

2009

'Youth Ventures Into the Unknown' developing an individual style of dance making

Kate Herron
Edith Cowan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons



Part of the [Dance Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Herron, K. (2009). 'Youth Ventures Into the Unknown' developing an individual style of dance making. https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/1335

This Thesis is posted at Research Online.
https://ro.ecu.edu.au/theses_hons/1335

Edith Cowan University

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study.

The University does not authorize you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site.

You are reminded of the following:

- Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright.
- A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. Where the reproduction of such material is done without attribution of authorship, with false attribution of authorship or the authorship is treated in a derogatory manner, this may be a breach of the author's moral rights contained in Part IX of the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth).
- Courts have the power to impose a wide range of civil and criminal sanctions for infringement of copyright, infringement of moral rights and other offences under the Copyright Act 1968 (Cth). Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

'Youth ventures into the unknown'

Developing an individual style of dance making

By

Kate Herron

Bachelor of Arts (Dance) Honours

Link Dance Company

Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts

2009

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

Abstract

As a new emerging dancer and artist who is highly interested in the form of choreography, the search for knowledge and understanding of where choreography has come from as well as how to generate works have been at the forefront of my personal journey in dance.

My thesis looks at and asks how the formal choreographic elements and approaches can assist new choreographers in developing an individual style of dance making? This question leads to the various approaches and elements taken from famous choreographers over time, and assesses how new emerging artists can draw from these examples as a way to learn and develop their own style of dance making. I have taken onboard this knowledge both academically and practically.

'Youth ventures into the unknown' is a new choreographic work that has taken onboard two particular approaches to choreography drawn from Trisha Brown and Merce Cunningham. As a movement study it has allowed me to see how these approaches and elements can assist me in creating a work, ultimately impacting upon my individual style of dance making.

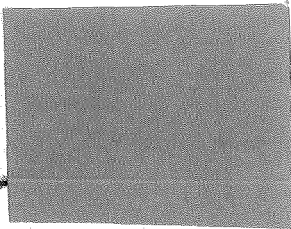
Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. Incorporate without acknowledgement any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education
- ii. Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made to the text; or
- iii. Contain any defamatory material

I grant permission for the Library of Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

Signed



Dated

24/9/2010

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Maggi Phillips for her inspiring guidance. To the Western Australian Academy of the Performing Arts for offering an environment of experimentation and artistic support, and to all the staff of the dance department for sharing their knowledge and insight into the world of dance.

Special thanks to my dancers for their contribution to the process and allowing me to learn and practice the form of choreography.

My final thanks are for my parents, who have supported me from the very beginning and believed in every thing I have done.

Table of Contents

Introduction	7
- Contemporary dance and choreography	7
- Contributors to choreography	9
- Elements and approaches to choreography	14
- Compositional devices	14
- The beginning	14
- Presentation of stimuli through concept	15
- Motif	16
- Elements of choreography	17
- Space	17
- Time	18
- Energy	19
- Structural devices	20
- Approaches to choreography	21
- Chance	21
- Improvisation	22
- Development of Classic to Modern work of art	23
- Technology in dance	24
- Mathematical Methodology	25
- Just dance	25
- How can new choreographers draw from these elements and approaches to assist them in the creative process? How will this assist my individual style of dance making?	26
- 'Youth Ventures into the unknown'	26
- Conclusion	29
- Bibliography	30

“Dancing is a visible action of life” - Merce Cunningham

Thesis Question

How can choreographic elements and approaches assist new contemporary choreographers in developing an individual style of dance making?

How I intend to answer and explore this question

My question will explore how various elements and approaches can be used to assist in the development of the creative processes of contemporary choreography. It will provoke discussion, knowledge and practice, as well as reflection and evaluation.

Through acknowledging and defining what these choreographic tools and methods are, I hope to discover what might work or restrict a new choreographer's creative processes. Once a grounded knowledge and understanding of these elements are outlined from research in texts and reviews I will continue the exploration of my question on a practical level, utilising some of the elements of choreography driven from these elements and approaches within a personal creative process. It is within this personal process that I hope to discover which of these elements and approaches might assist my particular approach to choreography.

Contemporary dance and choreography

Knowledge of contemporary dance history and its choreographic development are needed to create awareness and understanding of how contemporary dance and choreography arrived at where it is today.

Isadora Duncan is thought by many to be the founder of the modern dance movement as she broke away from the academic form of classical ballet and discarded her shoes to use the stability and power of her bare feet. 'Instead of being a point of escape from reality as

in ballet'¹, she became interested in 'the essential contact with the life-charged earth'². Duncan's interpretive dance was later developed by modern dance pioneers to maintain 'an intimacy with the muscle tensions of daily movements'³ displaying an inner awareness of the power of the whole body and its relationship to space. It was a challenge for artists to attain this style since as Mary Wigman stated, "the learned form was no longer decisive for the dance as an art, but the content itself, seeking a form of expression, endeavoured one for itself"⁴. The first pioneers and innovators of dance emerged in Germany and America with such people as Duncan and Wigman, as well as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey. Questions of space, dynamics, rhythm, speed and accent were elements with which these innovators of contemporary dance composed the new forms. Subject matter, based on commenting on real life became a part of dance when the American choreographers began to comment on living in a new developing country and the experiences of its people. Abstracting everyday movement was 'taken as a point of departure on which to construct a poetic metaphor'⁵.

