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# Remnants of us: Collective dance-making as multi-art form praxis

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**Keywords:** Collective practices, collaboration, contemporary dance, viniculture, multi-art forms

## Introduction

The Australian dance theatre collective, Remnant Dance, was established with a vision to create innovative contemporary dance, make new forays into performing arts' practices and connect with diverse practitioners and audiences. Core members embrace the place of "improvising and reflective processes in collaborative contexts" (Asker, 2003, p. 24) as integral to collective professional practice. The artists seek to create within a collaborative devised frame that is responsive to individual needs, sensitive to cultural and social concerns and adaptable to diverse places and spaces. Whilst Remnant Dancers do not always articulate in spoken language what new knowledge has been unearthed through collaborative improvisation, discovery is evident in the arc of skin as it responds to synaptic impulses, directing the body in movement patterns with haptic perspicacity. At what point do we connect with each other? How do we engage with others through collaboration and performance?

In the quest for connection, collective members have sought to create innovative contemporary dance works in non-traditional theatre spaces, such as installing site-specific dances in alternative spaces, making dance films in outback Australia and urban Myanmar, and collaborating across (arts) disciplines to experiment with contemporary dance theatre forms. The practice of the core dancers

has been enriched and challenged by collaborating with artists from other artistic disciplines, including visual art, fashion design, literature, music, photography and film. Despite the ongoing challenges of funding, administering and marketing such collaboratively devised, participatory and experimental dance works, Remnant Dance has toured extensively throughout Australia, as well as internationally to Vietnam, China and Myanmar.

Whilst the collective model for dance-making is not new, globalization, new technologies and practice-led research methodologies in university education programs have generated new knowledges for making and understanding dance as a socially engaged and embodied form. In the Remnant Dance context, collective dance work is shaped artistically, financially, managerially by the individuals who make up the core membership. Our projects are artist-led—shaped by creative methodologies, organizational issues and the search for meaning-making by way of creating, making, and connecting through our craft, and in relationship with each other.

The recent project, *winery psalms—the mixed half-dozen*, invites consideration of collective dance-making as multi-art form praxis and is the case study for this research paper. In 2015, Remnant Dance invited twenty-two artists from the fields of music, contemporary dance, and visual/multimedia arts to collaborate in creating six short artworks that matched wine-tasting with dance, music, art and literature. The experimental artistic experience involved creating six groups, each comprised of a visual artist, composer, choreographer and dancers who were invited to collaboratively respond to a fragment of text matched with the taste/aroma of a local Australian wine. Embedded in the devising and production process was mentoring across disciplines and generations, as well as creative risk-taking for both emerging and established arts makers. Arts methodologies for installations were informed by how people interact with wine sites as a tasting experience, so each of the six ten-minute dance theatre pieces, performed during six shows on site at a local winery, invited audiences to experience sensory connection through visual, aural and kinesthetic mediums. The project was an innovative venture for Western Australian artists and audiences. In working collaboratively across disciplines, artists extended

creative practices that challenged how artwork is seen as a commodity, inviting audience members to engage, through their senses, with the performing art works and with each other.

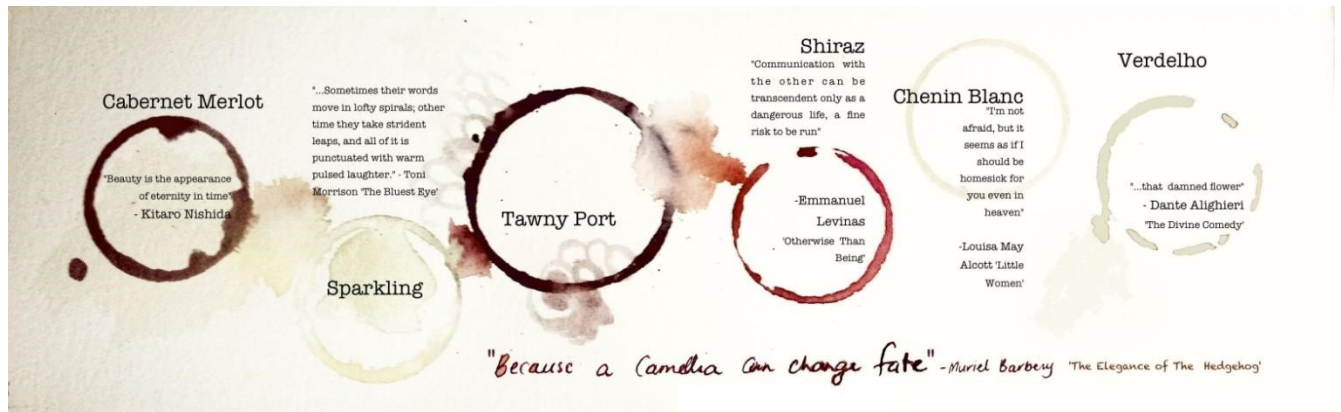


Image 1: Event image for the Remnant Dance production, *winery psalms—the mixed half-dozen*  
 Photographer/artwork: Amanda Humphries, 2016, image used with permission.

## Collective practices

Artistic communities can be defined in many ways, with distinctions based on organizational issues, aesthetic preferences, as well as social and political concerns. Duska Radosavljevic cites Simon Shepherd's taxonomy of theatre-making groups as including "repertory, ensemble, collective and collaboration" (2013, p. 9) focusing on ensembles for her analysis of contemporary theatre-makers' work. I perceive there are parallels between the ways a theatre ensemble is constructed with that of a dance collective, although according to John Britton, the question of what constitutes an 'ensemble' in the context of theatre-making is unanswerable (2013).

Radosavljevic suggests there are similarities in creative group processes and discusses how group dynamics, described by Bruce Tuckman (1965)—as forming, storming (conflict arises), norming (resolution of conflicts), performing (achieving performance goals) and adjourning (leaving or letting go until the next project)—shape artistic experiences within art-making groups (Radosavljevic, 2013, p. 6). I would add that the intimacy of interpersonal artistic practices sustains, enriches and challenges developing collective communities, which in turn fosters social interconnectivity.

