

International Dance Screen Lab

with

Director David Hinton

3-14 November 2008

The Drill Hall, Rushcutters Bay
Sydney, Australia

Critical Path and Reel Dance

Mentor.....	David Hinton (UK)
Facilitators.....	Critical Path (Margie Medlin, Helen Martin) Reel Dance (Erin Brannigan, Justine Shih-Pearson)
Production Manager.....	Loosie Craig
Editor.....	Nick Deacon
DOP.....	Justine Kerrigan, Sean O'Brien, Bonnie Elliot
Video Documentation.....	Eva Mueller
Text Documentation.....	Jodie McNeilly
Participants.....	Cordelia Beresford Laura Boynes David Corbett Sonia Esposito Stephen Jones Julie-Anne Long Meryl Tankard Josh Tyler
Collaborators.....	Narelle Benjamin (dancer/Stephen Jones) Kristina Chan (dancer/ Josh Tyler) Matt Cornell (dancer/Laura Boynes) Dean Cross (dancer/Laura Boynes) Damien Davis (dancer/Sonia Esposito) Liz Doran (writing consultant/Meryl Tankard) Sarah Fiddaman (dancer/ Sonia Esposito) Adelina Larsson (dancer/David Corbett) Kate Murphy (Video Artist/Julie-Anne Long) Mel Pesa (Sound and Music Composition/Sonia Esposito) Dean Walsh (dancer/Cordelia Beresford)

During the two week intensive workshop with David Hinton, I hovered. In darkened corners, one could hear the scrawl of pen on paper; see a head straining to be in earshot of a conversation, or catch eyes furtively peering over a shoulder to watch a dance take shape on screen. Wading through the hours of useful and informative detail of those two documented weeks, there were particular things which Hinton said that allowed me to appositely reflect upon my observations:

Where's the "soul" in screen dance? Has it somehow transcended the very last stages of what is a multi mediated process? Was it missing at the start, or perhaps, never intended?

The workshop raised this issue and many more for the eight participants actively engaged from idea to a working draft and presentation of their projects in the 2008 International Screen Dance Laboratory co-facilitated by Critical Path and Reeldance.

Eight very different processes under the guidance of Hinton unfolded before me. And it is with delicacy and all in good faith provocation that I recount these journeys in order to accurately record and elaborate beyond this document, themes for broader discussion.

As for soul, there is much to be said...

On the very first day we sat amphitheatre style in our favourite cane chairs, attentions gathered towards a single screen watching samples of the artists' previous work. It was here that each project and their most desirable trajectory for the two week Hinton mentoring were introduced. The intended workshop projects were complex, ambitious, and extremely diverse in terms of concept, way of shooting and final presentational mode. Each artist articulated their working methods and current practice. And expressed how they saw the next two weeks as an opportunity to either extend or challenge their methodologies. Potential new territories were marked, and the places to be created evocatively imagined.

David Corbett is interested in how to get people to look at things. He is particularly interested in constructing a highly sensitive and interactive environment to accentuate peripheral vision - that aspect of vision which dancers utilise more actively than non-dancers. He is also interested in what we "don't see when we are looking". Training as a medical doctor, David's inquiry of human optical perception of objects in the world (moving and still) is underwritten by acute empirical knowledge. As an improvisational artist and dancer, his ideas are equally acute in their embodiment. He is open to whatever happens. The eventual filmed and edited footage of David's collaborator Adelina Larsson dancing is intended for a three screen installation within a gallery setting; or even (God willing in this country of ours) a cave or planetarium. His most sober view entails a four walled space, screens on three walls: one in front and two at the sides of the viewer. As the visitor moves the images are unsettled, the content never quite forming. As they come to stillness (an ironic gesture for dance), the images are triggered to gather on screen, permitting the film to have an uninterrupted run. Using facial recognition software,

tracking of the retina by the system reacting to eye movement consequently directs the visitor where to look. Such a principle is not unlike film direction or focusing audience attention via camera perspective; albeit more sophisticated in its realisation. The audience in their interaction ultimately creates their version of the film in non-linear, interrupted phrases. Moreover forming the on-screen third level of choreography by their decision to move or remain in stillness.

Hinton understands this as a method for teaching an audience how to look; with interactive modes of presentation a particular niche for future directions of screen dance if the technology can achieve what it is conceived and designed to do. It is a future that he does not see himself a part of. A traditional filmmaker and television man for twenty years, Hinton has directed many internationally celebrated dance films with choreographers Lloyd Newson (DV8), Rosemary Lee (UK), Siobhan Davies and Wendy Houstoun (UK). On Friday of week one, a screening of David's four works *Birds* (2000), *Snow* (2003), *Touched* (1995) and *Nora* (2008) for a large number of the local contemporary dance community demonstrates the variegated approach to dance film that Hinton acknowledges as the exciting and attractive aspect of working in non-traditional filmmaking. Filming dance does not prevent traditional filmmaking techniques or retreat from narrative-based structures and verbal expression. He sees this form to be a true place of freedom. Dance film arguably emerged with the advent of moving pictures - silent cinema a case in point - but unlike the development of the contemporary film industry and grammar for film making, shares a highly nuanced, experimental conceit which cinema enjoyed in its earliest decades.