Expression and freedom characterise the early character of modern dance. Its further development over the next 50 years introduced Martha Graham's contraction and release technique, Merce Cunningham's technical movement and unique chance construction explorations, Anna Halprin's investigations into improvisation and Trisha Brown's explorations with gravity to name just a few of the directions pursued. Modern dance is as Louis Horst envisaged it, an art form that 'refuses to live within any boundaries'⁶.

¹ Louis Horst – Modern dance forms by, 1961, Page 16

² Louis Horst – Modern dance forms by, 1961, Page 16

³ Louis Horst – Modern dance forms by, 1961, Page 17

⁴ Louis Horst – Modern dance forms by, 1961, Page 17

⁵ Louis Horst – Modern dance forms by, 1961, Page 18

⁶ Louis Horst – Modern dance forms by, 1961, Page 22

Contributors to choreography

These innovators of the contemporary dance technique are some of the most well known choreographers of the genre. Their contributions have been enormous and are still being studied by students today. They prepared the grounds of contemporary dance as it is today and, in the process they offered a variety of tools and methods for future choreographers to use and investigate.

Martha Graham is perhaps one of the most famous innovators of modern dance. Graham founded her own dance company and school in 1926, where she developed her own personal technique of contraction and release drawn from basic human movement experimentation. Graham used these principles of contraction and release as the foundation of her technique creating a movement vocabulary that would increase the emotional activity of the dancer's body. The sharp, jagged, angular and direct movements of her choreography 'exposed the depths of human emotions'⁷, in a movement style never seen before her time. Graham's vision and exploration of modern dance changed the dance world forever, ultimately leading future choreographers down other paths of discovery. Her technique is still being explored and valued today.

Merce Cunningham, a student and dancer with Martha Graham took dance into the next generation when he challenged the conventions of modern dance. He completely disregarded character and story in his works and explored what he called 'pure' movement. Cunningham's idea of chance allowed for the inclusion of various movement possibilities generated by just the toss of a coin. He opened up the 'freedom of the stage and the idea of chance and random activity having part in dance'⁸. Cunningham's relationship with composer John Cage also challenged contemporary choreography and dance. The relationship was noted as a mutually beneficial partnership: 'Cunningham without Cage

⁷ http://marthagraham.org/resources/about_martha_graham.php

⁸ Merce Cunningham, Don McDonagh - 'Dancing in space and time' 1992, Page 2

would be like the bible without God' ⁹ said Jill Johnston the dance critic of the Village Voice in 1963. Cunningham believed that the music and the dance should not be led by one or the other but should be 'utterly independent of each another'. ¹⁰ His approach to achieving this end was to create and allow the movement and the sound to coexist in the same time and space.

His works were about 'possibilities of non-expressionist movement and, by extension, of non-expressionistic mixed-means performance, about non-centred space and analogously, uninflected time, about experiment that nonetheless respected grace, about surprise and non-synchronicity'. ¹¹

Cunningham used four fronts, which opened up all sides and angles to the spectatorship of the performance. His use of space and time gave new possibilities for dance theatre and the audience-dancer relationship. His awareness that space and time cannot be disconnected and his discovery of the weight of the body to go down and the subsequent eventual rise allowed for him to imitate the 'way nature makes a space and puts lots of things in it, heavy and light, little and big, all related but yet affecting all of the others'. ¹²

Cunningham's exploration of space, time and movement has influenced other great choreographers such as Trisha Brown, Twyla Tharp and Pina Bausch. His tools and methods made clear pathways for future modern dance choreography and are being used, explored and developed by choreographers today.

Trisha Brown is an artist who "takes nothing for granted other than discovery itself. Her works investigate the fundamental characteristics of movement, gravity, weightlessness,

⁹ Merce Cunningham, Richard Kostelanetz - 'Dancing in space and time' 1992, Page 15

¹⁰ Merce Cunningham, Joyce Morgenroth - 'Speaking of Dance' 2004, Page 16

¹¹ Merce Cunningham, Richard Kostelanetz - 'Dancing in space and time' 1992, Page 16

¹² Merce Cunningham - 'Dancing in space and time' 1992, Page 38

duration, visual and verbal experiences".¹³ She was interested in the relationships between the audience and the performer, and the overall relationship between art and life. With this in mind, she ventured to take modern dance out of theatres and into galleries and museums, collaborating with visual and graphic artists, actors and singers. The 1960s offered a great fusion of performative and visual arts, allowing audiences to perceive dance and art in a new light, which connected with life itself. One of Brown's famous works is 'Man walking down building' of April 1970, where Brown strapped a male dancer in a harness, sending him walking down a seven-story building. It was a work that contained no narratives, story telling, tricks or illusions, like Yves Klien's 'Leap into the void', it simply offered attention to the mechanics of walking, and the altered relationship between the human body and gravity. Brown's interest in the "complexity and limits of the human body in motion are addressed in her work. Brown did not simply succumb to gravity's pull, she played with it, resisted it, only to accept its inevitability"¹⁴. This gravitational pull was the means for much of her work from 1963 till 1983 with such works as 'Falling Duet', 'La Chenteuse', 'Lightfall', 'Pamplona Stones', 'Set and Reset' and 'Planes'.