According to Grant Kester, the emphasis on socially engaged art in recent decades has fostered collective practices and quite significantly focused on dialogue and exchange amongst creative communities (2005). In Kester's foreword to Jay Koh's text on art-led participatory practices (ALPP), he observes that artistic relationships revolve around dialogue between collaborating artists and the fact that "outcome is dependent on the fluency with which the artist and their collaborators respond to a reciprocal dynamic" (Koh, 2016, p. 3). Collaborative processes are complex. Artists seeking connections with other artists move towards other (like-minded) practitioners to create work that is meaningful for the participants. In a dance collective context, exploration of movement language and choreographic concepts foster investigative approaches, not only into making dance, but into what it means to make dance collectively, as was evidenced during the *winery psalms* project. Movement languages are determined by multiple members, and as individuals contribute in diverse ways, new knowledges emerge collaboratively. I have observed that collectives also hold appeal for a perceived potential for transformative (even emancipatory) social outcomes.

Dance collectives have existed loosely, or in more formally constructed ways for as long as people have gathered together to make dances and interact with audiences, communities and society (Kassing, 2007). Dance-making is inherently social (Collins & Ogier, 2013; Hamera, 2007; C. Stevens & McKechnie, 2005; K. Stevens, McKechnie, Malloch, & Petocz, 2000) and some dance scholars, such as Judith Hamera, argue for "recasting dance aesthetics, and aesthetics generally, as practices of everyday urban life" (2007, p. 3). When one adds the element of collaborative inquiry to a collective dance-making scenario, then a particular dimension of social engagement emerges. The dance work creates a site for participation, revealing that the aesthetic space is never a neutral space but is also in fact a social space in which participants engage with ideas and with each other, through the dancing bodies. Postmodern dance practitioners in collectives like the Judson Dance Theatre (1962-1964), pioneered movement language, eschewed hierarchical company models and rebelled against concepts of one choreographer for a dance work. At the time, the very questions of *what* is dance and *who* can

dance was explored through collaborative approaches such as contact improvisation. In the case of the Judson Dance Theatre, “anyone who abided by the democratic rules of the workshop could make a dance” (Banes, 1994, p. 208), whether trained as a dancer (or not), or as a musician, or a visual artist. Today, collectives such as the Mono Collective in Amsterdam (founded in 2011) are based on the idea of blending different skills and art forms with the intention of creating “interdisciplinary work that opens up new perspective” (Mono Collective, 2011). It could be argued that all dance-makers, in fact all artists, working in interdisciplinary settings, are seeking the outcome of new perspectives. Does this suggest that the idealism that often drives the establishment of collectives is too fragile to sustain, or too complicated to contain multiple perspectives and individual subjectivities?

The collective model as a vehicle for innovative dance-making is clearly not a new idea and, broadly speaking, still not without contention. My experience is that it is difficult to sustain artistic practice in a collective context. However, I have observed that sagacious dance-makers in collectives are creating work with determined acumen, which I attribute to a greater awareness of cross-cultural arts practices, an increased capacity for travel and global communication, shifts in dance training pedagogy and the increased diversity of tertiary dance education programs in recent years. In my experience, contemporary dance collective practices are characterised by nuanced and inventive dance-making and a desire to connect with other artistic collaborators organically, to foster equity in decision-making and to generate roles based on interest and skills for different projects. I have observed, in the Remnant Dance context, both core members and contracted collaborators have responded with enthusiasm and excitement when offered opportunities to make work together and to share in the decision-making for artistic work. All collaborators have enriched and also challenged Remnant dance-making practices across disciplines that include film, literature, fashion design, music production, visual and multi-media arts. I have also noted that often, with collective dance-making endeavours, social engagement is part of the artistic agenda or mandate. The potential of a collective, I believe, rests within fostering a hybrid collectively to nourish new artistic forms for creative growth and public consumption.

Contemporary arts projects, driven by collective practices and interests, mark an emerging body of work interested in and distinctive for its use of collaborative activities as a catalyst for conversation and change (Bishop, 2006a, 2006b; Jordan, 2015; Meskimmon, 2003; Neal, 2015). It is my contention that the *winery psalms* project is an example of such an approach. My observation is that for a new generation of artists making work collectively, a dialogic approach to collective practice has reconfigured the parameters for the making of artistic works, through embodied knowledges and aesthetic experience.

The debate surrounding the issue of art-making in social collaborations versus the criteria for evaluating this kind of work highlights the issue of the ethics of practice. There is a genuine challenge for aesthetic excellence in crafting dance within the collective context. Kester maintains that such pursuits “require a paradigm shift in our understanding of the work of art; a definition of aesthetic experience that is durational rather than immediate” (2005, p. 3). By durational, Kester is suggesting it takes time to build relationships and the artwork emerges during and through the process of participation, generating what he refers to as the dialogic aesthetic. Koh also notes that it takes time to build constructive and collaborative relationships to generate sustainable agency for change, in particular within social spheres and describes his ALPP as “a holistic set of micro processes that take place concurrently between others and me as fellow participants over a durational indeterminate time, through progressive phases” (2016, p. 30). Claire Bishop goes even further, declaring:

The social turn in contemporary art has prompted an ethical turn in art criticism. This is manifest in a heightened attention to *how* a given collaboration is undertaken. In other words, artists are increasingly judged by their working process—the degree to which they supply *good or bad models of collaboration*—and criticized for any hint of potential exploitation that fails to ‘fully’ represent their subjects, as if such a thing were possible.

(2006a, p. 180)

Bishop’s concern appears to be that aesthetic and social considerations should be evaluated on their own merits. Nicola Shaughnessy suggests that the “feuding between Kester and Bishop involves a familiar set of dualisms: art versus

politics, aesthetics versus ethics, authorship versus spectatorship” (2012, p. 200). I wonder if these binary notions can be challenged by a holistic experience of dance which involves body *and* mind, spirit *and* flesh, cognition *and* intuition.

### **Challenges to collective practices**

The complexity of evaluating work generated through collective practices is complicated by the approaches of the group, and creative outcomes. Often it is difficult to establish and maintain a collective practice due to a resistance against leadership styles, issues with funding and grant applications, designation of roles, and loss of momentum after a project peaks and concludes. According to Radosavljevic’s research, the main challenges for contemporary ensembles are to sustain the natural “storming” phase of a creative project and to justify to funding bodies why the collective model requires long rehearsal periods (2013, p. 21). Although dance collectives differ from theatre ensembles in process and outcomes, there are parallels between the two. Radosavljevic’s findings from interviews with theatre-makers resonate with my own experiences when she concludes that ensemble leaders rarely delight in their leadership roles, and prefer to be seen as a coach, directing from within the group—not as a director, but rather putting oneself out of a job (Radosavljevic, 2013, p. 19). It can also be difficult to distinguish between the artistic process and the creative outcome, when at times they become blurred or even merge.