Cinematographer **Cordelia Beresford** shows us a beautiful short filmed on Cockatoo Island at night. Aboriginal dancer Munyarryun Djakapurra plays a security guard who is overcome by the ghosts of past, particularly the immanent trace of school girls (Narelle Benjamin and Miranda Wheen) from the once located girl reform centre on Cockatoo, one of its many incarnations since 1839. Cordelia has been a DOP for ten years working on dance films, documentaries and a video installation. Describing herself as a traditional film maker, Cordelia is interested in moving away from a narrative driven approach during the workshop to experiment with abstraction, and pursue a two screen dialogue rather than single screen presentation. Working with Dean Walsh, Cordelia intends to capture some observational footage, or people in a crowded place (packed pubs for the Melbourne Cup only days away), focusing on "subconscious movement" and idiosyncratic gestures seen out of context from a distance. The oddity of these movements interests Cordelia to set up a two-screen dialogue between the original observational footage and Dean's extraction and physicalised interpretation of the selected everyday movement. Dean is to be presented on one screen facing the anonymous person on the other. Time and timing is the relationship factor between the two screens, a dialogue which explores synchronicity: 'in-phase' and 'out-of phase' permutations to inform a unique dynamic. Cordelia sees the duet choreography forming within the editing suite.

The relationship between 'narrative' and 'abstraction' in the development of each artist's project was an interesting topic raised at one of the several group meetings with David.

These meetings presented the opportunity for everyone to ‘catch-up’ and report on their progress as the daily schedule dispersed participants between the black space for rehearsal and filming; residency research room for editing, ‘TV’ room for one-on-one discussions with David or viewing of the dance screen library, the upstairs rooms for writing, editing or rehearsal, and off-site places for filming. The responses to the relationship between ‘narrative’ and ‘abstraction’ varied between each artist relative to their: usual practice, their desire to try an alternative, and consequent to the way their work was developing through the different stages from concept to screening. Cordelia felt that her initial desire to experiment with abstraction in terms of content and extracted gesture was being resisted by her impulse to engage with emotions and character. Cordelia’s sensibility is self-admittedly based within narrative or story telling frameworks.

In terms of dance film content, a spectrum connecting the two poles of ‘narrative’ and ‘abstraction’ can be schematised. Likewise, the presentational mode of the film: the way it is experienced temporally, how the frames fit together, or how an individual frame has been shot, can also take this formal structure. However, the development of all the constituents of a film from its genesis suggests that these two spectral lines overlap, moving between narrative and abstraction without falling restrictively into the one camp. Evidence of this shifting rhythm between – for many intended, incidental or unnamed reasons – is found in the individual journeys. The documentation reveals. However abstracted an artwork, a story or the affectations of story in its individual reception of emotions can be told. A story, however literal, is always an abstraction from some immediate experience, memory or constituted imagining.

Stephen Jones, Video Maker since 1976 and Historian of video within Australia, came to the workshop to “explore the geometry and shape of movement” and that which “happens in the frame”. Stephen is not interested in the emotive content of dance and dance drama affected through gesture. His long term interest in pure formal abstractionism and rejection of expressionism informs his practice. Each frame is viewed as an artwork unto itself, asking: what is its pictorial balance? What are its symmetries? How can the decision to manipulate a line or pattern of shapes be viscerally and visually moving without revolving around story or character? How can the animated shapes provide a satisfying composition?

Working with Narelle Benjamin, Stephen records with handycam the angular geometries of Nelly’s improvised movement. This occurs over the first two days, with intermittent play back sessions to determine scores, objectives, and the relationship between Stephen, Nelly and the camera. The camera as dancer presence or taking a mere observational perspective is mooted. Part of this time for Stephen was to learn to move again, judging when to come in close, pull out or foreground Nelly to look along her body supine. Stephen wants “to make the camera dance”. In duet with Nelly’s wrapping, fluid and angulated arm movements, continuous, sculpted and sustained strong shapes before venturing onto a new pathway, raises the practicality of communication. Stephen uses this time to focus on how to ‘communicate’ during filming whilst he is also moving: verbal direction or intuitive understanding?

Stepping into the role of Director during improvisational based scenarios, decisions as to where to point or how to move with the camera is an essential ‘on the fly’ deliberation. In the age of digital film, this approach is more common given the cost of film is dramatically less than early film where each shot would be planned. Storyboarding was discussed as something not so common in dance film. Hinton declares it to be an “ideological perspective” as to whether or not they are used. The misconception is in how well one needs to draw. “The quality of the drawings is irrelevant” to Hinton who admits he is a terrible drawer and so fills the frame with stick figures. Storyboarding can assist in planning the shot and mark out the rhythm.