The viewer is a key element to Brown's works, as she likes to test the viewers' perceptions relative to what they are seeing. 'Man walking down building' and 'If you couldn't see me' are two works, which enable a learning experience for the viewer about his/her body, its energy, its expressive potential and its limits. As Brown observes: "If a choreographer has created an aesthetic that allows her to explore and further access her own physicality she has done so with the full intention of inviting her audience along for the ride".¹⁵

Brown's exploration with scores and instructions can be noted in 'Group Accumulation', where Brown instructed one group to continue with movement phrases, whilst the other group was instructed to interfere with their colleagues intentions in the need to accomplish

¹³ Trisha Brown, Adam D. Weinberg & Charles Stainback - 'Dance and Art in Dialogue' 2002, Page 9

¹⁴ Trisha Brown, Maurice Berger, 'Dance and Art in Dialogue' 2002, Page 17

¹⁵ Trisha Brown, Maurice Berger, 'Dance and Art in Dialogue' 2002, Page 23

something different, thus creating a new scene in the space. 'Locus' was one of Brown's most complex scores, where she created a three dimensional kinasphere of space that surrounded the dancer's body. Each point of the sphere was labelled with numbers corresponding to letters in the alphabet, each letter containing a certain movement. The gestures the dancers perform 'literally spelt out sentences from a statement written by Brown', ¹⁶ although hidden from the viewers' knowledge unless they saw Brown's sketches. This experiment provided a new approach to choreography and allowed Brown to use pure movement exploration alongside her experimentation with linguistics and compositional structure.

'Locus' led Brown to explore instinctive movement, letting go of her scores and developing a way to memorize complex and intricate improvisational movement. She drew from the Kinetic and Alexander techniques to create an articulate aesthetic in pure movement. Her link back to technical dance took her back into the theatre, however she continued to explore and challenge the stage space by using the edges. In 'Foray Foret' she had a marching band play while circling the theatre in order to link the stage space with the urban streets. Once again the viewer is of high importance to Brown as she challenges the audience's view of work in theatres by playing with the areas that are important and with the things that audiences do not normally see; such as what a dancer does when they have their back turned to the audience. Brown also placed two works in one space at the same time 'Accumulation' and 'Watermotor', to challenge what the space would become only to discover that one added meaning to the other.

Like Brown's relationship with the audience, her relationship with her dancers was one that regarded the dancers as 'full players in the choreographic process' ¹⁷, giving them permission to explore the possibilities of invention, instinct and self-expression. Brown's passion to ask questions and search for answers has enabled a powerful humanity to be recognised in her works through her respect and exploration of the limits and possibilities

¹⁶ Trisha Brown, Marianne Goldberg - 'Dance and Art in Dialogue' 2002, Page 39

¹⁷ Trisha Brown, Maurice Berger, 'Dance and Art in Dialogue' 2002, Page 19

of the human body. Her compositional accomplishments are gained from decades of choreographic questioning.

These are just three of the many choreographers who have impacted upon contemporary dance. Some others include, Anna Halprin, who explored the form of improvisation introducing the concept of improvised, yet choreographic scores, in order to initiate new movement that could or could not relate to a particular subject matter or movement idea. Twyla Tharp is known for her fusion of classical ballet with jazz and modern dance techniques. As well her complex structures were often derived from mathematical/musical and improvisational techniques and, at a later stage, were influenced by her involvement with dance on stage, in film and in television.

In the next generation, Pina Bausch gained an international reputation as one of modern dance's greatest innovators. Her dance theatre works have been said to "combine movement of shocking visceral intensity with stage visions of often hallucinogenic strangeness"¹⁸. One of her main interests was not how the body moved but what makes a body move as it is often displayed in relationships between men and women. She was one of the first to start challenging her audiences with real-life subject matters and raw movement together, creating an overall theatrical piece of dance theatre. She was highly influential on other choreographers and directors such as Robert Wilson, Anna Teresa de Keersmaecker and Bill T Jones.

Bill. T Jones is a choreographer with a political agenda, utilising dance theatre and contemporary dance to ask impassioned questions about life. This political agenda is also evident in Lloyd Newson's work with DV8, which predominantly uses contemporary dance theatre to discuss issues of gender and equality. William Forsyth developed a style derived from a deconstruction of classical technique and introduced a new age of technology into dance, when, in 1994, he virtually re-invented the teaching of dance with his computer

¹⁸ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/jun/30/pina-bausch-dies-dancer> - NEEDS TITLE AND AUTHOR

application. Technology is highly influential in his pieces, along with the use of both classical and contemporary movement. In the UK Christopher Bruce created ballets that are not essentially about movement but about ideas and is followed by Matthew Bourne's 'theatre magic' approach of creating work. Through using pre-existing ballets and musical scores Bourne challenges and modernises them to suit the modern audience. Australian Graeme Murphy similarly draws upon this vision that dance should be a form of theatre, which stimulates its audience not only through movement, but also through its overall production. Like others before him and now, he draws upon classical lines at the core of the movement, but utilises many scores of movement both dance and non-dance that evidently result in a large range of tapestry, movement ideas and possibilities.

So with the knowledge of some of the greatest choreographers in contemporary dance, where should a new choreographer start? Ideally a studio for their own practical questioning and exploration is a good idea, but what are the elements and approaches that can assist in his/her creative process and how can they be of any use?