Collectives are often project-driven, plagued by the challenge of securing funding to ensure sustainable and ongoing creative development. Individuals enter a collective group with different (often unarticulated) expectations which can lead to misunderstanding and conflict. What begins as an idealistic venture can spiral out of control with (often covert) competing agendas and the (often unspoken) desire for someone to take responsibility of leadership, without appearing to lead. In dance collectives in particular, dancers’ stringent studio training, combined with former professional experience in a dance company environment, can at times leave dancers ill-equipped for group dialogue and consensus reached through collective solidarity and collaborative improvisation. To complicate things further, as collective



members come and go, there is a need for constant adjustment to group dynamics. In the Remnant Dance context, I've noticed new members require considerable time to feel that they have an equal voice in group decisions and to feel valued on multiple levels when participating in choreographing dance art/work.

My experience of the collective model is that it resides in the in-between spaces of art-making and is neither entirely a group of individuals nor an institution. Collectives such as Remnant Dance are uncomfortably squashed in the space between the independent solo practitioner and the company model. The challenges are many and diverse. As a practitioner-researcher, I am constantly calling into question the boundaries within which I find myself working. I find I am also constantly justifying the work I do, whether it is inviting collaborators to contribute to a project, or applying for funding. Administrative and organisational tasks can be overwhelming and the challenges of assuming a leadership position within a collective model pose unique frustrations in the dance collective context. This can be seen as a form of dissensus, where I am at odds with my own sense of what I would like the role to be, in contrast to what I actually have to do. Interestingly, I find that these challenges, types of frustrations, and ostensible obstacles, can in fact lead to a greater reflective capacity for negotiating with the individual members of the collective and how to then face the world through the different collaborations (at home and abroad). Thus, *dissensus*, or the lack of consensus and/or collective dissent, has considerable potential as a tool for self-reflection, as well as a tool for devising collaboratively.

As Remnant Dance Maker, I have observed that the collaborative nature of the work, and the sense of connection that each independent artist has experienced in the past years, has drawn each one to commit to making dance in this context. The artistic process is fluid and responsive to individuals' needs during the time they work within the collective context and this flux can be challenging simply because, in the words of Emmanuel Lévinas, "communication with the other can be transcendent only as a dangerous life, a fine risk to be run" (2013, p. 120). The risk involves a level of intimacy generated through the heightened emotional experiences of making and performing dance works which brings immeasurable rewards that vary for each individual, depending on the project. Intimacy is connected to the danger of facing the Other through, in Lévinasian terms, the 'Work'. As Lévinas describes it, "an

orientation which goes *freely* from the Same to the Other is a Work . . . *the Work conceived radically is a movement of the Same toward the Other which never returns to the Same*" (1996, p. 49). The posture of approach and the action of the Same moving towards the Other requires generosity without any expectation of gratitude (without returning to the Same). The Work is a relationship with the Other "who is reached without showing itself touched" (Lévinas 1996, p. 49).

### **Strengths of collaboration**

Within the dance collective, Remnant Dance artists have come to thrive on this kind of connectivity which embraces collective agency and shared ownership of Work. As a contemporary dance-maker, I relate to choreographer Jennifer De Leon's description of her work, as "the moment of the time/no-time when consciousness is occupied with neither coming nor going, neither haste nor urgency or imposition, but simply being" (2009, para. 17). The "affect" created by dance exploration allows, in the words of Constance A. Schrader, for a choreographer to "feel, perceive and sense, and in integrating those responses . . . discover your own form" (2005, p. 175). The creative act engages the choreographer in multiple intelligences including verbal, kinaesthetic, aural and interpersonal. In making dance with others the identity of the choreographer shifts to co-creator. For Gilles Deleuze, thinking takes many forms (1988) and I would add that deep thought can be embodied through creative exploration into the shape and form that we call "art". The making of art involves constant moving from the front to back realms of thinking, folding ideas in on oneself, exploring back-to-back with others, both physically and philosophically. Much like Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the rhizome, there is ceaseless movement of thought, embodied in action that shapes thinking to recreate new neural pathways and patterns of movement: a "rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*" (2004, p. 27). Through danced collaborative processes, there is a shared folding and doubling on the fronts and backs of bodies in intimate, ephemeral moments. The creative work is in a state of *becoming* (Deleuze, 1988) and dancers are responsive to concepts of *being* (Lévinas, 2013). The movement of ideas in the body invite a philosophy of practice in which dance-making presents a space for meeting the Other in the dance.