For Stephen, judging where Nelly is going to move next solidifies over their time together as Nelly composes from the improv and creates a repeatable sequence. The ease with which they build “rapport” accelerates the filming and situates Stephen very early on in the editing suite to master the program and “make new pictures” that he [and perhaps no other] “has never seen before”. Stephen’s approach is painterly, his monitor screen the canvas. When asked by Hinton “in what ways will this be a development on what you’ve done before?” Stephen quickly reflects that “it has been about the camera work”: “non-gravitational” ways of seeing/feeling the body against its background perspectives. The forgetting of gravity in compositing Nelly’s dancing form to 2D is embodied by Stephen in the camera movement.

Artist **Laura Boynes** sets herself the challenge to attempt all facets of the filming process over two weeks to develop her film *Mate*. Working with two male dancers and Cinematographer Sean O’Brien, she takes from original conception the variegated possible relationships between two mates who in a “ritual like version of chess” spend time together in a unique, found location near Eveleigh rail yards. They proceed to explore developed scores in an improvisational encounter over two days. Laura is interested in learning final-cut pro for the purposes of editing the film and to take advantage of the technical experience of those around her. She wants a “full rounded experience”. Laura will endeavour to resist linear story telling with a move towards abstraction, creating the material and choreographic language while in ‘place’ as the boys site-specifically generate the dance through non-verbal play.

Editor **Nick Deacon** joins the team early in week one to guide participants through the basics of final-cut pro. After this first group lesson, Nick works with each participant individually to discuss the arc of their project, show digitising processes and assist in the grueling final phases of their project development if needed. Stephen works with Sony *Vegas Pro 8* professional digital video editing software, a program that he teaches himself during the course of the workshop. He manages to trouble-shoot a technical mishap to permit the display and editing of a three tier single screen triptych using three different timelines. Each layer is the identical sequence performed by Nelly, shot from a different perspective.

Artist **Josh Tyler** has a good working knowledge of final-cut pro and cuts a little footage of himself in the upstairs room with Cinematographer **Justine Kerrigan** during the first

week before the arrival of his dancer/collaborator Kristina Chan. Josh gets in early with creating a rough draft, working through the entire process as an exercise for raising possibilities, experimenting with lighting and a style of shooting (they shoot a series of 6 stills per second to produce a beautifully crisp, high res image), and the opportunity to eliminate aspects that don't work. The fact that Josh has experience in final-cut pro helped in marking out this iterative way of working: running through the entire process with all available elements known to the artist at that point, accepting what works, throwing out what doesn't and inviting that which is emergent; then starting again to develop toward the final product with a clearer view of what lies ahead.

How do we start a process? What are the essential departure points? Is it formulaic, organic, or intuitive for the artist? Where are one's comfort zones? At what point does moving on feel impossible?

Cordelia felt that this was the first time she didn't have a "solid" enough idea for developing the content. Her usual departure was narrative based. Since the interest for this workshop was more formal and technical, the lack of story was a sticky, slow starting point. Cordelia wants to delve into the world of two screens, the dialogue seeking formal meaning through their temporal relationship. Margie mitigates her concern by saying "one can lose those barriers once the momentum picks up." The workshop structure and tight time frame also helps the inevitable 'plunge' and 'sticking to' with blind faith. The fast-track nature and time pressure of a mentored "artist-led" workshop helps with galvanizing decision making where doubt is not really a sustainable option. The end result for Cordelia is rich. The content disclosed from the choices made during the process emerging from location, observational filming, the dancer's study and editing.

Josh is a trained actor who works regularly as a Dramaturg. He has experience in screenwriting and is interested in developing a dance film based on recent research interests of the *hikikomori*. Broadly defined, *hikikomori* is a "Japanese term to refer to the phenomenon of reclusive individuals who have chosen to withdraw from social life, often seeking extreme degrees of isolation and confinement due to various personal and social factors in their lives. The term *hikikomori* refers to both the sociological phenomenon in general as well as to individuals belonging to this societal group."¹ Josh is particularly interested in those who lock themselves away in small darkened rooms in front of their computers, hardly (or never again) emerging into the outside world. More specifically, Josh is centering his story on those who live a second life through their virtual avatars: a self-constructed identity. These avatars, as representative of a new self, connect with other on-line entities forming a range of relationships with distal intimacy. The project for Josh (without giving the game away) is to explore a person's relationship to their avatar. In its physical dimension, he asks: how will the dance emerge between him and Kristina in a small room? How can this abstracted virtual connection be explored three dimensionally and communicated once again through the screen.