Elements and Approaches to choreography

'In the first half of the Twentieth century, the dance expanded and experimented in so many directions. The changes in the art have been more startling, more sudden and more numerous than those in any other field. They include radical differences in technique, style, form and content, and most welcome and surprising of all, several theories of choreography. It was in the nineteen thirties that theories of dance composition were developed and taught.'¹⁹

(Humphrey. D, 1959 p.16)

¹⁹ Humphrey. D, 'The art of making Dances' 1959, page 16

Compositional devices

The beginning

Composition begins with a form of stimulus be it emotive, physical, real or imaginary. 'Stimuli can be defined as something that rouses the mind or spirits, or incites activity. Stimuli in dance can be auditory, visual, ideational, tactile or kinaesthetic'²⁰. This stimulus is the 'basic impulse' of a composition and will more than often provoke an intention that is finally conveyed to viewers. In most circumstances the title and type of dance work produced will be determined by the stimulus. Several stimuli can be used collaboratively to generate some form of communication.

Styles of dance can be defined down to classical, contemporary, ethnic, jazz and pop. However the stylistic compositional choice within choreography may include pure, study, lyrical, dramatic, and comic movement as stylistic options. The difference between these styles to the dance styles of ballet and contemporary is their contribution to the form of the work. For example a pure dance is a work that has utilised a kinaesthetic stimuli approach, and can be recognised when a choreographer uses improvisation on the mechanics of movement either as the process to generate movement or even the structural choice for the work. In comparison to this, there is a study, which could look intensely into a stimulus that is visual, such as an image of an event, or could venture into the choreographic tools, such as space, time and dynamics. A study may even choose to look at a dance style such as ballet and look closely at the concept of plies and tendus. In contemporary dance this movement study could look into the contraction and release technique of Martha Graham.

²⁰ Smith-Autard. J.M - 'Dance Composition' 2004, Page 20

Presentation of stimuli through concept

After a stimulus is found, a choreographer transfers this into a concept, which is the foundation for their work. To present this concept a choreographer needs to find movement images that relate to the concept. Typically movement is representational of the chosen concept. If a piece is sad, then distorted and hunched images may come to the forefront of the choreographer's movement ideas. The movement will draw from these stimulated ideas and images but will add action and dynamic features to create a vocabulary of movement. A choreographer may choose how to approach the representation of the concept through a literal representation, where the bodies move accordingly to the concept of the work. The other option is symbolic representation, where the intention in the movement is blurred and can be almost unrecognisable in relation to the work's concept. In this process however a choreographer must be careful not to lose the concept of the work in the abstraction of the symbolic representation, as audiences and dancers alike may lose the drive for the work. In saying this, a choreographer might base stylistic choice and development for a work on the idea of blurring the concept, thus allowing for different views and choices to be made. This approach would then be recognised and considered as an open work.

Motif

A dance aims to communicate a concept (idea or cluster of ideas) and thus the arrangement of a work is much more than creating movement. Choreography has a form or structure that includes shape, unity mould and mode of being. An audience does not remember each movement and the order in which they are performed, but remembers the communication of particular images offered. This is why a motif is important in any dance work. A motif is the 'foundation for logical development'²¹ of a dance work. It gives the viewer a reference point to connect the work together. A motif most commonly comments on the concept of the work or is movement generated from the stimulus of the work. If well crafted, motifs create unity within a work connecting all the movements and phrases of the work back to the centre of the work's essence.

²¹ Smith-Autard. J.M - 'Dance Composition' 2004, Page 33

*Motif - A theme or subject – an element in a composition, especially a dominant element*²².

(Webster's Dictionary 1966)

At the beginning of the construction of a work, a motif allows for development of movement. A motif can be manipulated throughout the body, on different levels, different dynamics and in various spatial arrangements and patterns. A motif creates cohesion throughout the work, which allows for images to be repeated without looking the same, but maintaining a recognisable connection with the chosen concept. An example of a motif could be as simple as a circle of the arm at an even tempo. This could continue to be developed on different levels, directions, tempos, and body parts and even transferred into phrases based around circles. A more complicated motif could be drawn from something literal like the movement of screwing a light bulb or as abstract as threading fingers between fingers and twisting in opposing directions. All motifs can be developed through various elements of space, time and dynamics and can be explored on various movement and emotional levels.

Fundamental Elements of Choreography

Within these constructional elements come the varieties of tools one may use to generate movement and structure for a work. Space, time and energy are three basic tools, which play a fundamental role within the creation of not only movement in small units but also within the overall work being produced.

Space

Space is an element that surrounds the human form in everyday life. We exist, move and are manipulated by the measurements and sensations of spaces. Within dance we use placement, direction and levels in order to design the body or bodies in space to create a mood and/or image. 'Space is the 3-D canvas within which the dancer creates a dynamic image. Breaking it down into component parts brings a wealth of possibilities for

²² Webster's Dictionary 1966

movement exploration'²³. Space has no fixed points and is an element of dance which can be filled with dynamic and stimulating movement and ideas. A choreographer needs to utilise space. The space will be removed from its 'basic form' and transformed into a conscious life that presents the images and possibilities. Mary Wigman utilised space by using it as an active element and even an opponent to the dancer. She defines 'dance as motivated tension in space and as a creator of space'²⁴.