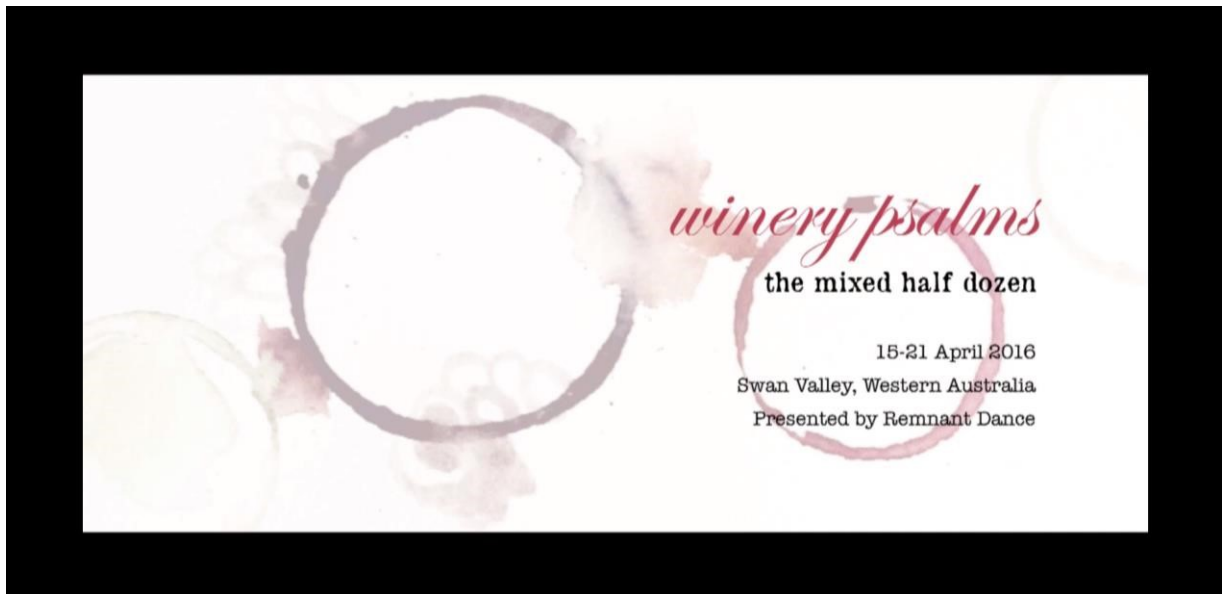
The term 'collaboration' emerged in the vernacular in France (1860) and it includes both the act of working with other people on a common project and to "cooperate treacherously with the enemy" (Johnston, 1976, p. 155). This latter reference implies another (darker) side to collaborative methods and methodologies. With regards to dance-making, the text—that is the body—turns outwards, towards the Other and creates opportunities for meaning-making through engagement, exchange and collaboration. The gamble in doing so is that the body is exposed, made vulnerable and put at risk. That said, artists often persist with collaborative endeavours despite frustrations, which may be because "like kids rolling down a hill to deliberately make ourselves dizzy, we want, from time to time, to see things in another way" (Barstow, Phillips, & Medley, 2014, p. 12).

### ***winery psalms*: multi-art form collaborations**

The *winery psalms* project evolved through collaborative explorations across disciplines of dance, music and visual/installation art. Each member of the six working groups was invited to read the source material of their fragment of the text, to taste the matching wine, and to develop an artistic response to the text's quotation through collaborative devising. The pairing of viticulture with artistic practice was significant for the development of creative ideas through collaborative and interdisciplinary processes. New audiences encountered contemporary art works for the first time because of the approach and concept of sensory engagement across mediums. Dancers, visual artists and musicians were able to extend or embrace the boundaries of the primary language of their practice. Dancers were challenged to engage with art in a still medium. Visual art pieces became engaged in a more kinetic way, and music at times took a more dominant form. The added taste and aroma of wine during the promenade theatre experience invited the audience further into the performance. There was a 90-minute installation and a live performance event, during which audiences came early to mingle, and stayed late to discuss the work with artists and other audience members.

Click on the image below to follow the link to an edited documentation of *winery psalms—the mixed half-dozen*, or alternatively, follow/click on this link to view the short video documentation of the performance experience:

<http://www.remnantdance.com.au/index.php/create/repertoire/311-winery-psalms-the-mixed-half-dozen.html>



Video 1: Click on the still video image above for an edited documentation of *winery psalms—the mixed half-dozen*, 2016

Filmed: Simon Stokes, 2016, footage used with permission

The title of each *winery psalm* piece was constructed with the psalm ‘number’ taken from the year of publication of the source material of the quote, and then, a combination of the author’s surname and the wine matched with the piece. For example, the first work, *psalm 1970 Morrison Sparkling*, was inspired by Toni Morrison’s 1970 novel, *The Bluest Eye*, and matched with a Pinelli Sparkling wine. Each collaborating group wrote a ‘tasting note’ in response to the textual provocation, which provided a synopsis of the short work, as illustrated in the following excerpt from the *winery psalms* program.



*psalm* 1970 Morrison Sparkling

*provocation*

Toni Morrison  
*The Bluest Eye* (1970)

Sometimes their words move in lofty spirals; other times they take strident leaps, and all of it is punctuated with warm-pulsed laughter.

*response*

Delicate explosions of dynamic texture and effervescent tension unleash a cacophonous, rapturous spirit. Fragile tannins reminiscent of forsythia, lilac and dandelion, challenge the balance of heavy undercurrents and seasonal offerings, framing an opia tltainvokes not an answer, but a question.

*collaborators*

**Artist:** Jo Darvall, sales queries, contact page: [www.jodarvall.com](http://www.jodarvall.com)

**Composers:** Alix Hamilton, Anna-Kat Hicks, Digby Hill, Julie Valenzuela

**Choreographer:** Scott Putman

**Dancers:** Ellen Avery, Katie Chown, Samantha Coleman, Jacqui Otago, Caroline Stevenson **Wine:** Pinelli Sparkling Juliet

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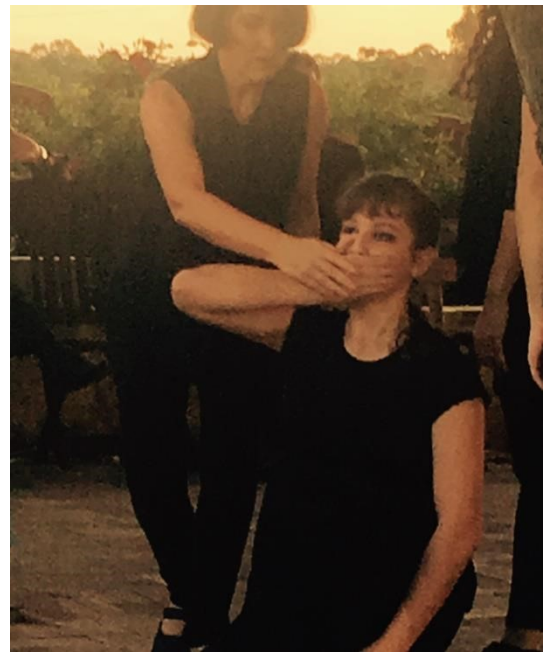
Image 2: *winery psalms* program excerpt—*psalm 1970 Morrison Sparkling*

Design: Lyndall Adams, 2016, image used with permission.