¹ Wikipedia. World Wide Web. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hikikomori> (last accessed 1 December 2008)

Quasi-versions of *hikikomori* are found throughout the workshop: the nature of making dance film. Straining over computers in darkened rooms, they emerge bleary eyed and distracted. The practice has its requisite disembodied hours.

Meryl Tankard writes for days. And she loves film. She is very interested in writing an original story for a feature film and to adapt Peter Goldsworthy's short stories *Little Deaths* into short films. The workshop provides Meryl with the time and contact with an experienced writer to work on her feature script. Choreographer and Director of twenty stage works, Meryl wants to develop the skill set and vocabulary for making film without spending years at film school. Meryl wants the "whole picture". It is suggested (after we view some footage of her televised stage work) that Meryl's years of experience directing will transpose readily to film. Meryl's impetus to move into directing her own or (even others) choreography is fueled by dissatisfaction with other professional attempts at filming her work for cinema and television. The "chopped" up manner in which her dance sequences end up, and noticing where the camera "wasn't" but should have been, entails the necessity for a choreographer to support and articulate the dance's meaning by directing the camera. Meryl is excited by the prospects of focusing the 'audience eye' to the essential aspects and drama of the dance, getting in where an audience in a live-stage context cannot.

Meryl's time at the workshop is spent mostly in front of the computer in consultation with writer Liz Doran. A script starts to develop as each scene is imagined, animated and dialogically structured. The question of where dance enters these realist (very humorously dark) narratives is answered through Meryl's understanding of dance in the everyday. Moving about the kitchen to make a cup of coffee is itself a dance of interest.

Julie-Anne Long's inquiry expands into the everyday, both in the elaboration of gesture in situ (her own home) and from domestic duty. Julie-Anne is using this opportunity to work with a new collaborator, Video and Visual Artist Kate Murphy. This forms part of a much larger investigation "The Invisibility Project" which considers the invisibility of middle aged women. Julie-Anne shows three former films made with Samuel James, a mix of live pre-recorded scrim projection interacting with Julie-Anne as live performer in a shipping container (*Boxing Baby Jane*); and the *Nun's Night Out* a residency in Hill End with a group of collaborators inhabiting the beautiful landscape and small built structures in and around the village, ending with a vaudeville show at the historic Royal Oak Hall. Sam in this instance was the "invisible eye" never setting up a shot; developing a simple narrative from performers in the various settings and post-production. The ordinariness of nun behaviour translates as hysterical in representation, but interestingly raises anthropological questions despite the constructed characterisation. *What do Nuns do?*

Following the 'ordinary', 'everyday', and 'domestic' elements coupled with the "getting ready to perform" experience, Julie-Anne wants to have Kate shoot her shifting in and out of three modes: JL as herself; JL getting ready to perform; JL the performer as character. JL sees this as self-portraiture. Working with Kate, who makes documentary like videos of real people being themselves not being themselves (e.g. *Britney Love*

2000), makes perfect sense. These transitions are acutely captured in observational footage using three cameras: a handycam to roam and follow JL at home and in public spaces; a camera fixed on a tripod and left running, the action often stepping into frame; and a small third camera embedded in different parts of the house. Julie-Anne spends a day in the studio working out four movement scores for material to emerge: head; hand and face (gestural); folding of washing (task based duties); and specific gestures.

Two observational approaches to gathering footage were used during the workshop. Cordelia decided to understandably reject the drunken Melbourne Cup pub crowd for the juxtaposition of arrival, departure and various registers of waiting (or be it, loitering) at Central Station's country platform. Here, the camera on a fixed tripod was directed at people who unknowingly perform for the camera in their everydayness. Albeit, some people just seem to know when they are being watched!

Cordelia settled to use the filmed movement of a young woman standing, bursting into short phrases of walking with idiosyncratic gesture, always returning to the same floor position. The footage was given to Dean to study before filming in the black space days later. Natural light filters through one and a quarter exposed windows. Dean works tightly in front of the mirror vacillating between the girl's action and a heightened physicalised impression: swinging into high release of the chest, sustained; resuming pedestrian embodiment of the girl, looking, waiting; focus external; heavy quick transitions from lighter feminine qualities to clenched fists and palm slapping of his torso. Brisk turns, replete loops. A moment crystallized, distorted; a close study in mimesis regenerated. Dean reproduces this action at Central Station in the place where she once stood.

Julie-Anne and Kate's observational approach differs by virtue of the conscious performer. Hours of filming produce some durational single shots (the result of planning), others spontaneously or incidentally captured. JL mentions that part of her process is about "working with what you've got" being open to "whatever comes up", and "not trying to make something happen". It is seen through the play back of footage how JL comfortably shifts register from folding washing to hand and head dialogue. The camera is in close pulling out in response to take in the sudden dance that emerges and intensifies, finally locking in the living room and background kitchen until the dance subsides and the folding resumes.