When creating a work a choreographer must acknowledge that each individual will work and see space differently. The choreographer will ultimately add to the meaning of the work with the exploration of levels, directions, shapes, positive and negative space, dimensions, environment and relationships within the space.

Another element of space a choreographer must recognise is the totality of the performance space. Maybe, a choreographer uses ideas about placement on stage, such as utilising the centre of the space as a prominent, confident position, whilst designating upstage left as less powerful and downstage right as somewhat vulnerable. Creating spaces within space, like a small box of light in which a dancer must dance, whilst the rest of the space is open and free for another dancer allows for contrast and interesting restrictions and possibilities of movement exploration. This type of exploration can also be used within the creation of movement where dancers use other dancer's negative spaces with which to create tensions of dominance or rebellion. This can lead to solo, duet and group material that is intricate and uses unnatural spatial arrangements for the body or a collection of bodies. This unnatural idea can be noted in Brown's processes, where she would sometimes place objects randomly in the space and have her dancers complete set movements in the space while negotiating the newly placed impediments. She would discover new pathways for the dancers by watching them avoid hitting the objects, thus enabling new spatial arrangements both within the overall space and the dancer's personal space.

²³ Blom and Chaplin, 'The intimate act of choreography', 1989, page 31

²⁴ Blom and Chaplin, 'The intimate act of choreography' 1989, page 31

“The dance is an art in space and time. The object of the dancer is to obliterate that.” Merce Cunningham

(Cunningham. M, 2004, p16)

Time

Time within dance includes not only the length and form of the dance and the music but also bears a direct relationship to the time of one’s personal rhythm and movement. Tempo, momentum, duration, regular/irregular rhythms, accent, metre and stillness are all elements of time, which can be explored within technical practice and within the choreographic design and creation of a work. Each individual exhibits a variation of a sense of time. Some will move with a naturally fast rhythm, while others may be contained within a slow controlled extended rhythm. A tempo may be given in sections of a work and this will drive the group’s process of the choreography. The combinations are endless for a choreographer and he/she may manipulate and intertwine them in order to find the constant or changing rhythm and tempo of the desired work. Time may be consistent within dance forms such as jazz, tap, classical ballet and all the various ballroom/Latin styles, however exploration of time within contemporary dance can be explored from one extreme to the other. This is evident in Merce Cunningham’s collaboration with musician John Cage. Cunningham states “the music should not have to work into the underline of the dance and the dance does not have to reflect the music in a way to meet the tempo.”²⁵ Cunningham believed that the two could sit together without being reliant on one another and still create a relationship, which in most cases was achieved. This separation with the music allowed for the free spirited nature Cunningham believed dance lived in to be explored without hesitation or restrictions that the music might apply. As long as the length of the music and the dance were similar and reflected the same subject matter, natural connections would be made within the time of the work.

²⁵ Merce Cunningham – ‘Speaking of dance’, 2004, Page 16

Energy

$E = mc^2$ – An object's mass is a form of energy, and energy is a form of mass²⁶ – is one of Einstein's most famous equations an equation that affected the world and the world of dance. Cunningham places importance in his works not only on the dancer moving but also on the person standing still. Stillness can demonstrate that energy is being used only at different speeds and with different forms of force.

'When energy is expanded to any degree by or on a body across time and space, it becomes a force and produces movement'²⁷. This energy can be passive or active. When this energy is active we employ force, in comparison to when we are passive and forgo an extension of force, instead we comply with the natural forces of the human body.

Gravity is a force, which will affect us whether we are being passive or active. Forces that impact on the dynamics of movement include positive and negative, strong and gentle. These can include powerful and controlling strong positive forces, or submissive and mindless gentle negative forces. A choreographer can use force to make a work more dramatic or could use the force as a subtle element that contributes to the movement. Force can be heightened if a choreographer decides to vary two types of forces used within the work, which could create a dynamically interesting work that explores alternating moods or ideas.

'Dynamics are the interaction of force with time'²⁸. This interaction results in a variety of movement and movement qualities, which reflect the energy of the work. Dynamics are abstractions, which enable movement to become tangible, through force and energy. This energy is played within each movement of each phrase of a work, creating the possibility of many climaxes. Merce Cunningham believes that even the simplest movements contain these climaxes through the dynamic exploration of force and energy. With this dynamic

²⁶ Einstein, Albert, Physics Paper, 'Does the inertia of a body depend upon its energy-content?', 1905

²⁷ Blom. Chaplin, 'The intimate act of choreography' 1989, page 73

²⁸ Blom. Chaplin, 'The intimate act of choreography' 1989, page 77

abstraction integrated into space and time, the possibilities for a choreographer are endless within the creation of work.

Structural devices

There are many structural devices that are recognised in the composition of choreography. Unity, repetition, variation, contrast, climax, transition, development and balance are just a few. They can be small organisational devices but they constitute significant elements within choreography in order to generate a well-rounded work. They can be engaged with from the beginning of the process or be developed over the duration of the process. They could indeed also be what the piece intends to explore but normally they are elements which assist the communication and design of the choreography. For example, moments of unity in a movement study assigned work can offer moments of clarity, allowing clearer definition of the movement being explored and the connections between the dancers to be noted by the viewer. Without this structural device the space can become chaotic making it hard to maintain the viewers' interest. Repetition is an effective way to show audiences particular moments and movements in which the choreographer deems important, whilst variation offers the new or opposing development of the work.