The opening winery psalm, *1970 Morrison Sparkling*, invited audiences to experience live artwork as a sacred space: a psalm. As the audience sipped bubbles of sparkling wine, Deleuze's concepts of difference and becoming played out in the

dancers' bodies with live music, invoking a soundscape of restless, certain uncertainty. In addition to *becoming*—of the epistemological and ontological relationship of continual impermanence and the assemblages of meaning—other notions appeared and reappeared for me, including Deleuze's descriptions of foldings, doubling and the making of memory (Deleuze, 1988). The idea of "foldings" is described by Deleuze as "the fold of the infinite, or the constant folds (replis) of finitude which curve the outside and constitute the inside" (1988, p. 97).

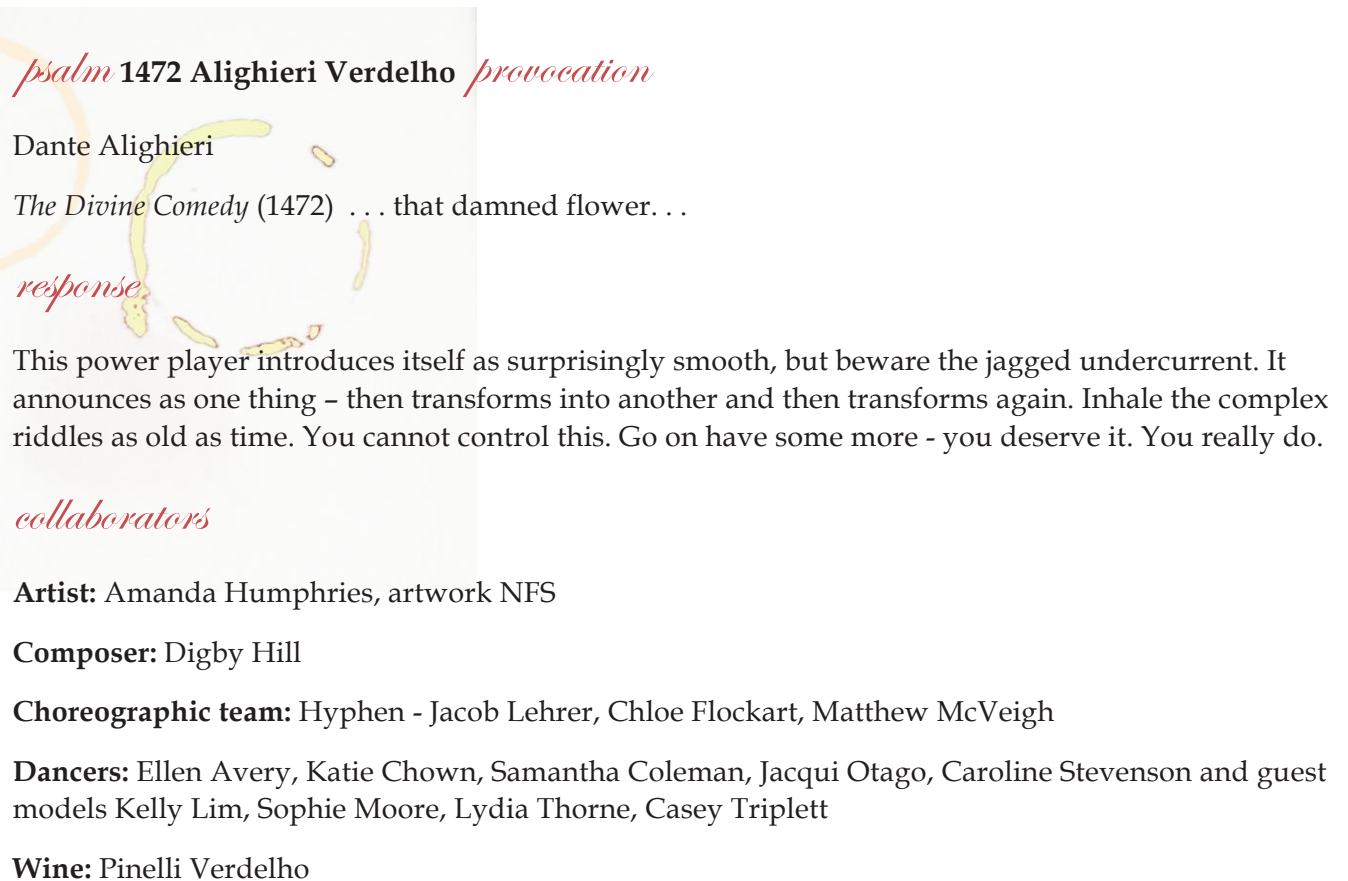
Interestingly, the notion of *being* resonated—not so much in relationship to the Deleuzian understanding of being but rather to Martin Heidegger's concept of *Dasein* (1927), as the phenomenological perception of an individual and their worldview. I have found that worldview, ultimately in the collaborative and collective dance experience, invariably involves encountering *others*. Elizabeth Grosz has noted that Heidegger tries to present *Dasein* as "neutral, clean, unbounded with the complications of sexuality and anthropological specificity" (1995, p. 70), noting the positions sit together uneasily. Grosz maintains that Heidegger's gesture to remove traces of sexual difference from *Dasein* generates a different understanding of sexuality, for as a 'neutral' term and a definition of the origin of things, it speaks of corporeality. In relation to the corporeality of the Other, I have discovered that dance-making invites possible restoration of an ontological base through the domain of ethics. As Lévinas suggests, beyond this concept of *being* there is an ethical imperative to care for others: the Self is found in the Other (2013). As illustrated in the images to follow, these notions of Self/Other were explored in the work of the *psalm 1970 Morrison Sparkling*. In this instance, the Other was the other person who observed, listened, danced, sang: what is our ethical obligation in this relationship with an Other?



Images 3-6: Jacqui Otago, Caroline Stevenson, Katie Chown, Samantha Coleman, Ellen Avery, Julie Valenzuela, Alix Hamilton, Anna-Kat Hicks performing for *psalm 1970 Morrison Sparkling*  
Photographer: Amanda Humphries, 2016, photographs used with permission.

Deleuze and Guattari “argued that life was an open and creative whole of proliferating connections” (Colebrook, 2002, p. 5) and for some of the collaborating artists, practice in the studio became increasingly about the proliferation of such connections through collaboration. The question of artistic practice pertained to the ethics of work in which “the cornerstone of creative dialogue and collaboration lies in an understanding of reciprocity, that of a multi-directional and dynamic conversation

that can benefit all and can create an entity or sensation which is greater than a sum of the parts” (Barstow et al., 2014, pp. 12-13). The second ‘winery psalm’ explored the proliferation of such connections through collaboration, inspired by Dante Alighieri’s text, *The Divine Comedy*, as extrapolated in the tasting note below.