Participants are under the gun. Aiming to develop their proposal beyond concept to filmic matter which ends (or starts) in the editing suite over two weeks, would seem to preclude a 'whatever happens' commitment. Hours of rushes 'in the can', is both a blessing and a curse. How much sits in the can is a matter of planning. What can help is a clear structure or editing principle driving the decision making; careful logging with timecode and explanation; and ample time for digitising given this occurs in real time. Hinton raises the point that digital film has the potential to generate hours of rushes because it is so cheap. To avoid this, planning your shot beforehand helps, raising questions of: how much planning is too little or too much? Does it compromise moments of serendipity? Or does a lack of planning leave you with a big mess to trawl through in the editing room, with

confusion as to what you ultimately want to communicate? Of course there is much in between. Levels of planning enter the process at different stages for different reasons; often applying strict formulaic rules to a process open multiple spaces of possibility. I am reminded of Ingmar Bergman who was extremely structured, rigorous, and careful with time in every stage of the filming process. These strictures and his pedantic preparedness provided a method of working that left little to happenstance or deviation. And yet, it was his belief that improvisation and the potential for freedom, spontaneity and new ideas were operative in this system of control.

There is no single way to approach film making. The documented projects evidence this. A film's process is open to a manifold of constraints and incidental factors, some debilitating whilst others fortuitous.

David needed to return to Canberra and sit exams, so sadly he and Adelina could only be with us for one week. They used the time to play with movement in the dark space using lines of light to explore the idea of the peripheral and the mysteries of perception: "revealing", "cutting off". The work is an interesting conflation of the conceptual and how the system operates. In order to physicalise the complexities of this relationship Adelina searched for metaphors, naturally finding in the technology metaphors to imbibe within the body. A unique relationship to the materiality of the virtual as ultimately screen presence is already entering the choreographic content, suggesting the incontrovertible 'close' partnership between dancer and system. The development of interactivity starts early, an equally difficult place of negotiation to its stages in post-production and installation.

In the basement garage of the apartment where David and Adelina are staying, they discover - while doing the laundry in the morning before they leave - a great location for 'spontaneously' shooting "a little movie". In a single shot we see Adelina emerging out of a lift. She walks unaffectedly toward the camera, past it, then suddenly gliding, facing away with arms raised. Subtle shifting contractions become visible on her exposed back. Her trajectory softly and deftly forms an arc, very smoothly, too smoothly: could she be skateboarding? The shot goes on long enough to realise that Adelina is riding a revolving car plate which turns vehicles around in tight spaces.

They show their single-shot video to the other participants and David, it is positively received. With only hours left they decide to return that afternoon with Justine and shoot it on HDV. There is some deliberation as to whether or not the unrehearsed, serendipitous good fortune of the morning's shoot could be reproduced. The immediacy, qualities, textures and temporal rhythms of the context itself could be redescribed with different equipment and camera operator, compromising the moment. David digitises their morning's effort. Nothing lost, only much to gain.

In an attempt to explore "relationship formation", filmmaker **Sonia Esposito** introduces a detailed narrative. Her mental sketch takes the form of a storyboard with a handful of shots described in terms of location and action. There is a pool below a large block of apartments, a guy and a girl either end of the pool dive into the water. There is a woman

at her window within the apartment block looking out, she eventually draws the curtain. Thunder and lightening rumble and flicker in the night sky, nature conveniently co-opted into the action of the film. It is “between air and water” that the girl and boy come together and dance.

By the water, and in the water – well, not quite – Sonia’s dueting boy and girl are found with dancers Sarah Fiddaman and Damien Davis, who over a two day period choreograph and shoot enough material for Sonia and Nick to edit before the final Friday. Much discussion is had regarding how Sonia might shoot this filmic enterprise with the given resources and time available. Sonia is poetically inclined to abstract dramatically from her literal ideas of where the action will take place. What initially is a very set view of the film’s trajectory becomes - for Sonia, the dancers and Justine - a fluid framework of potentialities to work within. Sonia is able to maintain the essence of her story while the dance within its watery articulations ends up taking on a highly abstracted quality where the human representation of relationship formation is marked with gender. The material is later read (by an industry panel and the other participants) ambiguously with more passive registers of receptivity. Sonia’s process explicates another mode of the narrative and abstraction relationship. Where the ‘ground’ of this work was incontrovertibly literal, it became mediated through the different filmic phases. For example, the unrealistic call for location and the resolve to provide the illusion or allude to a scene and feeling state through camera and lighting means. Further, the non-verbal nature of dance and Sonia’s attempt to let go of dialogue cracked open the narrative and allowed her poetic intentions to be foregrounded in overall look, sound and feel.