From concept to space and dynamics to contrast, all these choreographic elements are simply tools used within the choreographic process. They are applied to the body as ideas to generate movement and create an overall structure and can be detected in many approaches; from Martha Grahams development of technique, Cunningham's play with chance, Brown's exploration of gravity, Nanette Hassall's gravitational-pulling choreography and Sue Peacock's exploration of emotive concepts with intricate movement and design. These choreographic characteristics draw upon elements as tools in order to stimulate and create a work.

Choreographic Processes

Although all the elements and structural devices of choreography assist the creation of movement and help with the understanding of structure and the various possibilities of choreography, it is the approach of different methods we use to create movement and the overall work that will determine the final shape and texture of the work.

Looking back at the previous discussed choreographers, many methods of creation are available. Different methodologies emerge from the nature of the choreographer's working processes and his/her vision of the work. Like utilising choreographic principles and structural tools, exploration of these various methods will contribute to the development of choreographic process. Whether experimentation with such methods works or not initially, various solutions to some compositional questions may arise later on in the choreographic process from things that may not have worked originally.

Some approaches of chorography I have recognised in my research include

Chance

Composing by chance is one method recognised in Merce Cunningham's work. His arrangements in 'Sixteen Dances for Soloist and Company of Three' (1951) and later work 'Suit by chance' was based around the notion 'that it is possible for anything to follow anything else, and that the actual order of events can be chanced related rather than chosen, which allows the work to be free and to face the moment by moment discoveries 'rather than being bound and remembered'²⁹. Cunningham used charts within his exploration of chance. The dancers would learn a range of phrases and positions, movements and stillness. These would all then be worked out in different floor patterns, directions, durations or even the isolation of just one step in Cunningham's charts which he would then present to his dancers. The charts 'defined the physical limits within which the

²⁹ Merce Cunningham, Remy Charlip - 'Dancing in time and space' 1954, page 40

continuity would take place'³⁰; a dancer may be standing still for a long time then suddenly start jumping, rolling and spinning in the next moment. The stage is filled with familiar and unfamiliar movements that happen radically and sporadically around the space. At points in the work where exits and entrances or unison were needed, flips of a coin decided who would do what. This approach to composition enabled Cunningham to disconnect himself from habitual cause and effect relations of movement and people in the space.

Improvisation

Improvisation is one of the most common methods used in the compositional process. If we think about it, every time an individual creates a movement for the first time then he/she uses the form of improvisation. This form can then be developed into material that we remember, clarify and alter or we can use the improvisational form to create a whole work. Debate on whether an improvisation work is actually a work of choreography has been discussed for a long time but I believe with the right tools to assist the method, improvisation can stand on its own as a work of choreography. If this method of creating an improvised work draws upon some tools such as space, time, dynamics, development and theme along with tools of improvisation itself such as the use of scores, what makes it any less than a piece of choreography? It is important to recognise that the form of improvisation is a complex one and that the possibilities for movement and movement development are endless. This endlessness is why many choreographers draw upon the technique when generating a work. Giving tasks and scores to the dancers and the choreographer themselves allows freedom for movement exploration. Trisha Brown's numbered alphabetical cube which she placed around her dancers in *Locus* led her to find a way to memorize improvised movement so that intricate movement would not disappear through her use of sketches and mathematical equations. Although this is a hard method to follow, many choreographers use improvisation as the source of their movement. Doing something and then doing it again and again through improvisational scores and tasks allows for it to stay within the body, thus enabling the dancer to remember and re-create the movement. Whether improvisation is used as a method to generate movement or as a

³⁰ Merce Cunningham, Remy Charlip - 'Dancing in time and space' 1954, page 41

method upon which to base the work, it is a method that is heavily involved in the choreographic creative process of movement.

Development of Classic to Modern works of art

Matthew Bourne and Graeme Murphy are just two choreographers who have taken classical ballet classics such as *Nutcracker* and *Swan Lake*, and adapted them to modern dance. In doing so they are both commenting on what the classics in dance are, and also challenging and commenting on how society and the world of dance have developed.

Murphy's *Nutcracker; the story of Clara* departs from the original and becomes an Australian story as a Russian ballerina's career brings her to Australia during the Russian revolution. The setting for the work is a hot Australian Christmas, where the elderly Clara faints at the showing of images of her life which brings with it dreams of creatures, children and men. Murphy uses not only the physical, but also the psychological journey to show Clara's journey from child to dancer, and from Europe to Australia. His adaptation cleverly comments on the many dancers who crossed to Australian shores at this time, along with a representation of Australia, whilst also maintaining a link to the classic work of *Nutcracker*.

Whilst Bourne's *Swan Lake* stays true to the original story, he has altered it in many ways through gender and setting. He completely modernises the work through costume and design, however he maintains the use of the famous musical scores of Tchaikovsky's 1877 masterpiece. Other choreographers who have played with this adaptation include, Garry Stewart and his company Australian Dance Theatre, who created an athletic and abstracted version of Giselle in *G* and *Swan Lake* in their adaptation called *Birdbrain*. Mats Ek's *Sleeping Beauty* likewise takes ballet into a strong classical and modern dance fusion. This fusion from classics to modern has been used all over the world by many choreographers, who wish to draw from, develop and comment on past works. As an approach, one could use previous works as inspiration, as in these choreographers who generate whole new works from older ones.