*psalm 1472 Alighieri Verdelho* *provocation*

Dante Alighieri  
*The Divine Comedy* (1472) . . . that damned flower. . .

*response*

This power player introduces itself as surprisingly smooth, but beware the jagged undercurrent. It announces as one thing – then transforms into another and then transforms again. Inhale the complex riddles as old as time. You cannot control this. Go on have some more - you deserve it. You really do.

*collaborators*

**Artist:** Amanda Humphries, artwork NFS

**Composer:** Digby Hill

**Choreographic team:** Hyphen - Jacob Lehrer, Chloe Flockart, Matthew McVeigh

**Dancers:** Ellen Avery, Katie Chown, Samantha Coleman, Jacqui Otago, Caroline Stevenson and guest models Kelly Lim, Sophie Moore, Lydia Thorne, Casey Triplett

**Wine:** Pinelli Verdelho

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Image 7: *winery psalms* program excerpt—*psalm 1472 Alighieri Verdelho*  
Design: Lyndall Adams, 2016, image used with permission.

The *psalm 1472 Alighieri Verdelho* invited direct audience engagement through phones to access the dance/music available only online. The choice to scan QR tags to access dance footage and music facilitated engagement with a virtual world. The short animation, to follow, offers an example of artwork included for access via personal devices. As the audience members moved from spectator to participant-performer in the moments of online engagement, new questions were raised. What was being *made* through collaborative and improvised endeavours along these communicative fronts?



Click on the image below to follow the link to view the short (2:50) animation, or alternatively, follow/click on this link to view the animated film, *Turn*:

<http://www.remnantdance.com.au/index.php/make/story/342-turn.html>



Video 2: Click on the still video image above for the animated film, *Turn* of Caroline Stevenson, Jacqui Otago, Ellen Avery, Katie Chown, drawn by Amanda Humphries for *psalm 1472 Alighieri Verdelho*  
Animation: Amanda Humphries, 2016, footage used with permission.

The third short work, *psalm 1868 Alcott Chenin Blanc*, began with a singer leading audiences out of the previous work (located online and accessed by phone) into an area for storytelling, inspired by a quote from Louisa May Alcott's novel, *Little Women*, as noted in the program excerpt to follow. In this piece, the live singer and three dancers moved on and around an artwork located in the space, referencing experiences of families gathering around a living area to share the intimacies of their lives. The Chenin Blanc tasting, poured discreetly during the performance, offered a bittersweet sensation on the tongue, reminiscent of tears.

*psalm* 1868 Alcott Chenin Blanc *provocation*

Louisa May Alcott

*Little Women* (1868) I'm not afraid, but it seems as if I should be homesick for you even in heaven.

*response*

Taste the unashamedly nostalgic flavour of sweet sorrow etched into the threads of time. Joyful notes of spring and roses burst through smoky reminiscence to delicately weave a waltz of memories.

*collaborators*

**Artist:** Kirsten Biven, artwork title: *The Pilgrim's Progress "Alcott's Little Women"*, size: 161 cm x 270 cm, medium: textiles and mixed media, price: POA

**Composer/ Performer:** Anna-Kat Hicks

**Choreographer:** Frances Barbe

**Dancers:** Katie Chown, Jacqui Otago, Esther Scott

**Wine:** Pinelli Chenin Blanc

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Image 8: *winery psalms* program excerpt—*psalm 1868 Alcott Chenin Blanc*

Design: Lyndall Adams, 2016, image used with permission.

In the process of sharing, making and showing, the *psalm 1868 Alcott Chenin Blanc* illuminated the truth-making of art and the “fold”. The language of body was visceral, evidenced most intimately in the tears of audience members, the focused stillness of bodies (spectator and performer alike) and communal expulsion of breath as the artwork and the *work* of the artwork (Bolt, 2007, p. 33) was realised in live performance. As Lévinas suggests, “the body is the fact that thought is immersed in the world that it thinks and, consequently, expresses this world while it thinks it. The corporeal gesture is not a nervous discharge but a celebration of the world, a poetry,” (1996, p. 40).

According to Linda Ashley, dancers are generally content with “learning set movements, then through repetition, gaining increased accuracy and expression. In this role dancers are required to think and perceive, mainly through imitation. In the collaborative model, the *dancer* is involved in both the roles of choreographer *and*

dancer, and thus, it is proposed, expanding the cognitive potential of the activity”, (2005, pp. 1-2). In the process of creative ownership and shared creation for *psalm 1868 Alcott Chenin Blanc*, the choreographer, dancers, musician, visual artist, together enabled greater understanding of meaning-making, of story-telling and of shared bodily expression through the (often) non-verbal communication of performance, as illustrated in the following images.



Images 9-12: Katie Chown, Jacqui Otago, Esther Scott, Anna-Kat Hicks performing for *psalm 1868 Alcott Chenin Blanc*  
Photographer: Amanda Humphries, 2016, photographs used with permission.

In the experience of working in the studio and also during *winery psalms* performances, I found that the artistic exploration persistently invited an encounter of the Self or the Same with the Other (Lévinas, 2013). Dance-making in the collective environment seemed to endlessly investigate notions of connectivity and in the case of the work, *psalm 1958 Nishida Cabernet Merlot*, to pursue the kind of beauty that philosopher Nishida Kitarō describes as “the appearance of eternity in time” (1958, p. 40).



### *collaborators*

**Artist:** Sue Starcken

**Composers:** Johannes Luebbers & Shoeb Ahmad

**Choreographer:** Lucinda Coleman

**Dancers:** Katie Chown, Jacqui Otago, Esther Scott, Caroline Stevenson

**Wine:** Pinelli Cabernet Merlot

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Image 13: *winery psalms* program excerpt—*psalm 1958 Nishida Cabernet Merlot*

Design: Lyndall Adams, 2016, image used with permission.