Justine works closely with Sonia to create the illusion of the dancers between water and air through the use of blue light, mirrors and constructed ripple effects (the leaves of a tree branch and strips of blue cellophane blown by a fan in front of the lights). There is quite a set-up. Both Sarah and Daniel compose emotive phrases apart and in contact with each other to repeat as solo moments and two longer duet sections. They are informed by the ideas of “two currents coming together” and “surrendering to a relationship from independence”. Sonia provides themes for physicalising ways of coming together and marking a trajectory in the overall structure: curiosity, doubt, excitement, and fear. Sonia reminds the dancers that the order does not matter as it can be arranged during the editing process.

When dancing for film, error or performing bits out of sequence is acceptable as long as there are a few good takes. This is unlike the pressures of live performance where the concatenation of bits - often rehearsed in isolation - inevitably require errorless flow. In film, committing the dance sequence to memory is less emphatic (if not a single or durational shot), but not ruled out. Stephen’s project is one example of the same sequence being repeated with different camera movements. Stephen is looking for the peaks in real-time footage to synch the three layers. Thus accuracy of the sequence is required for enabling creation within post-production. In this case, Nelly’s three screen presences are treated with an outline effect where the remains of colour are solarised within.

Despite the idea that error can be dealt with in the editing room where the selection of better frames can take place, other factors may spoil the shot. In particular, that which is not seen through the camera's own view finder. There were a couple of examples (I could give many from my own experiences) of not realising something is in the frame until you see it on the computer monitor. Working with improvisation as opposed to the choreographed repeatable sequence is the more problematic scenario. Laura was particularly drawn to a moment in the rushes where the boys in mid shot are having a duel in the dirt. There is some strong movement with a clear energetic forming between the boys building within a single shot, however as the camera pans to settle on a part of the backdrop, a friend's still's tripod sits within the overgrown weeds behind the boys, ultimately disaffecting the composition; a moment never to be re-created.

A sustained diagonal floor perspective of Julie-Anne's oven recording various duties waist down within interesting compositional symmetries of her kitchen is added to by Kate sitting on the bench just slightly in frame. Through the camera Kate is out of shot. During the playback she is revealed to be visible on the edge. The distance from the edge of a view finder's frame varies from camera to camera.

During playback of the footage from Sonia's first shoot, Justine notices that some of the shots are out of focus and not seen on the viewfinder while shooting with the HD P2 camera which is tape less and uses a memory card. To heighten the underwater, airy feel, Justine shoots in 'slow mo' at 50 fps rather than 25. The problem with the P2 card is that it needs downloading after 16 minutes and the viewfinder is not alerting Justine to the 'true' quality of the focus. In these situations a field monitor can help provide a truer picture of the live content's mediation.

The workshop provided adequate resources for taking a film from conception to its final presentational mode - as long as requests were within reason. Cordelia, David and Stephen were the only artists not making single screen projects. Their films could have been screened using separate monitors or two data projectors on the wall side by side during the presentation. Stephen managed to stack his three layers streamed through one data projector on a single screen.

Equipment came from Critical Path's own store, the participants, and UNSW. Other pieces were hired. Participants who were aware of what they could ask for before the workshop were easily accommodated. During the workshop, if a particular request regarding equipment or a particular person for consultation or collaboration was made, Critical Path or Reel Dance would deliver.

Various experienced people skilled in some aspect of the process were invited to help participants. Hinton stressed the quality and range of support at their disposal. For example: The Director of Critical Path possesses an arsenal of technical information from working the camera, lighting a shot, understanding interactivity and the behaviour of digital systems, multi-screen development and film production; while the Director of Reel Dance Erin Brannigan has an acute understanding of screen dance in terms of its history, theorisations, local and broader International contexts, festival politics, and film

analysis. Writing a book on the topic, Erin's knowledge is vast and articulated from a cinematic perspective. Loosie Craig the production Manager with a good working knowledge of cameras and the editing suite could be consulted along with Video Documenter Eva Mueller who is currently doing her Masters in digital sound.

The fundamental affinity between dance and film is that they are based on movement.
(David Hinton 2008)

Hinton's expertise and years of experience in directing is invaluable to each participant. He manages throughout the workshop to share his time between short group meetings and one-on-one discussions. Beside the first day, and the half attended 'group meetings' organised by Hinton each afternoon for an hour, two tutorial sessions were provided. Hinton showed us a range of films where the dance was shot and presented in different ways. We dissected footage of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers considering: the camera movement of older cameras (tilt up-down, pan left-right, moving in or out, left-right on a dolly system, overhead or beneath); the dancers relationship to the centre of the frame, rebalancing the composition of the frame as the moving figure throws it out; the number of edits, how and when they are made and the difference between 'montage editing' and 'continuity editing'. Negotiating the close-up, long shot, wide and mid in relation to the moving figure(s) and its/their background was explicated. The question of whose language (dancer/choreographer or the film maker/Director) was foregrounded in each of the examples (where is the emphasis on camera movement, postproduction or the dancers) expanded our framework for analysis. The Fred and Ginger clip clearly demonstrates the dancer/choreographer voice, while Busby Berkeley's kaleidoscopic early 'video art' preparations of his pretty *Dames* is an extreme contrast in terms of the camera work and post-production. Examples of a balance between prioritising either the dance or film were shown. They included Gene Kelly *Singing in the Rain*; and the big group choreography in the carpark scene from *Westside Story*. Here dancer, camera movement and moderate editing are utilised.