Technology in dance

Trisha Brown was among one the first to fuse art and dance together in the 1960s, which ultimately generated new possibilities of presentation and representation. Today art and technology have developed alongside one another, allowing for an even greater range of possibilities to arise. In dance these possibilities have contributed to the creating of work both through movement and subject matter. William Forsyth created a computer program in 1999 called "Improvisation Technologies". It is a CD-ROM that shows Forsyth's methodology for creating different types of movement through the use of geometric shapes such as points, lines and three-dimensional forms. Each method he describes has an animated graphic line appear as the example of what he is describing. For example in his section on how to create arm movements, by extruding lines from points, a graphic line is placed within Forsyth's explanation. Forsyth's *One Flat Thing – Reproduced* made in 2000 in collaboration with Ohio State University's Advanced Computing Centre for the Arts and Design (ACCAD) is a cross-disciplinary work that explored the creative possibilities that make connections between art and science and practice and theory. The diagrams of this work show lines, curves and shapes that are made by the dancers and how these energetic lines define the space. The development in technology assists the understanding of Forsyth's methods allowing for greater success and understanding of space in dance, as well as creating new ways to think of movement and movement possibilities.

Kate Champion and Lucy Guerin are two young Australian choreographers who use technology in their work with great success. *Love Me* by Guerin uses images over her dancers' bodies, while Champion uses audiovisual technology through screens to assist with subject matter and as extensions or x-rays of her dancers' bodies in *The Age I'm in*. Choreographers can now play with a mixed medium of human form and technology through projection, screens, sound and lighting. Dance film has developed alongside this technological fusion with dance and now plays a role in the final product of a choreographers work. Sue Healey for example is a choreographer who plays with video recordings both for performance and as a final product for the work. Choreographers can now play with their ideas and creations in more than one way, thus enabling greater subject matter possibilities and a new way to find, create and view movement.

Mathematical Methodology

Trisha Brown's alphabet sphere that she notionally placed around her dancers, with each letter containing a different movement to the next and in a different space and time is what I would like to call a universal language method. Based originally from a score and similar to Cunningham's chance charts, this method has rules and guidelines but contains a sense of freedom and unexpected possibilities within the various combinations that can be used in writing/dancing with this alphabet. This is a mathematical approach that may have its limitations, however its possibilities are endless. It is a method that I intend to explore.

Just Dance

'Just Dance' is a personal approach that I believe is important within choreography, especially for new and developing choreographers. To feel obligated to contain one's ideas within a particular formula of tools and methods in a piece of choreography may ultimately restrict an individual's potential. Passion and enjoyment for creating, dancing and discovering are important elements for the art of dance. If a choreographer has no interest in what they are producing, it is likely the dancers and the audience will not either. It is essential that the fire that burns behind the choreographer's need to create makes its way to the forefront of their work. Creating a work could be as simple as having a theme or as complicated as using chance, improvisation, elements of space, time and dynamics along with the inclusion of costume and technology – in the end these things will develop over time, just like the movement, the dancers and the choreographer themselves. It is important to remember that while these tools and methods may assist you, a choreographer is a creator and the work is his/her creation. Choreography on its own is a method of questioning the possibilities and searching for what can be found.

How can new choreographers draw from these elements and approaches to assist their creative processes? How will this knowledge assist my individual style of dance making?

Through the duration of my research on the many elements and approaches to choreography, I have found pleasure in discovering how many possibilities there are. I have discovered that the simple textbook approach to motif, development and so on is in actual fact not enough to generate an engaging work, though they assist as tools. The really interesting processes (for me personally) for choreography are found within each individual approach. At first these processes seem bewildering but as time passes and the approaches are able to sink in, true form and clarity arises. Acknowledging the different time periods and politics both in and out of dance, I have discovered that we have ventured beyond and found new mediums and forms in which to present works; however the essence for creation and finding of new forms of expression still remains. Therefore I have decided that the practical component of my question will take a leap of faith into the unknown realm of improvisation in order to create its form of movement. This is a road that I, as a young choreographer, have not yet taken to generate a work. Of course I have played with improvisation, but the strict contained environment in which I placed myself so that all movement became set and linear placed me in a situation where I lost opportunities where really interesting choreography could have been created.

Using Trisha Brown's alphabet sphere and writing approach as the means for the skeleton of my work, along with Merce Cunningham's play with chance as a loose structure, I will draw from many choreographers' approaches to improvisation as the muscle to find new movement and creation expression.

'Youth Ventures into the unknown': Research in the practice of choreography

The beginning of my process started with improvisation tasks given to the three dancers. For the first two weeks, I filmed the dancers as they answered questions and responded to stimuli, such as quotations or music. I also used an improvisation into material task that I was taught by Olivia Millard. I had a dancer improvise for four minutes, whilst the remaining two dancers would note down what they were seeing. This resulted in each

dancer having two lists of noted-down movements, and tasks were then centred on what they had written. I found this task interesting because even though each dancer drew from another, the material ended up reflecting their own personal movement interest, resulting in three phrases that were all completely different yet created from the same place.

The quotation material I started to incorporate heavily into these tasks led me to find interest in war and youth. I found the dancer's responses to these types of quotations produced the movement quality and form I was looking for. This led me to my final quotation and title for the work, and which alphabet movement phrases and mathematical order of movement would occur through the duration of the work.

