

Ficto-theory: Dance miniature at the little con – a fragmented remembering with endnotesⁱ

‘Hello, I’m not exactly sure where to begin because I never know where it begins, or ends, if it begins or ends, or just middles forever; I mean where does forever begin as it goes on forevering?’

Sorry, I’m going to begin again. What I mean to say is I’m your slightly dyslexic friendly neighbourhood experimental artist, and I was wondering if we could dance in your front yard?’

Before the event, riding my bike round and round the streets in search of performance spaces – logistics of walking and moving audiences and performersⁱⁱ, coordinating times and destinations: assigning a trio to each block and two blocks to each trio; explaining the movement to the performers so they can lead the audience; then sending the audience off with one trio and asking them to change to a different trio as both audience and performers change to different blocks. And it’s all happening at once. Four blocks, four trios, four audience tours. Each audience does two tours with two different trios on two different blocks. Each trio does two different blocks with two different audiences. Each blocks tour culminates in a laneway that spans all four blocks before changing, beginning again. And it’s all happening at once.

Audience missed half the event, performers missed another half; half the event or more was what we missed, what wasn’t and didn’t happen, so we finished with an imaginary finale that amidst the confusion of explaining the workings of the score I forgot to implement.

It’s improvised. We make it up as we go along.

The part we didn’t miss, beginning and ending at Cecil st. where the pretend finale that didn’t happen saw cushions layed out either side of two intersecting pathways down the centre of the studio - the four trios dancing in separate corners with audience seated along the crossroads between them.

How amazing it would have been if they were boxes. Remember the boxes?

As the box event is raging in the up and downstairs spaces at Dancehouse, other box events are happening in all the Melbourne dance venues and this is synchronized with Sydney events moving between the drill hall, Sydney dance company studios and the opera house; there’s also events happening in Berlin, Switzerland and the New dance school in Amsterdam. Between all the box events in all the cities people have offered up their front yards and as audience members move between one location and another, they walk past houses with performers taking audiences on neighbourhood tours. The buses, trains and trams are also full of dancers duetting in the aisles and for a day the whole world knows the universe is dancing.

Andrew Morrish is performing for a boeing full of people between the Amsterdam and Melbourne events - playing at such an intensity he starts to stutter and fall into strange tangents, causing the plane to veer off course, which like the stuttering, tangents, falling off and tripping over become more material to generate more play; and as this is happening the play starts folding in on itself, and he starts folding the play back in, and the play and him are folding, layering and multiplying, turning dough into noodles, stretching the atmosphere of the space and shifting the direction of the plane in about a million different directions, sometimes all at onceⁱⁱⁱ.

I turn to 3 people staring as they walk past and start to follow, slowly turning my head as they look back down the street, taking in the breeze through my pores, noticing the

duet between the breeze and the low railing woosh of Andrew and the plane streaking metal and lights for a moment as they land on the Nicholson st. tram track runway. Disembarking he leads his audience along the laneway to Paul who tells them to follow him and ignore the Ann-Maree chanters led by a crazed floral mesdame from the 70's curling up in the dog's bed, galavanting in the geraniums and balancing a cumquat in her eyeball.

An old chap is stumbling around the bins out the back of a car park, he seems pretty harmless, singing to himself; but he's had a skinful tonight. Was I so wise to play with my pissing, growling, drunken madman? Drawing blood must mean something. They were glad to get the gate closed at Rose St. A mad, meandering homeless group moving randomly between house fronts, invading and daubing them with presence and imagination - how many cowering Fitzroy residents peeked nervously between the blinds; hovering by the phone, unable to differentiate between art intervention and home invasion?

As we're about to begin and walk out the studio, I remember we should send trio D and their audience who have the furthest to travel off first. I yell out just in time, following up with a reminder that this is improvised, just in case the smooth efficiency of our preparations suggested otherwise.

In trio B, the second last to leave the studio, Peter's first, he enters rattling the letterbox, the first of many textures in a very zen yard. He quickly finds his way onto the stones, standing against the wall, open - a series of expressions giving way, falling into each other quickly and naturally: smiling, slightly anxious, aggressive, uncertain. The stones churn, not quite crunching beneath his feet and his weight falls into the wall as his body begins shaking, trembling lightly all over, head to toe, one foot hovering slightly away from the ground. He makes his way to the side wall, leaning forward over the rubbish bins, one leg comes off the ground and I find myself enchanted by the map of the world on the sole of his shoe. Burying himself behind the bins finishes the last and begins the next thing, quietly punctuating the end of melancholy and beginning of play. By the time he crosses the veranda to lift the doormat we're moving the audience on to our next destination. A street party unlike any other and instant rapport with 'neighbours' I've never met in a street I've never lived - everything I need to know inscribed upon my sweating palm. I get on my horse, close the gate of reality and step into a five minute dance I will call 'the departure.' So lovely this particular tenant provided me with superb hip-swaying music and just a smatter of light with which I might entice my growing farewell party. Increasingly lulled by what is fast becoming a humorous illustration of this slightly familiar soundtrack, I am glad to be arrested by the scream of my lover who passing by her window is alarmed by my departure. She, always practically inclined, suggests more light may help, something I initially dart but eventually warm to, aware the bush I have found is no place for one destined for great adventure in a far off land. I bend over backwards, knowing only too well no offering will fill this woman's heart and find it easiest to conclude with my eyes fixed upon the gaze of a young boy - shhing his father into silence - who's future I am certain depends upon this very moment.