When thinking along these terms, my latest viewing of David Lynch's *Inland Empire* reveals an emphasis on camera movement in large sections of the film. From unsteady dogma, to extreme close-up of faces and eyes with moving lens distortion Lynch disturbingly takes the frame uncomfortably out of focus. The shot then pulls out to a mid where once again all appears normal. Here, I am focused on the psychology of the character and the blurring between reality and the margins of some other Lynchian world that he has us teeter upon without ever really knowing who, where and what.

For sound, David talked us through a small excerpt of a boxing match in *Raging Bull* directed by Martin Scorsese. The sound track is incredibly visceral, heightening not only the drama and revolving camera action but the kinesthetic reception of each blow, consequent disorientation and thickness of the screaming crowd and staccato flashes of the paparazzi bulbs. Our perceptions are visually distorted. We see, hear and feel like the

boxer. This is made all the more real by the tight relationship between the cinematography and sound.

Dance film soundtracks lie anywhere between melodic compositions, sync rhythms and beats to minimalist sound or noise. Voice and naturalistic sound picked up by extension from the shoot is more difficult given the mics (if powerful enough) pick up every noise. For editing, a clapper board needs to be used so that the visual remains in synch with its natural sound when dragged into sequence and to avoid dubbing; also to keep incidental noise to a minimum. For the workshop, sound was the least discussed, becoming more of an issue toward the end when editing the visuals. The assumption seemed to be that a pre-recorded track would be used over the top.

At the disused rail shed, Laura picked up a lot of natural and made sounds within the environment from her small camera mic. In the opening sequence, the sound of an aerosol spray can is heard as the word “MATE” forms on the wall. Other sounds include the dragging and scraping of gravel as the boys tussle in the dirt with their sneakers; and the cacophonous, calming sound of rain hitting the metal roof. A wide shot of the structure’s overhead interior architecture with daylight and rain pouring through punctuates the scene. The sound of rain is accompanied by a striking close up of a face in contemplation, momentary respite from the vigorous boyish battle.

Sonia works beforehand with sound and music composer Mel Pesa so that the dancers have something to work with during the choreographic phase. During the presentation, the panel is shown three examples of the same section of a sequence cut with three different sound samples to comment upon. The collaboration with sound so early in the process suggests both continuity and a balance of values between the visual and sound.

On learning that she is able to work with a DOP and make use of the cameras, Meryl breaks free of writing for a day and decides to shoot one of her now scripted stories *Dead Dog*. Contacting a couple of professional actors, Meryl and Justine wander up to Bondi Junction Shopping Centre and film the remaining scene. Most of us are unaware that Meryl has done this, and are pleasantly surprised during the final presentation screening of the macabre and funny tale *Dead Dog*, which is well acted, written and shot. The film was done in a few takes with durational single shots following the emotion and drama. From a close-up of the actor’s face replacing a framed picture of ‘the dog’ (whose dog? I never asked), to discussing on the phone the problem of its disposal, the shot pulls out to reveal a stripy bag with a lump inside. We then see the woman wrestle with the weight for the next two scenes. The dialogue is picked up on the small mic with no issues. There are few cuts and the final long shot before the woman runs off is of the stifling ramp well in the small plaza at Bondi Junction, which offers a surprisingly artful perspective of a non-iconic irrelevant space.

Locations for the workshop mattered mainly for Julie-Anne, Laura, Sonia and Joshua. Cordelia managed to shoot in a public location that was quite stunning in its heritage design (a place which is unfamiliar when out of context, but still manages to plague one as familiar), and functional for observational footage. Joshua spent some time

considering how he might shoot in the upstairs room, and what props would indicate that it was a *hikikomori* space. Ideas about “stuff” littering the room with a computer on a desk are discarded by the time the shoot takes place on the second last day with visiting stills photographer Bonnie Elliot. Josh’s first draft (prior to Kristina’s arrival) is to troubleshoot the moment when the avatar is physicalised at human scale. This is initially done through camera movement and editing where the avatar pops out of the computer. It is a good effect, but Josh decides to strip back these more literal ideas to have an empty, darkened room with heavy drapes. Kristina, initially absent in the opening scene to emerge from the computer in elaborate costuming, is also stripped back to her still presence in the room, awakening in a revolving movement on Josh’s realisation that his virtual representation has physicalised. Kristina wears a simple grey dress to match Josh’s t-shirt, a departure from early discussions about *manga* outfits. The grey against the mint green walls and the chocolate brown trim of the wood supports the chiaroscuro quality of the film which ends as a wide shot of Kristina on Josh’s back, limbs dangling. Josh revolves slowly against the softness of the wall.

