tension levels and movement availability.

the weight on that part has it's equal in power
a true stored hoarding
the greater the weight
and its soft touch
the more it may erupt

This refers to the movement potential within tension when weight is loaded on a joint or joints. The more weight and pressure that is put through a joint whilst keeping a relaxed connection to

the contacting surfaces, the more dynamic movement potential is available on release of

tension. these joints are each illumined
joints as floating points
they float bright jelly fish
in the deep electric sea
each one moves
and the rest
float respond
the ocean blows from all ways
and the joints sway
just a thread connecting each from knuckle to sacral space
the lights stay open
and each one might trail out a vine
a line
a spindle antennae length
to the never ending of the rocking sea
be rocked
trailing back

Our joints are among the most important receivers and interpreters of proprioceptive information.

I use the image of all the joints floating in fluid, affected by the oceans currents and thus affecting each other.

This affect is determined by the image of thread like jelly fish limbs connecting each joint. The use of light as an image is to allow them to all stay "aware" and open, so that were one joint to "close" it would be recognized as a dark, tight or non-responsive part of the body.

The image of ocean currents allows an unforeseeable fluid dynamic to be introduced. A sense of the internal fluidity at the mercy of a greater, perhaps random one.

The image of each joint with the capacity to trail a threadlike antennae out into the currents is there to expand the sense of spatial perception beyond the skin and to allow for a sense of movement intricately and specifically instigated far beyond the body's usual proprioceptive capacities.

the connector between the contact points: joints as spheres
balls of golden fluid
may release full spherical directional potential
and tension around is soluble on noticing
at any point or all
and where is the ball releasing its question?
or does the golden fluid dissolve out
diffusing the tension around it
into new streaming paths
and do the balls fall stream together?

This is a further development of the idea of the movement potential inherent in our joints. Here I also begin to link the principals of contact point movement with movement accessible from joint release.

The image of the fluid sphere is to encourage an understanding of the mutability of tension around our joints.

What seems to manifest as stiffness in the joints is actually muscular and connective tissue tightness around synovial fluid, which has the same movement potential properties as other fluid in the body.

By allowing the joints to have fluid movement potential we can ask: where would a sphere of fluid release direction?

Tension around a joint can both dissolve into the fluid sphere or the fluid sphere might expand its golden liquid release out.

Can we perceive other joints releasing simultaneously?

any net stretched pulls the whole thing along
at any point there is no point
start to pull somewhere
and where else isn't it?
you'll know by the tight sides where the knots tied
how small can you feel it all?
Sometimes the taut thing feels out
a different tensing
that can release within winding
can open space

loosen the weave

open trace

Through connective tissue the whole body moves at the same time and where a part of the body is not responsive to or does not allow movement from another area to affect it, tension will be felt.

There is no hierarchy of movement instigation and execution. Within each directed movement action are the micromovements of fluid, breath and connective tissue and within these micromovements lie the potential for the next directed movement.

Where/how can the minutest movement in one area of the body be felt in another area/areas?

The image below describes how tension can be moved through the fascial lines of the body as an intergrated whole.

An ocean

a net

its all filled

and flowed

what's moved

moves what moves it

This refers to the combining of the connective tissue, net pulling imagery with the fluid breathing imagery as it influences spinal and joint movement. Combining multiple movement principle images allows for near instantaneous and simultaneous multi-dynamic movement potential.

A string in each joint from anywhere

pulled at anytime

at any speed
birds fly with a puppet string in their beaks
and it may yank or drop

This is a development of the idea of the joints kinetic potential referred to earlier in the jellyfish antenna passage. Here it refers to a quality that cedes directional and dynamic choices to an imagined outside agent. This is a very useful tool for improvising as it allows you to explore many spatial, directional levels and movement qualities.

footloops
whole heel ball arch toe
soft in them and the whole body knows
breathe and the feet read
spine circles infinite eights a ball of yarn
the worlds create

Footloops are a way of mapping the feet so that spiral movement can be transferred through the whole body. The softer the feel of contact in the feet, the more movement can be directly conveyed through the legs and pelvis into the spine and arms. Fluid spinal breathing can be felt in the loops of the feet. By imagining a ball of yarn that the feet stand on, a 3D quality is released in the feet and this is expressed through the whole body's movement.

All of the above principles are layered together in practice and inform warp, mutate and evolve each other. They are in turn warped, layered, mutated and evolved by juxtaposition with the practices of somatics, martial arts, singing, percussion and movement improvisation from which they originally grew.