In trio C, Jane missed the pre-event walking tour^{iv}, so we send her in first - prancing, flicking limbs, she's light-fast-sharp-clear and relaxed all at once. She darts out and back into view. In the 2 short minutes before I have to leave I witness a highly

articulate dancer with a quirky abstract sense of humour and exquisite receptivity to site. I didn't want to leave; but someone came home: just walked through the orchard and window with lace curtains looking mildly apologetic, returning home to what was a drive but is now a theatre. Her housemates all popped their heads out to see the audience and she's not sure what to do with the invisible apple offered her as she disappears back behind her front door.

Oh so lucky we were.

Me with large found bunch of twigs to cover torso and head, chatter of drunken boys and park parrots. I am Magrillesque with Cage on sound, how thrilling. A wonderful indoor set and outdoor performance, very temporal, black clothes outlining her in the mysterious dinge against the concrete - security light interrupting the night air.

Red tracksuit pants nimbly frolicking amongst the roller-door, bricks and sand - the wicked relief of water without a cause. A gibbering duet meeting briefly on a harmonic wave; skipping in the lane without the skipping rope, the yippy-yappy concrete-lot back-alley dance - a furious exploration of exotic spaces.

Which thread to follow, shadowy skin creeping for the light beneath a deep-set arch - a taxi, quiet and sustained stood on the edge watching her from 20 cm throughout, the beauty of light play across all surfaces coming from near and far.

I'm talking nonsense, I know, but off they go, a solitary figure in the distance under a single sinister streetlight...a bottle top along galvanized iron running into a dead end. Confrontation. Fear and memories of trust... in a dark car park Grace dances her dog-bark duet under the ineffectual security beam shedding false moonlight on her lying rolling body. The stars are coming out and Paul feels the diminishing light, softly entering an entrancing garden of shadows, fragile foliage and veranda. Suspending his action in the shadows, the quietness and mystery of the night and the garden. Then moving fast, a jump into the side garden - a change in sound, texture and Dominique disappeared into the ceiling, the audience gasping when she rolled into the sand pile and stuck, surprised and falling still there against the wall beside a one legged amputee war victim arthritically shuffling along the veranda on his knees, crashing heavily into the white stones, wondering where they'd come from.

I can't do, I didn't write this^v. I need space, it's all happening at once - navigating the pathways, unable to see two groups in the concluding trios in the long alley-way context, but knowing someone out in the road was probably reading us all in a strange collective synchronicity.

Oh so lucky we were.

A trio with Dianne and Hellen, then Joey, Jane, Jonathon and myself make a quartet. The 3 of them stand in the mouth of the lane enclosed by a tight semi-circle of watchers, of which I am one. Surrounded by non-stop performance fragments, one giving way to another, focus was hard to find at first but then came clear and simple. Had I settled in or did the 'position, position, position' make all the difference? Passing back through the thin membrane of audience I'm swallowed by the lane as a dog barks his grumpy dissatisfaction the other side of a garage door being shaken by a performer. He wasn't about to bow-wow out of a fight with an unseen foe and protected his boundaries with a steadfast gaze before being enticed to continue with a meow before the procession of laneways led back to the studio for the imaginary finale^{vi}.

Endnotes:

ⁱ An improviser, someone who makes things up as he goes along, I'm drawn to the Australian Aboriginal notion of dreaming, where the earth both creates and is created by dreams, each step somehow bringing the earth and the dream into being. Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips says a dream is "memory in its most incoherent and therefore fluent form." (Phillips 1994 p.67)

I'm uninterested in any kind of purity of documentation; it's not about sameness and fidelity to what was, but otherness and what's becoming. Writing is a creative act in the present.

The endnotes, and the documenting/remembering of the event itself turn on a series of linked ongoing fascinations: an intrigue with endlessly blurring the line between discourses of so called 'reality' and 'fantasy,' and the inherent fallibility of memory – remembering/documenting as an act of creation and imagination so resolutely intertwined as to become 'the memory of a possible future' (Damasio in Murphy).

And finally, inspired predominantly by the writings of Matthew Goulish and Tim Etchells, I've also been drawn to the idea of using the notes as an opportunity to create an-other text, with a different cast of performers to the first, whose entourage included:

ⁱⁱ Tony Osborne, Fiona Bryant, Peter Fraser, Jane McKernan, Dominique Miller, Hellen Skye, Jonathan Sinatra, Shaun McLeod, Dianne Reid, Ann-maree Ellis and Joseph Lehrer (a duet), Grace Walpole and Paul Romano.

ⁱⁱⁱ The box event really happened (a year ago) in radically different much less megalomaniacal form but Andrew Morrish didn't perform in either event, let alone in a plane between events, though he really did lead an audience to Paul past another audience chanting 'ann-maree.'

^{iv} And Jane really did miss the pre-event walking tour and really did perform first, but she was in trio D, not trio C; which only leaves the Yvonner Rainer tribute 'trio A' unaccounted for in the main text,

^v whose writings are combined fragments from performers that didn't see one another during the course of the event; re-written and edited together by Paul from the writings of Shaun, Di, Fiona, Peter, Tony, Hellen, Grace, Ann-maree and Joey; the 'I' variously moves and shifts between being all those people whose words, sentences and responses 'I' shamelessly appropriated and twisted into a semi-fictional narrative they were really involved in.

^{vi} This includes the imaginary finale that wasn't, that really did happen, remember: "Imagination creates reality," more than half the event was what we missed, what we dreamed... "the world we desire is more real than the world we passively accept" (Frye in Phillips 1998 p.xviii).