The following two to four weeks on, I asked the dancers to devise phrases out of remembered material or material which I had given them. I enjoyed watching the dancers and calling out 'stop, repeat, remember' as a way to find new movement. This also led to ordering movements in less natural ways to what I once would have done. I might have stopped them once at the beginning whilst they were moving slowly and the next time I might have stopped them during a moment of fast movement such as jumping. They would then have to fuse these movements together in the order that I stopped them. Thus an interesting movement vocabulary offered itself in the form of phrases.

With this constant use of improvisation, it was interesting to see how the dancers developed from day to day, depending on mood, weather and so on. Repeating themselves was evident, but it was the smaller subtle moments where I discovered enriched engaging movement. I discovered that the time you give movement could sometimes make all the difference. Forcing movement out with no time to let an idea or sensation germinate can leave it stale and in the end not really any good. Of course there are moments where it all comes out just the way you want and, if so, it is from there that you can continue to explore.

After all these types of things started crossing my mind, I decided it was time to start placing everything into individual phrases, which I would then title to a letter of the

alphabet. This process took a while, as each dancer would learn each letter and the material would be edited and cleaned. I then started putting some trial words together to see how all these phrases that had been developed between my dancers and I sat together. I was happy to find that through my decision to mix up the stimuli between youth and war, along with some 'just-for-fun' texts that the accumulating material actually sat together nicely. They were dynamically diverse as they all came from different places of creation, but the mixture of slow with fast seemed complementary.

For the spatial arrangement of the work I decided to restrict my dancers to particular points except for one, allowing me to play with restriction and freedom, which relates to the text. This text has been changed over the course of my process. Originally I wanted complete sentences from each dancer but decided that (for the moment) I did not want to make an hour work therefore I decided to use just one sentence, 'Youth ventures into the unknown', and break it up with each dancer using two to three words. This actually opened up new doors to allow repetition and a type of copycat effect. The biggest challenge was creating moments of unison. But as the dancers became better acquainted with the material and the music, natural patterns started to occur. The music score for this work is three classical pieces jigsawed together to represent the jigsaw of the movement, space and intention.

My overall reflection on the work is satisfaction in being challenged to explore different choreographic approaches. Due to time restrictions, I had to curtail the journey of exploring structure, theatrical form and dynamics. Even though I find the work a bit monotone in dynamic variation, I found the movement range and vocabulary very different, new and engaging for me personally. Entering this process I was able to open up to many possibilities and decided to ride the wave rather than come with a particular motive and structure for the work. I feel that if I combined both my knowledge of having a particular structure and allowed for this newfound freedom to generate movement and then mathematically piece it together I could create a very interesting individual choreographic style of work.

Conclusion

In conclusion, searching for how choreographic elements and approaches can assist new contemporary choreographers in developing an individual style of dance making, I have found to be a personal experience of gaining and utilising knowledge. An understanding of the various approaches of previous and present choreographers allows for future choreographers to think on many levels, whilst the assistance of the fundamental elements of choreography such as time, dynamics and space, helps new choreographers to understand the practical and theatrical tools that will increase the articulation of their work.

This gaining of knowledge about the range of options available for creating a work has offered, for myself personally, a bigger palette of choreographic possibility. Whilst my individual style will grow and develop throughout my career, I believe that understanding, acknowledging and drawing from these previous and present choreographic inspirations can only continually open access to increased levels of choreographic and artistic achievement.

Bibliography

Book References:

Blom, Lynne Anne and Chaplin, L. Tarin, 'The intimate act of choreography'. London, Dance Books, 1989, c1982.

Brown, Trisha. 'Dance and Art in Dialogue.' Roland Aeschlimann, Andover, Mass, Addison Gallery of American Art, Phillips Academy, Cambridge, Mass, c2002.

Horst, Louis & Russell, Carroll. 'Modern dance forms in relation to the other modern arts.' Princeton, N.J, Princeton Book Co, c1987.

Humphrey, Doris & Pollack, Barbara. 'The art of making dances'. London, Dance Books, 1959.

Kostelanetz, Richard (ed). 'Merce Cunningham: Dancing in space and time.' London, Dance Books, 1992.

Morgenroth, Joyce. 'Speaking of dance: twelve contemporary choreographers on their craft'. New York, Routledge, c2004.

Smith-Autard, Jacqueline M. 'Dance Composition'. London : A. & C. Black, 2004.

Website References:

Australian Dance – 24/08/09

<http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/articles/dance/>

Bremser, Martha. 'Fifty Contemporary Choreographers,' 1999 – 28/08/09

<http://books.google.com.au>

E=mc² explained – 01/10/09

<http://www.worsleyschool.net/science/files/emc2/emc2.html>

Friesen, Joanne. 'Perceiving Dance' 1975 – 24/08/09

<http://www.jstor.org>

Martha Graham Resources – 18/09/09

http://marthagraham.org/resources/about_martha_graham.php

Mass–energy equivalence – 28/09/09

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mass%E2%80%93energy_equivalence

Rockwell, John. 'Merce Cunningham in conversation with John Rockwell' – 10/09/09

<http://prelectur.stanford.edu/lecturers/cunningham/index.html>

The Guardian – Pina Bausch – 23/09/09

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage/2009/jun/pina-bausch-dies-dance>