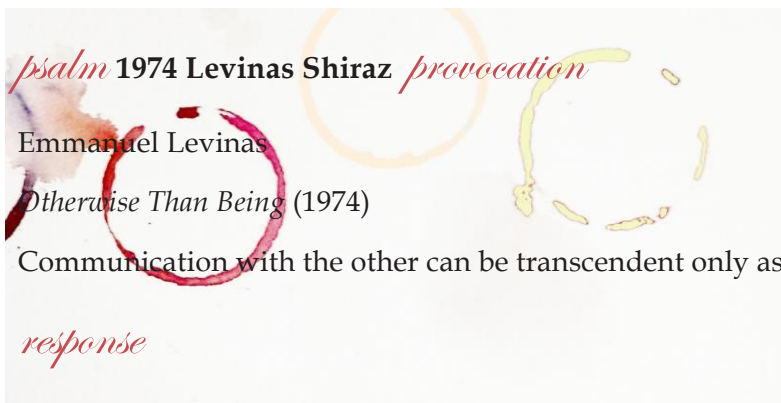
As the choreographer involved in this collaborative group, I found that if engagement with collaborators was to be a successful exchange, it must be open-ended as what emerges through the discourse, or what Cheryl Stock refers to as “intertextuality” (2009), is most likely unpredictable. While intertextuality as a term was partly introduced into critical theory through Julia Kristeva’s translation of Mikhail Bakhtin’s idea of the dialogic, Stock is using the term here to reference “the interweaving of different mediums of expression and communication: written, visual,

aural and kinetic,” (Stock, 2009, p. 14). Choreography can be seen as a site for interconnection, and intertextuality, allowing for outcomes which are not only unexpected but in which participants embody new knowledge through utterances of dancing text. Stock also notes that the “choreographic environment now embraces concepts of connectivity and interactivity which extend beyond the physical to the mediated and virtual” (2009, p. 9). As I understand it, intertextuality encompasses a myriad of open-ended possibilities created through the discourses and practices of a culture within which artistic work is created with the knowledge of multiple narratives that have come before. Bakhtin reminds us of the delicious possibilities and the sheer pleasure of the spaces between when creating together (1981), which emerged simply, and with simplicity, in the work of *psalm 1958 Nishida Cabernet Merlot*, as alluded to in the images below.



Images 14-16: Remnant Dancers performing on site for *psalm 1958 Nishida Cabernet Merlot*  
Photographer: Amanda Humphries, 2016, photographs used with permission.

Interconnection has the capacity to shift the climate of what I understand as a given social culture but is in fact dynamic and changeable: cold fronts within warm fronts generating new fronts for social change through creative occlusion. The *psalm 1974 Levinas Shiraz* offered this kind of climax for the entire *winery psalms* production as four dancers engaged directly with each other, exploring themes of communication and human interaction based on Lévinas’ observations of encountering the Other, as explained in the program excerpt to follow. Drinks were consumed before the work, so audience foci was directed to the live experience, and individuals were encouraged to engage with, and appreciate, the nature of art as ephemeral, transitory and relational.



Communication with the other can be transcendent only as a dangerous life, a fine risk to be run.

*response*

The sharing of weight is like divulging a well-kept secret, a metaphor for trust. A meeting of equal parts, it is a quiet challenge that requires both courage and commitment, for only when you truly surrender your self can you feel the weight of the other. Unsure but interested? Take a risk in this place of tantalising uncertainty.

### *collaborators*

**Artist:** Kate Leslie

**Composer:** Julie Valenzuela

**Choreographer:** Sue Peacock

**Dancers:** Ellen Avery, Katie Chown, Samantha Coleman, Esther Scott

**Wine:** Pinelli Shiraz

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Image 17: *winery psalms* program excerpt—*psalm 1974 Levinas Shiraz*

Design: Lyndall Adams, 2016, image used with permission.

Within this particular work, the archiving of memory in the body altered the comfortable notion of shared empowerment, leaving audience members without words to properly articulate the experience of encountering the Other. By archiving I mean that the experiences of the body remain in the cells of the organ of skin and shape the thought and action of the body in encounters with others. This was evident in development of movement material, as seen in the rehearsal footage overleaf, as collaborating artists began by listening to the ‘text’ of bodies in conversation. By this I mean responding to what was communicated between bodies in the collaborative exploration of improvised and guided movement tasks in a studio setting. As Shaughnessy has observed, “devising is a collaborative methodology, underpinning the processes involved, while performance provides a liminal space in which participants can play, engaging conceptually, spatially and imaginatively through

experiment and experience” (2012, p. 10). In the performance context of this artistic work, multiple voices were involved in the exchange of ideas through the bodily encounters of the *psalm 1974 Levinas Shiraz*.

Click on the still video image below to follow the link to view the short twenty-second example of rehearsal footage, or alternatively, click on the following link to view the footage:

<http://www.remnantdance.com.au/index.php/make/story/343-video-3-sue-peacock-in-rehearsal-with-katie-chown.html>