The final phases of the project for the participants is to first digitise select footage, then edit a rough template of the film; or pull together enough of the material to present and take into further development. Depending on experience, amount of footage, how many cuts and what they were hoping to have completed by the Industry panel presentation day, each participant spent relative time tucked away in the Research Residency Room or rooms upstairs for editing. Nick always within a 20 metre radius. Hinton spent quite a bit of time during the editing phase to query and guide the artists about what they were trying to communicate; how they were shaping the material. Hinton declares “there are only two things” that matter at this point and they are your “rhythm and development”

Laura spends most of her last week in the editing room. She is determined to finish and accomplish her desire for a full rounded experience. Once the rushes are digitised, and they sit in batch folders, the hours of ‘good’ *hikikomori* fun begins. Hinton reflects that there “are so many possibilities” with choosing shots (I guess only if they are shot well); and “the hard stuff is when the camera is on the move” rather than “when the camera is fixed”. Laura has good rushes. She gets herself to a point of selecting three chunks that she likes after a discovering a very strong opening scene that she spends quite a bit of time finessing. Hinton pushes Laura to develop the moving aspects, avoid short bursts and jump cutting to let the film run a little. Hinton says: “you need to ask yourself what it feels like”; and to keep the ideas connected to the material, allowing the development of the visual to take on sense within the bigger picture. The editing process is like taking a microscope to the images, slowing it down frame by frame, abstracting from this bigger view. It is very easy to lose oneself in the nuance of a frame, be overcome by the composition, rhythm and transition between two bits rather than understanding these things in the overall rhythm. After a long time of intense monitor work, one can sometimes no longer see or feel adequately to make effective decisions.

If there is a fascinating person in front of the camera, the technical stuff doesn’t matter

(D. Hinton 2008)

On the final day, presentations of projects at a “nascent stage” are made to a mixed panel of Industry heavyweights including:

Kathy Cleland (Curator, Writer and Academic); Bec Dean (Curator, Writer and Visual Artist); Linda Mickso (Film Producer); Nerida Moore (NSWFTO Project Officer, writer/director/lecturer); Ricardo Peach (Program Manager Inter-Arts Australia Council); and Clare Stewart (Director Sydney Film Festival).

As each participant speaks and shows their works in progress, we see ‘fascinating’ figures appear on the screen; conceived, directed, choreographed, dressed, and reconstructed in spaces and places imagined by the equally fascinating group who managed to bring their projects to this well articulated point for discussion, with the promise of a solid future direction. Each panel member is keenly engaged, offering suggestions with respect to the ideas, how it was shot, what they felt were its overall strengths, where resonances with other film makers or films were useful references, and the narrative structure: how the non-verbal aspect of dance carried this differently to usual story telling. Sound was considered in its evocative role, along with the more ‘poetic’ and ‘viscerally’ affecting aspects of the films. Each panel member spoke surprisingly with respect to how they were moved, or how the meaning washed over them through the discordant, non-linear arrangement of images; or of the emotive qualities of two bodies coming into contact. Some aspects were disappointingly interpreted out of context. A context the workshop participants and facilitators were familiar with having shared intimate knowledge of the process and intentions of the artist. However, overall it was a panel of ‘felt’ responses, testament to the kinesthetic aspects of filmmaking that Hinton would sometimes subtly infer or make explicit by direct questioning of the participants. This was where Hinton’s mentoring made its mark: communicating to the artists the importance of understanding what “fascinates” or “interests” them beyond the competence of a technical craft.

Eight screenings moved us differently: the mesmerising pleasure of shapes forming and dissolving with timely accents, still feeling Nelly despite the privileging of form; the elegance and simplicity of Adelina on the car revolve: the purity of a single shot; and the slow fuse, laconic drama of a dead dog, directed with wit and moving visual acuity; eliciting a juxtaposition of emotions. The lightness and gravity of a woman as herself in crafted motion toward someone other than herself, unfolding in the giddiness and extraordinary study of everyday forgotten ordinariness. Two dancers form in essence between air and water. Currents buoyed by exquisite contrasts of light and shadow. A girl waits, a boy extracts and aggravates, the affective force of distilled intentions constructing an intense dialogue. As the rain falls, the ambiguity of relations hit the dirt: playful, reflexive, competitive; and finally, the realisation of an ideal self, unlike self, dancing in delicate non-virtual communion.

As for “soul”, the possessions are replete...

Postscript

The participants are planning a follow up screening of their projects as a result of the two week mentoring with David Hinton. With the success of their draft work screenings and the positive feedback and encouragement from members of the Industry panel, it is with great hope that the artists will pursue completion of their projects for submission in any number of the International screen dance festivals, or as artworks in their own right.