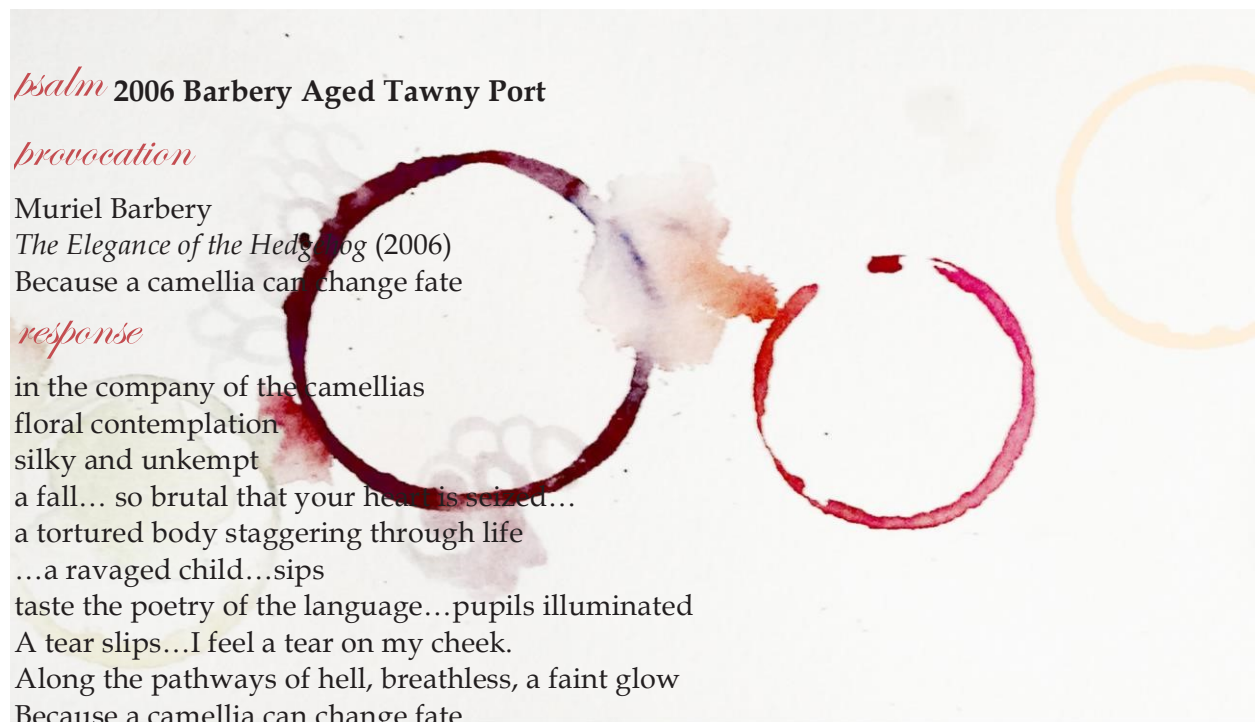


Video 3: Click on the still video image of Sue Peacock in rehearsal with Katie Chown for *psalm 1974 Levinas Shiraz*

Filmed: Lucinda Coleman, 2015, footage used with permission.

The final winery psalm, as described in the program excerpt below, invited audiences to move to encounter a solo dancer, three oil paintings and a violist, together exploring how fate can be altered through something as unexpected as the fragrance of a camellia. Audiences watched without drinks in hand, and then were led out of this contemplative space to an area where a small taste of Aged Tawny

Port was distributed and audiences were left to linger over the after-show drink that invited people to engage in conversation directly with each other.



Muriel Barbery, 2006 *collaborators*

**Artist:** Lyndall Adams, artwork (triptych): *the fates: i) Clotho ii) Atrpos iii) Lachesis*, oil on canvas, 3 x 112 cm x 112 cm, \$8000.

**Composer/Performer:** Alix Hamilton

**Choreographer:** Katie Chown

**Dancer:** Samantha Coleman

**Wine:** Pinelli Aged Tawny Port

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Image 18: *winery psalms* program excerpt—*psalm 2006 Barbery Aged Tawny Port*

Design: Lyndall Adams, 2016, image used with permission.

Shaughnessy has observed that “in practices associated with live art, or forms described as site/place responsive, participatory and socially engaged, the dualisms between process and performance are not recognised or relevant” (2012, p. 42). The *psalm 2006 Barbery Aged Tawny Port* managed to resist reductive dualities in favour of the dynamic complexity of process and product. As Elizabeth Grosz has commented: “knowledge is an activity; it is *practice* and not a contemplative



reflection. It *does things*" (1995, p. 37). In *doing things*, collaborative endeavours unearthed new approaches to making work in the collective environment and these experiences have been not only reflexive but they have also bridged thinking and doing in the act of art-making.



Images 19-20: Violist, Alix Hamilton, performing with dancer, Samantha Coleman along with artwork by Lyndall Adams for *psalm 2006 Barbery Aged Tawny Port*  
Photographer: Amanda Humphries, 2016, photographs used with permission.

## Conclusion

The overall premise for the *winery psalms* project was to explore collaborative processes across multiple disciplines to extend ideas about approaches to creative developments. Each artist was challenged to consider the language of another artistic discipline, engaging in discourse and debate as to creative interpretation of a philosophical or literary text. The fragments of text were incorporated into the works as a philosophical centre, interpreted in a contemporary and culturally relevant way. Six wine varieties, matched with the quotes, further emphasized the interdisciplinary and visceral nature of the production, providing a platform for new audiences and unexpected marketing opportunities. The fusion of cross-discipline practices speaking the language of the body immersed the audience in corporeal dialogue,

despite our experiences of living in an ever-more technological and virtual age.

Ongoing dance-making in the contemporary collective context endlessly wrestles with these ideas of connectivity and what the ensuing conversations offer for discovery about artistic practice. At the outset of the *winery psalms* project, many collaborators experienced that “the first gestures between artists are the most valuable: they are playful, raw and often at cross purposes” (Barstow et al., 2014, p. 14). We began with interdisciplinary collaborative explorations in the six small working groups. Collaborations on moving bodies began to leave marks, not only from the transfer of weight or grasp of flesh on flesh, but the mark-making of a person. How does this impact the people with whom I am working? What traces were my fellow artists and I leaving on each other?

I discovered that I needed to embrace the unique and syncretic tendencies of each participant. Lévinas’ response to that of either an antagonist or protagonist in the dialogue between human beings is to acknowledge I am *for* the Other (Lévinas, 2013). Being responsible to the Other, with whom I am now beholden, suggests avenues for artistic collaborators endeavouring to be responsive to the Other. Lévinas pleads the case of service, so that “there can be in this world pity, compassion, pardon and proximity—even the little there is, even the simple ‘After you, sir’” (Lévinas, 2013, p. 117). Lévinas is not suggesting simple courtesy, but rather that one is ethically responsible for one’s own actions in the world. Each one of us leaves our trace upon the work, and upon the other person and “a real trace disturbs the order of the world” (Lévinas, 1996, p. 62).

Collaborative endeavours have the capacity to not only develop critical relationships in and between communities, but also in art-making, they tell us something about those involved, of our world, and of us. Collaboration invites making work within the folds of movement in the moment of encountering the Other in the dance. The broader the cross-cultural and cross-disciplinary investigation, the greater the markings we make, leaving behind traces of where we once were and perhaps where else we might go. By inviting audience members into a live performance experience, such disturbances ripple through the world. Certainly,

during the *winery psalms* project, audiences were invited into a holistic sensory experience that involved tasting new wines, moving through sites, responding to visual art pieces, live music and dance—and interacting with a community of curious audience members, also on a journey of the senses, and one of connecting with each Other.

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